

Simeon Polotskii and the Origins of the Russian Tradition of the Writer as Prophet

Глас пророческ исполнися

(The prophetic voice has been fulfilled)

Simeon Polotskii (1678)¹

ce poète n'est pas un personnage à être oublié, car je me souviens d'avoir lu quelque part qu'on lui attribue certaines prophéties et que ses prédictions de Pierre le Grand se sont réellement accomplies. Il n'est pas surprenant qu'il eût été un bon prophète, car l'imagination des poètes avait si souvent contribué à notre bonheur, que la superstition veut réaliser et que le bon esprit approuve.

I. F. Bogdanovich (before 1772)²

Few would dispute the central importance of the image of the writer as a figure of prophetic authority in the development of Russian literary tradition. And yet, curiously little research

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¹ The first line of the poem, in Simeon Polockij, *Rifmologion: Eine Sammlung höfisch-zeremonieller Gedichte*, ed. by Anthony Hippisley, Hans Rothe and Lydia I. Sazonova, vol. 1 (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2013), p. 269.

² Letter to Ia. Ia. Shtelin (no later than 1772), in G. P. Makogonenko, ed., *Pis'ma russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1980), p. 249.

has been done on the origins of this remarkable phenomenon. If asked to identify its earliest literary manifestations, most readers would point to the period of its widespread adoption in the 1820s, when it first became prominent in the verse of Fedor Glinka, Kiukel'beker and Pushkin. In this context Pushkin's celebrated 'Prorok' ('The Prophet', 1826) is commonly held up as the foundation text of the tradition. Is this view correct, however?

To answer this question, we need to bear in mind that there are two distinct approaches to assessing any cultural tradition. One can either analyse the way it has chosen to represent itself over time, tracing its own evolving myth of origins, or one can seek to identify its earliest manifestations. These two lines of enquiry will produce very different results.

The first approach hinges on a chain of writers invoked as precursors; it will lead us back from Pushkin to Derzhavin, possibly even to Lomonosov, but not much further. As Russian writers sought to consolidate their sense of a native prophetic tradition, they made various attempts to project it back on to earlier authors. In his 'Literaturnye mechtaniia' ('Literary Reflections') of 1834, for example, the critic Belinskii paraphrased motifs from Pushkin's 'Prorok' to construct a portrait of Derzhavin as the poet's prophetic predecessor.³ Just over a decade later Gogol extended the tradition further back in time. In a seminal essay of 1846, he argued that the essence of Russian poetry was to be found in its intimate connection with the spirit of biblical prophecy. As 'proof' he cited lines from Lomonosov's ode of 1757 to the Empress Elisaveta Petrovna on the divinely inspired psalmist David and

³ V. G. Belinskii, 'Literaturnye mechtaniia (Elegiia v proze)', in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1953-59), vol. 1 (1953), p. 48.

prophet Isaiah, using them to characterise Lomonosov as the ‘initial prophetic outline’ who anticipated the future direction of Russian verse.⁴

Not much has changed since these early attempts to extend the chain of succession back into the past. Derzhavin and (less commonly) Lomonosov are usually invoked as the partly unwitting antecedents of a prophetic tradition in Russian literature that remains firmly grounded in the work of Pushkin and his contemporaries. This retrospective view not only ignores Derzhavin’s conscious crafting of his own prophetic image, it also overlooks the contribution of Lomonosov’s unfairly belittled contemporary, Trediakovskii. More importantly, it fails to account for the foundations that were laid well before the work of these writers, in the late seventeenth century.

This article will therefore adopt the second approach, probing beyond the tradition’s self-representation to uncover a significant earlier stage in its formation. I will argue that Russia’s first professional court poet, Simeon Polotskii (1629-1680), built up a close association between the figure of the writer and the prophet through his personal example and

⁴ ‘Он сам как бы первоначальный, пророческий набросок того, что впереди.’ In ‘V chem zhe nakonets sushchestvo russkoi poezii i v chem ee osobennost’ (the penultimate chapter XXXI of *Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druz'iami*), in N. V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 14 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1937-52), vol. 8 (1952), pp. 371-72. For Lomonosov’s lines (‘Божественный певец Давид / Священными шумит струнами, / И Бога полными устами / Исая восхищен гремит:’) from ‘Oda imperatritse Elisavete Petrovne na prazdnik rozhdeniia ee velichestva’, see M. V. Lomonosov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, ed. by A. A. Morozov (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1986), p.148.

literary work.⁵ Although never included in the accepted ‘canon’ of Russia’s prophetic authors, Simeon assumed two closely linked aspects of this role – the prophet as moral preacher and the prophet as predictor of the future. I will first examine some of the historical factors that enabled him to establish his authoritative position at court, and then consider the specific contribution of his writings to the linking of poetry with prophecy, focusing on his two collections of verse and rhymed version of the *Psalter*. On the basis of this evidence and early responses to his legacy, I will then assess the extent of his long-term influence on the image of the writer as a prophetic figure.

Simeon’s Position at Court

As an Orthodox Belorussian monk from Polotsk, Simeon may well seem an unlikely candidate for the post of Russia’s first professional poet. His early verse was written in his native Belorussian as well as in Polish and Latin; he only began to write poems in a ‘relatively normative Church Slavonic’ in the late 1650s.⁶ And yet, as I shall argue, his foreign background helped to facilitate his rapid rise to power.

⁵ On Simeon’s standing as Russia’s first professional writer and versifier (insisting on being paid by the Tsar for his verses), see the section ‘Pisatel'skoe samosoznanie’ in A. M. Panchenko, *Russkaia stikhotvornaia kul'tura XVII veka* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1973), p. 161; Ronald Vroon, ‘Simeon Polotsky’, in Marcus C. Levitt, ed., *Early Modern Russian Writers, Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 150 (Detroit, Washington, D.C., and London: Gale Research, c.1995), pp. 291-307 (pp. 292, 301); Aleksandr M. Panchenko, ‘Simeon Polotskii’, in *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, vol. 3 (XVII v.), part 3, P-S (St Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1998), pp. 372-74 (p. 369).

⁶ Vroon, ‘Simeon Polotsky’, p. 295.

Significantly, right from the outset Simeon forged his close association with the tsar through the poetic word. In July and October 1656, when Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich was passing through Polotsk during the Russian-Polish war, he was met on both occasions by an unusual delegation: the newly tonsured monk Simeon and his young pupils from the monastery school greeted him by declaiming panegyric poems in Belorussian.⁷ A few years later, when Simeon came to Moscow as part of an invited delegation to advise the ruler on the withdrawal of Patriarch Nikon, he recited another poetic address to the Tsar (in January 1660) and several further declamations during his nine-month stay.⁸ Through these staged performances he gained an influential patron and audience, and gradually accustomed the court to poetic recitals as an intrinsic part of state occasions. This innovative practice marked the beginning of the ‘poet and tsar’ relationship that subsequently shaped the image of the writer as a figure of prophetic authority.⁹

After Polotsk was retaken by the Poles in 1661, Simeon found himself in an increasingly awkward position. In the spring of 1664 he moved permanently to Moscow; initially hosted in the Kremlin palace, he soon took up residence at the nearby

⁷ For further details, see Anthony Hoppisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1985), p. 10; Vroon, ‘Simeon Polotsky’, p. 294; Panchenko, ‘Simeon Polotskii’, pp. 372-74. According to Panchenko, neither address was an original work.

⁸ Vroon, ‘Simeon Polotsky’, p. 294.

⁹ On Simeon’s role in inaugurating the ‘poet and tsar’ relationship, see A. N. Robinson, ‘Simeon Polotskii i russkii literaturnyi protsess’, in A. N. Robinson, ed., *Simeon Polotskii i ego knigoizdatel'skaia deiatel'nost'* (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), p. 10. Robinson notes the significant point that Simeon and Tsar Aleksei were exact contemporaries.

Zaikonospasskii Monastery.¹⁰ During the last sixteen years of his life he built up a substantial body of writings (collections of panegyric and didactic verse, a rhymed translation of the Psalter, plays, theological tracts and sermons) and rose to a position of considerable influence at court.

How was Simeon able to achieve such a prominent status? His background and Western-style education endowed him with skills that were much in demand in the Polish-Latinate transitional culture of Muscovy. In the words of Dmitrii Likhachev, baroque was not just a fashion in Russia but a necessity – it provided a cultural language which enabled Russia to converse with Europe.¹¹ As a graduate of the prestigious Kiev Mohyla Collegium (and possibly also of the Jesuit academy of Vilno), Simeon was exceptionally well equipped to play a key role in the process of acculturation and westernisation begun by Aleksei and subsequently developed by Peter the Great. The range of his erudition is reflected in the extensive private library that he built up.¹² His appointment as tutor to the Tsar's children

¹⁰ L. I. Sazonova, *Literaturnaia kul'tura Rossii: rannee novoe vremia* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2006), p. 51, gives the date of 1664 for Simeon's move to Moscow. According to Hippisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky*, p. 11, and Vroon, 'Simeon Polotsky', p. 296, the move took place in 1663 or 1664.

¹¹ D. S. Likhachev, 'Predislovie', in Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvėtnyj*, ed. by Anthony Hippisley and Lydia I. Sazonova, with a foreword by Dmitrii S. Lichačev, 3 vols. (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 1996-2000), vol. 1 (1996), p. ix.

¹² Simeon's personal library was the largest collection in seventeenth-century Moscow (603 titles and 391 authors). The main subject represented was theology, the overwhelming majority of the books were in Latin. See Anthony Hippisley and Evgenija Luk'janova, *Simeon Polockij's library: a catalogue* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), pp. 1, 172, 193.

consolidated his influence and ensured his security when Tsarevich Fedor took over the throne in 1676.¹³

Fluent in several languages and adept at navigating between different cultures, Simeon was ideally placed to act as a bridge-builder between the Latin West and the Orthodox East. A natural mediator, he served as interpreter and negotiator in some of the difficult religious struggles faced by the tsar. He helped shape policies towards dissenters, advised on the schism and debated the fate of Patriarch Nikon. In August 1666, for example, he was despatched by the Tsar to Avvakum's prison cell to make a final attempt at persuading the Old Believer to accept the reforms (he did not meet with success; Avvakum recorded in his *Zhitie* [*Life*] that they argued fiercely and 'parted afterwards like drunkards' with 'nothing in common').¹⁴ At the Councils of 1666-1667 Simeon was entrusted with keeping the official record (which he wrote in Latin script, not Cyrillic) and was also asked to compose the official theological treatise in defence of the Church and Nikon's reforms.¹⁵

Through these wide-ranging activities Simeon established his authority at court as the tsar's spiritual adviser. How did he translate this role into literary terms? What voice did he assume? How did he present his relationship with the tsar? What use did he make of prophetic themes? I shall first consider the strategies adopted in his two major collections of

¹³ Vroon, 'Simeon Polotsky', pp. 298, 301; Panchenko, 'Simeon Polotskii', p. 367.

¹⁴ Avvakum's *Life*, cited in Hippisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky*, p. 12.

¹⁵ On the treatise, *Zhezl pravleniia na pravitel'stvo myslennogo stada pravoslavno-rossiiskiiia tserkve* (1667), see Vroon, 'Simeon Polotsky', pp. 297-98; Panchenko, 'Simeon Polotskii', p. 366. On Simeon's use of Latin scripts, see Robinson, 'Simeon Polotskii i russkii literaturnyi protsess', p. 18.

verse, neither of which was published in his lifetime. I shall then pay particular attention to his rhymed version of the Psalter, composed in 1678 and published in 1680.

The Poet and the Tsar: Rifmologion

When Simeon began to organise his writings in 1678, he assembled a large number of occasional poems written over more than two decades under the title of *Rifmologion ili Stikhoslov (Rhymologion or Verse Collection)*, and continued to add new works up until his death in August 1680.¹⁶ The resulting voluminous manuscript of 654 folios comprised verses celebrating feasts in the Orthodox calendar, panegyric odes addressed to the tsar and members of the royal family, and two plays on religious subjects.¹⁷ Simeon was effectively straddling two different worlds: he combined the roles of tsar's poet, establishing the moral authority of his voice at court, and of priest-poet, composing works with a liturgical function.

¹⁶ According to the dates given on the title-page of *Rifmologion*, Simeon began to assemble his collection in 1678. In the preface, he notes that he worked on the collection in his fiftieth year, i.e. in 1679. See V. P. Grebeniuk, “‘Rifmologion’ Simeona Polotskogo (Istoriia sozdaniia, struktura, idei)”, in Robinson, ed., *Simeon Polotskii i ego knigoizdatel'skaia deiatel'nost'*, pp. 259–308 (p. 262). For a detailed overview of the manuscript collection's composition and range of genres, see L. I. Sazonova, ‘K istorii sozdaniia “Rifmologiona” Simeona Polotskogo’, *Slavianovedenie*, 2011, no. 2, 19-35, and her (closely related) introduction to the critical edition of 2013, Lidiia I. Sazonova, “‘Rifmologion’ Simeona Polotskogo – kniga pridvorno-tseremonial'noi poezii’, in Simeon Polockij, *Rifmologion*, pp. lxxxvii-cliii.

¹⁷ The first and only volume of the critical edition, Simeon Polockij, *Rifmologion* (2013), covers fols. 1-287.

Both these roles were important constituent elements of the later image of the writer as prophet.

It is clear from the verse preface addressed to the ‘noble reader’ that Simeon was acutely aware of the need to define his profile as a professional writer, and anxious to ensure the survival and ‘use’ of his work in future generations.¹⁸ As well as presenting his role as the tsar’s moral guide in a biblical context, he reinforced the sacred dimension of his work by imitating various liturgical practices. He wrote his poems in a modified Church Slavonic, using ‘the same stylized, archaic language’ as works designed for worship. Many of the declamations were modelled after Jesuit school rhetorical exercises and performed in churches. Hence Ronald Vroon’s apt description of the collection as a ‘paraliturgical service book for various ceremonials patterned after divine worship but set apart from it.’¹⁹

How did prophetic themes fit into this context? The first point to be made is an important general one that applies to all of Simeon’s works, including his translations and sermons. Prophecy was built into the foundations of his world view and writings, providing a framework for interpreting and explaining the meaning of life. According to the pre-enlightenment view of history as a sacred process, reflecting the gradual unfolding of God’s providential design in this world, the Hebrew kings and prophets of the Old Testament are a series of figures or types of Christ and the Redemption, whose ultimate meaning is fulfilled in the revelation of the New Testament. The figural interpretation of scriptures, expounded by Frank Auerbach in his celebrated essay ‘Figura’ (1938), was part and parcel of the Christian

¹⁸ ‘Predislovie ko blagochestivomu chitateliu’, *ibid.*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁹ Ronald Vroon, ‘From Liturgy to Literature: Prayer and Play in the Early Russian Baroque’, in Massimo Ciavolella, Patrick Coleman, eds., *Culture and Authority in the Baroque* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 125.

typological tradition of exegesis inherited by Simeon from his Jesuit mentors. Simeon extended this approach to include the sacred role of Russia as the ‘new Israel’, presenting the Israelite kings and Hebrew prophets through their Christian refraction as models for Russian tsars and their moral advisors. By constantly rehearsing these parallels in his sermons and verse, he aligned himself with prophetic tradition and assumed its authority. This empowerment naturally became most pronounced in his direct addresses to the tsar.

Because of this approach, prophetic subjects are embedded throughout *Rifmologion*. Almost half the collection consists of cycles of poetic greetings for Christmas and Easter addressed to the Tsar and members of the royal family. These verses are saturated with examples from the history of the Israelites and the lives and teachings of the patriarchs and prophets, presented as prefigurations of episodes from the Christian narrative. The most popular types cited by Simeon include Jacob, Joseph, Rebecca, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Job and Daniel. In one poem, for example, drawing on the same image that Pushkin later made famous in ‘Prorok’, Simeon compares the burning coal that purified Isaiah’s lips to Christ’s role in cleansing humanity.²⁰

Simeon deployed many additional strategies to reinforce his prophetic standing. Prominent among these was his use of astrology to predict the future. Much in vogue at the courts of Tsar Aleksei and Peter the Great, this ‘science’ was also well tolerated by the Russian Orthodox church. It was widely practised on many levels, from determining an auspicious time for blood-letting to planning the nation’s military strategy.²¹ Although

²⁰ ‘Chto v ugli drevle proobrazovasia’, in Simeon Polockij, *Rifmologion*, p. 174.

²¹ See the chapters ‘Vrachebnaia astrologiia v XVII veke’, ‘Prognosticheskaia astrologiia na “sluzhbe” u tsaria Alekseia Mikhailovicha’, ‘Astrologicheskie predskazaniia sud'by Petra I kak istoricheskii mif i real'nost’’, in R. A. Simonov, *Russkaia astrologicheskaia knizhnost'*

astronomy was not particularly well represented in Simeon's library, he did own three books of astrological prognostication.²² The extent of his actual mastery of the subject has been the subject of much heated debate – was he truly expert, or just a casual dabbler?²³ Whatever the truth of the matter, the astrological themes that pervade his verse did much to reinforce his legendary reputation in this field.

At the heart of *Rifmologion* lie five lavishly decorated 'booklets' (*knizhitsy*), originally bound separately and presented to the Tsar to mark important family events, such as births, coronations, and deaths. The first booklet, given to Tsar Aleksei on the birth of his son Simeon, includes 'Beseda so planity' ('A Conversation with the Planets', 1665) – an early experiment in the genre of the *genethliacon*, which commonly used astrology to predict a glorious future for the newborn child. The seven planets tell the poet what gifts they will bestow on the tsarevich; the moon predicts his defeat of the Muslim Turks.²⁴ The second

(*XI – pervaiia chetvert' XVIII veka*) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo MGUP 'Mir knigi', 1998), pp. 71-136. Simonov notes Simeon's discussion of the distance and size of planets in his manuscript exposition of the Christian faith, *Venets very kafolicheskiiia* (1670), and the extent of Peter the Great's familiarity with astrological predictions from childhood. *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 125.

²² For details of Simeon's ownership of books by Rogalius (n.d., n.p.), Argolus (Venice, 1638) and Leovitius (London, 1558), see Hippisley and Luk'janova, *Simeon Polockij's library*, p. 167.

²³ For a reasoned overview of the debate, see V. I. Pluzhnikov and R. A. Simonov, 'Goroskop Petra I', in *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, vol. 43 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1990), pp. 82-100. This article is largely repeated in 'Astrologicheskie predskazaniia sud'by Petra I kak istoricheskii mif i real'nost'', in Simonov, *Russkaia astrologicheskaia knizhnost'*, pp. 115-36.

²⁴ Simeon Polotskii, *Virshi*, ed. by V. K. Bylinin and L. U. Zvonareva (Minsk: Mastatskaia

booklet 'Orel Rossiiskii' ('The Russian Eagle', 1667) celebrates the proclamation of Aleksei Alekseevich as heir to the throne. Against the background of the sky and its planets, forty-eight sunbeams represent his virtues. The sun moves in a circle of animals representing the signs of the zodiac, a horoscope of the journey upon which the tsarevich is now embarking.²⁵

These prophecies were not fulfilled: Simeon died in infancy, and the Crown Prince Aleksei only lived to the age of sixteen. Although Simeon did not devote a separate booklet to celebrate the birth of Peter, he used a similar combination of astrological prediction and praise in a remarkable poem which he presented to Tsar Aleksei on 29 June 1672 at the christening, forecasting a great future for the tsarevich.²⁶ According to his nineteenth-century biographer, Ierofei Tatarskii, Simeon was rewarded by the delighted father with sugared

litaratura, 1990), p. 86. Simeon also composed two poems in Polish on the art of astrological prediction. See 'Siedm nauk wyzwalonych' ('The Seven Liberal Arts'), which notes that 'astrology [...] with ease determines the future by the stars', and 'Siedmiu pλανiet znaki y ich operacie następuja' ('The Signs of the Seven Planets and the Nature of their Influence'), *ibid.*, pp. 120-23.

²⁵ For an excellent discussion of the ode's complex heraldic imagery, see Hippisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky*, pp. 45-48.

²⁶ On this poem in the context of contemporary attitudes to astrology, see A. N. Robinson, 'Simeon Polotskii – astrolog', in G. V. Stepanov, ed., *Problemy izucheniia kul'turnogo naslediiia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), pp. 177-84; Pluzhnikov and Simonov, 'Goroskop Petra I', pp. 86-88.

sweets, dates and other delicacies.²⁷ The poem was not included in *Rifmologion*, but survives in a few different manuscript copies and published versions.²⁸ It deserves close attention

²⁷ Ierofei Tatarskii, *Simeon Polotskii (Ego zhizn' i deiatel'nost')*: *Opyt issledovaniia iz istorii prosveshcheniia i vnutrennei tserkovnoi zhizni vo vtoruiu polovinu XVII veka* (Moscow: M. G. Volchaninova, 1886), p. 128.

²⁸ The text discussed in this essay is the version beginning ‘Radost' veliui mesiats mai nyne iavil est’, first published in 1876 by Archimandrite Leonid: ‘K biografii Simeona Polotskogo’, *Drevniaia i Novaia Rossiia: Ezhemesiachnyi istoricheskii illiustrirovannyi sbornik* (St Petersburg, 1876), no. 4, p. 398. An editorial footnote relates the publication to L. N. Maikov’s biography of Simeon Polotskii, first published in earlier issues of *Drevniaia i Novaia Rossiia*, 1875, nos. 9-12. In his accompanying commentary, dated New Jerusalem, December 1875, Leonid starts by quoting from ‘Skazanie o zachatii i rozhdenii gosudaria imperatora Petra Pervogo i o prochem’ the passage describing Simeon’s visit to the Tsar on 1 November 1671 and their discussion of astrology. He then states that it is well known that Simeon also prepared a horoscope for Peter’s birth (no other evidence has been found to support this claim) and observes that his predictions are reflected in the poem presented to Tsar Aleksei at the christening of his son. He explains that he has taken Simeon’s poem from a manuscript chronicle in his possession, compiled by the poet’s ‘friend and pupil’ ‘Simeon Medvedev’ (Silvester’s lay name was Semen). After citing the full poem (48 lines), Leonid concludes that ‘many features of this horoscope were subsequently fulfilled’, suggesting that Peter the Great followed its directives by constantly directing his military campaigns towards the East and by clinging to the ideal of liberating the Christians from the ‘hated yoke of the Turks’ – a goal for his successors to follow. In his biography of 1886 Tatarskii quoted 32 lines from Leonid’s text: the opening section (Leonid’s ll. 1-22) and the astrological

because of its active engagement with the prognostic dimension of prophecy. Significantly, as we shall see below, it attracted considerable interest among later writers. Derzhavin and Pushkin, for example, both cited it as evidence of Simeon's prophetic abilities, grounded in his mastery of astrology, and integrated it into their own understanding of the poet as prophet.

In a carefully structured series of rhymed couplets of syllabic verse, the poet calls upon four different audiences (two cities, the planets, and the tsar) to rejoice (*veselisia*) at Peter's birth. The first section (ll. 1-12) opens with a proclamation of the joy that the month prediction (Leonid's ll. 29-38). He notes that Leonid has concluded from the poem that Simeon must have drawn up a horoscope for Peter, and finds some support for this claim in Simeon's other poetic references to astrology. Tatarskii, *Simeon Polotskii*, pp. 126-27. A different 46-line version of the poem (omitting Leonid's ll. 5-6), 'Virshi na rozhdenie Petra I' ('Radost' veliiu sei mesiats mai iavil est'), taken from a manuscript copy of 1712 found in Kalinin (GAKO, no. 1752, ll. 218 ob. – 220 ob.), was published in 1969: I. F. Golubev, 'Zabytye virshi Simeona Polotskogo', in *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, vol. 24 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1969), pp. 254-59 (pp. 258-59). In addition to the copy published by Golubev, Sazonova gives details of two further manuscript copies of the poem (Sazonova, *Literaturnaia kul'tura Rossii*, pp. 69, 811, 805, 811): Simeon Polotskii, 'Stikhotvorenii na rozhdenie Petra I', Spisok pervoi poloviny XVIII v., RGADA (Rossiiskii gos. Arkhiv drevnikh aktov, Moscow), Rukopisnoe sobranie f. 188, op. 1, no. 738. Simeon Polotskii, 'Stikhotvornoe privetstvie na rozhdenie Petra I', Vtoraia chetvert' XVIII v., BAN (Biblioteka Akademii nauk, St Petersburg), Sobranie Arkheograficheskoi komissii, no. 170. Although the poem has not been found among Simeon's manuscripts and was not included in *Rifmologion*, most scholars accept his authorship. For a more sceptical view, see Hippisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky*, p. 35.

of May has brought with the birth of the tsarevich. It enjoins the city of Constantinople and the church of Saint Sophia to rejoice, for an orthodox tsar has been born, who will liberate them from the heretical Turks. The second section (ll. 13-28) calls upon the royal city of Moscow to fill with light (*prosvetisia*) and joy, secure within its walls, for Peter, like the 'rock' of his name (derived from the Greek *petros*), has been sent by God to strengthen the church. As the youngest brother, Peter is compared to Joseph and Benjamin, Jacob's most beloved sons by his second wife. The third section (ll. 29-38) voices the famed astrological prediction, bidding the planets, Mars and Jupiter, to rejoice, for the tsarevich has been born under their light and, according to their aspect, will enjoy courage, wealth and glory. The final section (ll. 39-48) charges the orthodox Tsar Aleksei to rejoice at the birth of his son; the poet wishes him and his wife long life, triumph over all foreign forces, and many generations of descendants destined to reign unshaken in the future.

In this way, by taking on the voice of chronicler of the nation's past and present and prophet of its future, Simeon creates a powerful poetic prediction. Reaching back to the model of the biblical forefathers and looking through the lens of history, he foretells the tsarevich's future as the divinely appointed saviour who will defend the holy city of Moscow and fulfil the Russian Orthodox mission to restore Constantinople to its Christian origins by defeating its Muslim captors. This religious prophecy is 'justified' through a detailed astrological prediction based on the position of the planets, and culminates in a prayer to strengthen the reign of the present Tsar and his descendants.

Although this was not the first time that Simeon used astrological predictions to forecast the future, this poem acquired an afterlife of its own in the context of ongoing Russo-Turkish hostilities and the rapidly developing cult of Peter I. It provided a powerful example of the poet's alleged prophetic powers translating into historical reality.

When Tsar Aleksei died on 29 January 1676, Simeon composed his fourth booklet at great speed, in time to present it to Tsar Fedor at the funeral. ‘Glas poslednii’ (‘The Last Word’, 1676) weaves together several different voices in dialogic form. The main voice is that of the expiring Tsar Aleksei, delivering his final instructions (a testament of eighty clauses) to Fedor, followed by shorter addresses to Patriarch Joachim, his widow, and various other influential figures, each of whom offers a personal reply.²⁹ In speaking for two tsars at once (the deceased father and his successor) at this crucial moment of political transition, Simeon was daringly assuming the power of imperial authority to set the agenda for the future.

Five months later, Simeon wrote the last booklet, ‘Gusl' dobroglasnaia’ (‘The Sweet-Sounding Psaltery’, 1676), celebrating the coronation of his former pupil Fedor in June. Emboldened by the change of ruler, he now issued instructions to the new Tsar directly in his own name. The five biblical epigraphs and prose introduction present the son’s succession to his father in terms of Solomon’s succession to King David. Simeon adopts a prophetic tone, quoting scripture (‘the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth’, Luke 3:5) and expressing the hope that ‘that which was prophesied by the prophet’ (*prorechennoe prorokom*) will come true. Fedor is enjoined to espouse the humility of David,

²⁹ On ‘Glas poslednii’, see I. P. Eremin, ‘Poeticheskii stil’ Simeona Polotskogo’, in *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, vol. 6 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1948), pp. 125-53 (p. 129); I. P. Eremin, ‘Simeon Polotskii – poet i dramaturg’, in Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, ed. I. P. Eremin (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1953), pp. 223-60 (p. 246); Grebeniuk, ‘“Rifmologion” Simeona Polotskogo’, pp. 294-97; Hippisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky*, pp. 65, 82.

the wisdom of Solomon, the piety of Hezekiah, and the providence of Joseph, while Russia is praised as the 'new Israel' and 'Moscovite Zion'.³⁰

Biblical allusions continue to run like a leitmotif throughout the series of twenty 'wishes' (*zhelaniia*) and twenty 'greetings' (*privetstva*) that follow. In the second greeting, after a detailed description of the signs of the zodiac and their significance for the tsar, Simeon bids Fedor to be like a new David, sent by God to overcome Goliath (coining striking verbs such as '*davydstvovati*' and '*goliafstvuet*').³¹ In this way, he harnesses the combined forces of prophecy as prediction and prophecy as moral instruction. David's defeat of the Philistine later became a stock metaphor for Russia's triumph over its enemies, particularly in the aftermath of Napoleon's downfall. The seventh greeting compares Fedor's rule to the staff of Moses and Jeremiah.³² Through these repeated comparisons of the Tsar to the kings and prophets of Israel, the poet associates his own voice with the moral authority of biblical prophecy.

In the daring concluding poem, 'Zhelanie tvortsa' ('The Creator's Wish'), Simeon invites the new ruler to print his work to spread the glory of the tsar throughout Russia and other Christian lands. He presses his point that the glory of Russia should be spread not just by the sword, but also through the printed word, for books are eternal and will dispel the darkness of ignorance.³³ This bold claim establishes a reciprocal relationship and even a certain equivalence between the deeds of the tsar and the words of the poet: both are instruments for the elevation of the fatherland.

³⁰ 'Gusl' dobroglasnaia', in Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, pp. 108-59 (pp. 111-12).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 138-40.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-59.

The Poet as Preacher: Vertograd mnogotsvetnyi

Shortly before he gathered together all the poems of *Rifmologion*, Simeon compiled another extensive collection, *Vertograd mnogotsvetnyi* (*The Many-Flowered Garden*), comprising some 2763 verses.³⁴ The two books are very different in conception and function. While *Rifmologion* includes occasional verse, generally designed for oral declamation, with a panegyric or liturgical purpose, the poems of *Vertograd*, intended for silent reading, present moral, didactic messages independent of current events.³⁵ Most of its poems are based on translations of texts, taken from various Latin collections of Jesuit sermons and *exempla* dating from the late fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, drawn from a very diverse range of biblical, classical and historical sources.³⁶ They were first grouped thematically, but then copied out by scribes according to the alphabetical order of their titles, starting with Aaron.³⁷ This arrangement creates the impression of ‘an encyclopedia of morals to be drawn from the world order’.³⁸

³⁴ This figure (2496 poems if the long cycle ‘Vivlia’ is counted as a single poem) is given by Hippisley in his introduction to the collection. Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvĕtnyj*, vol. 1, p. lv.

³⁵ Hippisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky*, p. 34; Vroon, ‘Simeon Polotsky’, p. 302.

³⁶ Hippisley has painstakingly identified over half the sources translated by Simeon. Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvĕtnyj*, vol. 1, p. lv.

³⁷ L. I. Sazonova, “‘Vertograd mnogotsvetnyi’ Simeona Polotskogo (Evoliutsiia khudozhestvennogo zamysla)”, in Robinson, ed., *Simeon Polotskii i ego knigoizdatel'skaia deiatel'nost'*, pp. 203-58 (p. 210).

³⁸ Vroon, ‘Simeon Polotsky’, p. 302.

Vertograd made a substantial contribution to shaping the early stages of the poet-prophet theme in three principal ways. First, in most general terms, although it lacks the prophetic ‘poet and tsar’ dimension so prominent in *Rifmologion*, it offers a much stronger distillation of Simeon’s voice as a preacher, backed up with all the authority of his imported foreign sources.

Secondly, it contains many poems specifically dedicated to the nature of prophecy and the figure of the prophet. ‘Prorochestvo’ (‘Prophecy’) identifies the three signs of a true prophet and discusses in this light several candidates for this role, including the sinner Balaam.³⁹ ‘Prorok’ (‘The Prophet’) compares Jesus to Moses.⁴⁰ Numerous verses deal with and are named after individual Hebrew prophets.⁴¹ For example, the first poem from the cycle ‘Molchanie’ (‘Silence’) paraphrases the words of Isaiah (6:5) before the seraph flies to him with a burning coal (the same passage that Pushkin later used in ‘Prorok’).⁴² As in

³⁹ Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvĕtnyj*, vol. 3, pp. 34-35.

⁴⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 34.

⁴¹ As well as poems on Aaron, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Jeremiah and David, see the long cycle ‘Vivlia’, consisting of 261 verse captions to the illustrations of an Amsterdam Bible featuring the patriarchs and prophets. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 452-510.

⁴² ‘Veleglasnyi prorok drevle vopiashe’, ibid., vol. 2, pp. 367-68. In the second line, paraphrasing Isaiah’s words, ‘Gore mi est’, iako iazyk moi molchashe’, Simeon derives the reference to silence from his Latin source, which relies on the Vulgate translation of the Hebrew ‘*nidemti*’ as ‘quia tacui’ (‘for I have been silent’), rather than ‘for I am undone’ or ‘for I am ruined’. The same passage from Isaiah is also cited in ‘Chto v ugli drevle proobrazovasia’ from *Rifmologion*, discussed above.

Rifmologion, the biblical prophets are advanced as models for the Russian nation, cast as the ‘new Israel’.⁴³

Last but not least, the collection’s title and contents establish a clear parallel between God as Creator and Gardener of the world and the poet as the ‘reader’ of God’s ‘book’ and creator of his own garden of verse. This analogy, popular in medieval and baroque culture, lies at the root of the view of the writer as a demiurge or god-like creator and is closely linked to the image of the writer as a prophet in a variety of ways, culminating in the association of the poetic word with the divine word.

The comparison is introduced in the prose preface where Simeon links his ‘many-flowered garden’ (*vert mnogotsvetnyi*) to the ‘heavenly garden’ (*vertograd nebesnyi*) or ‘spiritual paradise’.⁴⁴ The parallel he draws between the artistic arrangement of his collection and the divine order of the universe invites a comparison between the artist-gardener and God as two creators with a common sacred purpose. As Aleksandr Panchenko has pointed out, while this analogy was common and ‘neutral’ in European baroque culture, it was unfamiliar and viewed with suspicion by traditional Russian Orthodox clerics.⁴⁵

Simeon develops this metaphor in several poems of the collection. In ‘Mir est’ kniga’ (‘The World Is a Book’) God writes the book of the universe – whoever ‘reads’ this volume of five pages (made up of the heavens, fire, air, water creatures and earth) will be moved to

⁴³ See the phrases ‘my – Israil’ novyi’ and ‘Sami k Sionu dolzhni vozdykhati’ in the poem ‘Mir est’ Vavilon’, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 334. Several poems of the collection reflect traditional Christian anti-Semitic prejudices, imported from Latin sources.

⁴⁴ ‘Predislovie ko blagochestivomu chitateliu’, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 3-8 (p. 4).

⁴⁵ Panchenko, *Russkaia stikhotvornaia kul'tura XVII veka*, p. 176.

glorify its Creator.⁴⁶ If God is a writer, then, by reverse analogy, the reader of this divine work (Simeon) becomes a god-like creator, who reveals the glory of God in this world through his writing (the fundamental aim of *Vertograd*).

In the second poem of the cycle 'Kniga' ('The Book') Simeon extends this metaphor to cover other ways in which man can come close to the Creator.⁴⁷ God gives humans many books to learn from. The first book is 'this world' (*mir sei*), the second book is the 'written law' (*pisannyi zakon*) transmitted by Moses to the Israelites, and the third and fourth books are Jesus and the Virgin Mary. The fifth book is a person's 'conscience' (*sovest'*), in which he inscribes his deeds, good or bad, like 'letters' (*pis'mena*), while the sixth and final book is a 'mystery' (*taina*), read only by God. Man can therefore achieve closeness to God in many ways: as a 'reader' of this world, as a theological student of God's written law, as an imitator of Christ and the Virgin Mary, and, finally, through his deeds, by writing the book of his own life. This sequence reflects a progression from the study or imitation of different forms of divine revelation to the more active category of prophecy by deed, examples of which can be

⁴⁶ Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvėtnyj*, vol. 2, pp. 334-35. For a discussion of this poem's links with the tractate on poetry by the Polish Jesuit poet Maciej Sarbiewski (1595-1640), see the chapter 'Filosofia i estetika poezii barokko', in Panchenko, *Ruskaia stikhotvornaia kul'tura XVII veka*, pp. 167-208 (pp. 178-81). For parallels with the treatment of the world as a book in a volume owned by Simeon, see Hippisley and Luk'janova, *Simeon Polockij's library*, pp. 172-73.

⁴⁷ 'Razlichny knigi nam sut' Bogom predlozheny', in Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvėtnyj*, vol. 2, pp. 199-201. On the book in Simeon's verse, see P. N. Berkov, 'Kniga i poezii Simeona Polotskogo', in *Trudy Otdela drevenerusskoi literatury*, vol. 24 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1969), pp. 260-66.

found in Hebrew scripture alongside the more familiar category of prophecy by word.⁴⁸ The closing poem of the cycle reinforces the direct connection between the prophet's speech and the divine Word by describing Ezekiel's vision of God making him eat a book that tasted sweet in the mouth (Ezek. 3:3).⁴⁹

The parallel between the creative powers of God and man rests on the connection between the divine word (Logos) and the poetic word. The cycle 'Slovo Bozhie' ('The Word of God') explores the former, as communicated to and expressed by the prophets and the psalmist. In the eighth poem, 'Jeremia, prorok bozhestvennyi' ('Jeremiah, the divine prophet'), Simeon develops the comparison of God's word to fire and a hammer that can break rocks in pieces (Jer. 23:29).⁵⁰ In the next poem, 'Psalmopisatel'. Dukhom ispolnennyi' ('The psalmist. Filled with the spirit'), he uses the image of sharp arrows piercing the enemies' heart (Ps. 45:5) as a metaphor for the power of the divine word that can bring a dead soul back to life.⁵¹ Both texts suggest an association between the divine word revealed to the prophet and the poet's command of language. Simeon was familiar with this idea from seventeenth-century European and Polish treatises on poetry; his early student lecture notes on poetics include a Latin definition of poetics as 'none other than the poem or eloquence of

⁴⁸ See, for example, Jeremiah's purchase of a field while in prison, despite Jerusalem being under siege (Jer. 32).

⁴⁹ 'Ezekiliu knigu vo sned' aggel dashe', in Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvėtnyj*, vol. 2, p. 202. Simeon has adapted a text from Faber, adding to the original biblical account an angel and changing the scroll (*svitok*) to a book.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 129-30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 130.

God himself⁵². He also imported into Russian literature the baroque view of the writer's word as a moral deed, a building-block for the perfection of society.⁵³

In sum, therefore, through the poems of *Vertograd*, Simeon could introduce a rich new range of prophetic themes and diction into his verse. He composed numerous verses on the Hebrew prophets and prophecy, adopted the didactic voice of a preacher, cultivated parallels between the poet and God, linked the poetic word to the divine Word, and represented literary work as a form of transformative, moral action. All these strategies reinforced the association of the poet with the prophet. Although the collection remained unpublished for a long time, its compilation in the late seventeenth century bears witness to Simeon's enthusiastic crafting of the role of the poet as a moral teacher, an image that he picked for his garden from Latin Jesuit sources and successfully transplanted onto the virgin soil of Russian poetry.

The poet as psalmist: Psaltir' tsaria i proroka Davida

Simeon's rhymed translation of the *Psalter* was an unexpected offshoot of his work on *Vertograd*. According to his own account, while arranging the poems of this collection in alphabetical order, he reached the penultimate letter Ψ (*psi*) and had the idea of turning a few penitential psalms into verse versions. After carrying out this task, he felt inspired to continue.⁵⁴ Although the practice of translating the psalms into the vernacular had been

⁵² Hippiisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky*, p. 7.

⁵³ Panchenko, *Russkaia stikhotvornaia kul'tura XVII veka*, p. 177; Panchenko, 'Simeon Polotskii', p. 368.

⁵⁴ '[Vtoroe predislovie k "Psaltyri rifmotvornoi"] Predislovie k blagochestivomu chitateliu', in Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, p. 212. For textual evidence of the relation of the

established in Europe since at least the sixteenth century, it had not yet taken root in Russia. Using the text of the Church Slavonic Psalter of 1653 revised under the direction of Patriarch Nikon, Simeon modelled the formal aspects of his poetic translation on the work of the Polish Renaissance humanist Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584), whose *Psalterz Dawidów* (*David's Psalter*, 1579) paraphrased the psalms in syllabic verse.⁵⁵ He completed the whole psalter at record speed, in less than two months, between early February and late March 1678.⁵⁶

Psalter to the final stages of arranging the poems of *Vertograd* in alphabetical order, see Sazonova, “‘Vertograd mnogotsvetnyi’ Simeona Polotskogo”, pp. 239-40.

⁵⁵ Simeon had two copies of Kochanowski's *Psalter* (Krakov, 1586, 1629) in his library. See Hippisley and Luk'janova, *Simeon Polockij's library*, p. 87. On his use of Kochanowski's *Psalter*, see Sazonova, *Literaturnaia kul'tura Rossii*, pp. 54-56. For a comparison of the two translations, see O. A. Derzhavina, ‘Simeon Polotskii v rabote nad “Psal'tyr'iu rifmotvornoi”’, in Robinson, ed., *Simeon Polotskii i ego knigoizdatel'skaia deiatel'nost'*, pp. 116-33 (pp. 117-27), and S. I. Nikolaev, ‘65-y psalom “Psal'tyri Davida” Iana Kokhanovskogo v poezii Simeona Polotskogo’’, in his *Ot Kokhanovskogo do Mitskevicha: Razyskaniia po istorii pol'sko-russkikh literaturnykh sviazei XVII – pervoi treti XIX v.* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo S.-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 2004), pp. 5-14.

⁵⁶ Scholars all agree on the start date of 4 February, but cite two different completion dates of 21 or 28 March. The later date of 28 March, marked on the manuscript original of the preface to the psalter in manuscript no. 237 (l. 5), housed in the Synodal Collection of the State Historical Museum (GIM), Moscow, is first given in Tatarskii, *Simeon Polotskii*, p. 291; the same completion date is repeated (without reference to sources) in Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, p. 237, Derzhavina, ‘Simeon Polotskii v rabote nad “Psal'tyr'iu rifmotvornoi”’, p. 118, and Vroon, ‘Simeon Polotsky’, p. 303. The earlier date of 21 March, marked on the

The resulting metrical and rhymed *Psaltir' tsaria i proroka Davida* (*The Psalter of King David the Prophet*) marked a bold new beginning in Russian letters. It was the first book of verse to be published in April 1680 at the newly founded 'Royal' (*Verkhniaia*) printing house, set up on Simeon's recommendation with the approval of the tsar and entirely independent of the Patriarch's authority.⁵⁷ The volume was a magnificent production; an estimated 1200 copies were printed in two-colours, with superb engravings made from drawings by Simeon's celebrated contemporary, the court artist and iconographer Simon Ushakov (1626-1686).⁵⁸ The close association signalled in the title between kingship, prophecy and the psalms was reinforced by Ushakov's frontispiece (**Figure 1**). King David, crowned and in regal robes, stands by his throne next to an open book and lyre, looking upwards in prayer to receive divine inspiration. The picture is framed by three couplets of syllabic verse, opening with the line 'Dar prorochestva Gospod' posylaet' ('The Lord sends the gift of prophecy') and closing with an injunction to read the psalms. This combination of visual and verbal messages acted as a potent image, confirming the connection between

psalter in manuscript no. 661 (l. 96 ob.) housed in the same Synodal Collection, is given by Sazonova, "“Vertograd mnogotsvetnyi” Simeona Polotskogo", p. 214.

⁵⁷ *Psaltir' tsaria i proroka Davida, khudozhestvom rifmotvornym ravnomerno slogi, i soglasnokonechno, po razlichnym stikhov rodom prelozhennaia* (Moscow: Tipografiia Verkhniaia, 1680). An online copy of this edition from the Russian State Library can be found at <<http://dlib.rsl.ru/viewer/01002465551#?page=1>>.

⁵⁸ For the estimated print-run of 1200 copies, see Derzhavina, 'Simeon Polotskii v rabote nad "Psaltyr'iu rifmotvornoi"', p. 118. The copperplate engravings were made by Afanasii Trukhmenskii. On Ushakov's emblematic style and his close links with Simeon, see Hippisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky*, p. 50.

Simeon's version of the *Psalter* and the divine spirit of prophecy that moved King David.

Ushakov's mix of traditional Russian iconography with Western baroque architectural details complemented the poet's refashioning of the Church Slavonic Psalter in new forms derived from European models.⁵⁹

Although Simeon's other two collections of verse both contributed to the association of the poet with the prophet, the *Psalter* had a much greater and more immediate impact on this tradition. Like *Rifmologion*, it developed the parallel between the tsar and King David. Like *Vertograd*, it also used the translation of imported texts as a vehicle for honing the poet's moral voice. And yet it went much further. For the first time a poet writing in the Russian vernacular took on the language of King David, the prophet and psalmist, directly associating the poet's voice with the combined authority of these three roles. In his role as translator and poet Simeon became the conduit through which the power of prophecy originally bestowed upon the psalmist by God was transmitted to the tsar and contemporary readers. As such, he could be seen as a carrier of the prophetic spirit.

A close look at the contents and structure of the *Psalter* reveals that Simeon strengthened the link between poetry and prophecy by introducing three vital bridges: between the psalms and the Hebrew prophets, between these biblical models and his own verse, and between his poetic voice and liturgical worship. First, he appended to the psalms his rhymed versions of nine prophetic songs and prayers, known as the Biblical canticles, commonly included at the end of the Russian Orthodox Psalter for singing in church as part

⁵⁹ The arches and balustrade in Ushakov's frontispiece echo details from an engraving made by the Leiden artist Jan Saenredam (1565-1607) after a painting by Paolo Veronese. See Derzhavina, 'Simeon Polotskii v rabote nad "Psaltyr'iu rifmotvornoi"', pp. 120-22.

of the canon or for silent reading in private devotion.⁶⁰ The first eight canticles are all drawn from or closely connected with the Hebrew prophets: Moses's two songs (Exod. 15:1-19; Deut. 32:1-13) are followed by the song of praise uttered by Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10), the prayer of Habakkuk (Hab. 3:1-13), the song of Isaiah (Isa. 26:9-19), the prayer of Jonah from the belly of the fish (Jon. 2:3-10), and the two songs of the Three Holy Youths (from the Septuagint version of the Book of Daniel). The ninth canticle juxtaposes the song of the Virgin Mary (the *Magnificat*) with the prayer of the prophet Zacharias (the *Benedictus*) (Luke 1:46-54, 68-79). This arrangement (subsequently repeated by Trediakovskii in his Psalter of 1753) created a seamless transition from the psalmist's personal meditations to the national dimension of prophecy.⁶¹ It also served to narrow the gap between holy scripture and poetry, as these biblical passages, originally written in poetic form, were frequently cited together with the psalms in treatises on poetics as early examples of verse.⁶²

⁶⁰ Simeon introduces this section with a verse couplet 'Pesni, molitvy v rifmekh polagaem, / iazhe v zavetekh sviatykh obretaem.'

⁶¹ Vasilij Kirillovič Trediakovskij, *Psalter 1753*, ed. by Alexander Levitsky (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989), pp. 379-420. Trediakovskii's eleven prophetic odes were first published after his paraphrases of ten psalms in *Sochineniia i perevody kak stikhami tak i prozoiu Vasil'ia Trediakovskago*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Pri Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1752), pp. 103-49.

⁶² On Simeon's familiarity with this point from notes on the lectures on poetics of Maciej Sarbiewski, who taught in colleges in Polotsk and Vilna in the 1620s, see Panchenko, *Russkaia stikhotvornaia kul'tura XVII veka*, pp. 173-75. On Simeon's possession of a copy of Sarbiewski's work (Vilno, 1635), see Hippisley and Luk'janova, *Simeon Polockij's library*, p.

Secondly, he linked his versions of the psalms and prophets to his own original verse and reflections on his practice as a translator. His choice of poetic form and numerous additions to the psalms (explanations, examples, dramatic colour, ornamentation, visualisation images) already made it abundantly clear that he regarded his poetic version of the Psalter as an artistic work in its own right.⁶³ To set this in context, immediately after the title-page he inserted four of his own poems on the psalms, followed by three prefaces – a verse dedication of the *Psalter* to the Tsar and two addresses to the ‘noble reader’, one in prose and one in verse. All three preambles introduced parallels between the poet and the psalmist. He rounded off his versions of the psalms (including the additional Psalm 151 on David’s election and victory over Goliath) with another original poem, ‘Blгодарstvie’ (‘Thanksgiving’), expressing appreciation to the Lord for enabling him to ‘write a Slavonic psalter’ (*psaltir’ slavenski napisati*). In this way, he managed to weave his poetic transpositions of holy scripture and his own verse into a single fabric, unified by divine inspiration.

Thirdly, he structured the collection in a way that emphasised its liturgical context. Rather than printing the psalms in a single sequence, he divided them up into *kathismata* – blocks that make up a unit of reading for worship.⁶⁴ The addition of the Biblical canticles and

128. In his second preface Simeon explains that the Hebrew psalms were composed ‘khudozhestvom stikhotvoreniia’. Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, p. 213.

⁶³ For an interesting analysis of Simeon’s changes, see S. A. Demchenkov, “‘Psaltir’ rifmotvornaia” Simeona Polotskogo: printsipy poeticheskoi obrabotki bibleiskogo teksta’, in *Klassicheskaia slovesnost’ i religiozniy diskurs (problemy aksiologii i poetiki): Sbornik nauchnykh statei* (Ekaterinburg: Izdatel'stvo Ural'skogo universiteta, 2007), pp. 24-33.

⁶⁴ Vroon, ‘From Liturgy to Literature’, p. 130.

a *Mesiatseslov* (*Calendar*), a versified version of the Russian Orthodox cycle of saints' days and festivals, also served to reinforce the ecclesiastical character of his work.⁶⁵

However carefully Simeon tried to integrate his *Psalter* with orthodox practice, the enterprise remained highly controversial. In the words of Ilia Serman, it was 'the most revolutionary event in the literary culture of Moscow baroque'.⁶⁶ The use of the word 'revolutionary' is no exaggeration. Authorship contests as well as establishes authority; in allowing his poetic voice to shape the prophet's psalms, Simeon was creating a dangerous new precedent. From its inception in the ninth century, the task of rendering the psalms into Church Slavonic was fraught with complications, centred on the problem of how to convey the original divine word through the medium of another language. This difficulty was compounded by other factors, such as lack of knowledge of Hebrew, the complex poetic language of the psalms, and the need for a translation to reflect the accumulated tradition of Christian exegesis.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, once the canonical text of the Church Slavonic prose psalter was established, it acquired all the authority of a sacred book. As well as its central liturgical function, it was widely used at home for private devotion, as a textbook for learning to read and write, and as a divination book. As such, it was known practically off by heart by all literate Russians. Any attempt to create a new poetic version in a different language was

⁶⁵ *Mesiatseslov* was republished as a separate booklet in Moscow in 1882.

⁶⁶ I. Z. Serman, "'Psaltyr' rifmotvornaia" Simeona Polotskogo i russkaia poeziia XVIII v.', in *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, vol. 18 (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1962), pp. 214-32 (p. 216).

⁶⁷ C. M. MacRobert, 'What Is a Faithful Translation? Changing Norms in the Church Slavonic Version of the Psalter', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 69 (July 1991), 401-17 (pp. 403-04).

bound to be seen as subversive. Although Simeon made it clear in his prefaces that his poetic psalms were not meant for use in church, only for reading or singing at home, the very act of changing the traditional text of the psalter was suspect.⁶⁸ His choice of a Polish Catholic poet's version as a model laid him open to the additional charge of allowing heretical Latinate influences to infiltrate Orthodox tradition.

Simeon was well aware of the contentious nature of his enterprise and deployed a range of strategies to defend his position. These strategies played a crucial role in defining the relationship between authorship and authority and in many ways anticipated the methods subsequently adopted for the validation of a writer's prophetic status. In the later Russian tradition of literary prophecy, this status was normally sanctioned with reference to one or more of the following sources of authority: i) God; ii) the tsar or ruler; iii) public recognition; iv) the Church; v) a predecessor with established prophetic credentials. These sources were often invoked together, but sometimes competed. In the case of Simeon, although he does not explicitly style himself as a literary prophet, we can already discern the kernel of the first four forms of self-validation. The last method (invoking a predecessor) could not be used by Simeon for the simple reason that he was Russia's *first* professional poet, starting a new poetic tradition rather than continuing an existing one. He did, however, appeal to the authority of earlier psalters in Latin and Polish as precedents that legitimised his venture.⁶⁹

How did Simeon relate to the first four forms of validation? Most obviously, he constantly defined his identity as a poet in relation to God, the first and ultimate source of authority. He established his position as an authentic servant of God by taking on and

⁶⁸ See the references to the use of the psalms in church and at home in the first and third verse prefaces, in Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, pp. 211, 212, 215.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 213. Simeon does not mention any writer (e.g. Jan Kochanowski) by name.

transmitting the word of God to his generation. In his first preface to the *Psalter* he made numerous references to the crucial role of divine inspiration in his poetic work, comparing himself in this respect to King David. In his account of the genesis of the work in the second preface he linked this divine assistance to his own heartfelt inspiration, once more aligning his voice directly with the psalmist's.⁷⁰

He courted the authority of the Tsar in several ways. On the title-page he described his *Psalter* as a work carried out 'by order' (*poveleniem*) of the Tsar. In the first preface, he dedicated the *Psalter* to the Tsar, compared him to King David and urged him to accept his psalms as a worthy 'gift'.⁷¹ According to the eighteenth-century historian V. N. Tatishchev, Simeon even involved Fedor in the task of translation; the poetic versions of psalms 132 and 145 were said to be the tsar's own work.⁷² In this way he established a powerful triangle, linking the Tsar to King David through the agency of his *Psalter*. These flattering overtures were rewarded by the Tsar's publication of his work.

⁷⁰ See the references to God and the Holy Spirit and phrases such as 'pomoshchiiu Boga', 'Bogom nastavliaem', 'Bog zhe dade i kontsem delo uvenchati', 'posobiem Bozhiim' in the first verse preface and the opening of the second prose preface, *ibid.*, pp. 210-12.

⁷¹ See the references to the Tsar in the first and third verse prefaces, *ibid.*, pp. 211-12, 215.

⁷² In his 1886 biography of Simeon, Tatarskii quotes Tatishchev's note on Fedor's reign from vol. 13 of Sergei Solov'ev's *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*. Tatishchev's 'Tsarstvo tsaria Fedora Alekseevicha' appears in part 5, section 26 of his *Istoriia Rossiiskaia s samikh drevneishikh vremen*. See Tatarskii, *Simeon Polotskii*, p. 121. The same information was reported by L. N. Maikov in his essay 'Simeon Polotskii', first published in 1875, reprinted in L. N. Maikov, *Ocherki iz istorii russkoi literatury XVII i XVIII stoletii* (St Petersburg: Izdanie A. S. Suvorina, 1889), p. 41.

What about validation through public recognition? Simeon clearly saw himself as a poet with a moral message to deliver to his audience, and was adept at shaping the reception of his work. By addressing the first preface to his most important reader, Tsar Fedor, and the next two to his ‘noble reader’, he effectively constructed a composite picture of his ideal audience. Although his actual audience was small, he projected the image of a broader, educated Russian Orthodox readership, eager to gain ‘a clearer understanding’ (*svetlshago istolkovaniia*) of the psalms from his poetic versions.⁷³ His second and third prefaces included a sophisticated theory of translation, defending his departure from word to word correspondence and urging his audience to be a ‘true reader of writings, / not a catcher of words, but a seeker of sense’ (*pravyi pisanii chitatel', / ne slov lovitel', no uma iskatel'*).⁷⁴ His efforts to engage his audience were rewarded when his *Psalter* was set to music soon after his death by the early baroque composer, V. P. Titov – a successful experiment that marked the beginning of Russian chamber vocal music.⁷⁵

⁷³ Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, p. 214. Simeon signed off his second preface with a blessing extended to ‘all Orthodox’ (*vsem pravoslavnym*). Ibid. He envisaged an elite audience, distinct from the common people; in his poem ‘Glas naroda’, based on a seventeenth-century neo-Latin collection of Jesuit sermons compiled by Matthias Faber, he warns the reader that the voice of the people is always far from the truth and not to be trusted. Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvĕtnyj*, vol. 1, pp. 208-09.

⁷⁴ Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, p. 216.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 241. A copy with musical notes written by V. P. Titov, now held in BAN, was presented by Titov to Tsarevna Sof'ia. See Derzhavina, ‘Simeon Polotskii v rabote nad “Psaltyr'iu rifmotvornoi”’, p. 132.

The trickiest validating authority to invoke was the Church. To avoid any impression of treading on its toes, Simeon took great care to emphasise in his prefaces that his poetic versions were for home use and not intended to supplant the use of the canonical Psalter in church services. More boldly, on the title-page of his *Psalter*, after noting the tsar's 'order' for its creation, he flagged its 'blessing' by Patriarch Joachim (who later rejected this claim as false). This was a daring move, as Simeon was only too well aware of the clergy's opposition to his project. Even before the *Psalter* was published, the Grecophile monk Evfimii Chudovskii denounced it in a note composed for the Patriarch. Citing various negative opinions of the work, he attacked the poet for undermining the spirit and letter of scripture by replacing it with 'worldly' (*mirskimi*) words.⁷⁶ Simeon responded with a stinging counter-attack, 'K gazhdateliu' ('To the Slanderer'), strategically positioned as the concluding poem rounding off the nine prophetic songs that he appended to the psalter. Without naming Evfimii directly, he compared his enemy to Zoilus, Homer's malignant critic, corrupted by the inner 'demon' of envy. He tried to dispose of his most vocal opponent by undermining his moral credentials and hotly reaffirmed his own position as a 'true [...] son' of the mother church.⁷⁷ However, his defensive tone and failure to deal with the actual concerns that had been raised cast doubt on the validity of his earlier claims.

What was at stake here was the fundamental principle that writers were at liberty to create their own versions of scripture. This view was accepted in the Latin West but remained

⁷⁶ On Evfimii's note, see Tatarskii, *Simeon Polotskii*, p. 303; Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, p. 241; Serman, "'Psaltyr' rifmotvornaia" Simeona Polotskogo', p. 216; Panchenko, 'Simeon Polotskii', p. 371.

⁷⁷ Simeon Polotskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, p. 93. Similar references to envy as an inner demon distorting judgement occur in the second verse preface. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

highly controversial in the Russian Orthodox church. Although most of Simeon's strategies for consolidating his position paid off, he was not able to enlist the support of the clergy. During his lifetime, with the protection of the tsar, he managed to navigate his way around this obstacle. After his death, however, and that of Tsar Fedor two years later, the tide turned against him.

We have seen, therefore, that Simeon put in place significant foundations for the authority of the writer as a prophetic figure – both for himself, and, by implication, for writers in general. In *Rifmologion* he established the poet's voice as the tsar's moral advisor. In *Vertograd* he developed the poet's voice as a didactic teacher of religious and moral truths. Since neither of these collections was published until much later, their influence was necessarily limited to the audiences who read or heard their contents at the time. The one work published in his lifetime which could exert an immediate and lasting influence was his *Psalter*. This book, as Ronald Vroon noted, 'represented the beginnings of a shift in consciousness that would ultimately challenge the notion that the sacred and secular word were of an ontologically different order'.⁷⁸ It set in motion a dynamic tradition of poetic adaptations of the psalms and prophetic songs that took off in the mid-eighteenth century and peaked in the early nineteenth century, providing a fertile incubating ground for the development of the image of the poet-prophet. The psalmist's multiple identities and voices, first translated into literary form by Simeon, offered many attractive models to Russian poets: messianic prophet, divinely inspired poet, independent dissident, authoritative ruler.

In the concluding section of this article, I will identify and analyse some of the milestones which determined the complex process of transmission of Simeon's prophetic legacy to later generations.

⁷⁸ Vroon, 'From Liturgy to Literature', p. 130.

The Poet as Prophet: Legacy and Responses

Simeon's posthumous fate was initially shaped by his favourite disciple, the monk and poet Silvester Medvedev (1641-1691). Silvester had studied under Simeon in Moscow and shared living quarters with him in the monastery.⁷⁹ After his mentor's death, he inherited his large private library and manuscripts and continued to edit his works. He also took over the role of court poet and many of Simeon's publishing and educational activities. Not surprisingly, therefore, Tsar Fedor commissioned him to compose an epitaph in memory of their teacher. He gave precise instructions on the poem's form and content, rejected several short drafts, and helped to edit the final version (continuing the practice of literary cooperation between poet and tsar initiated by Simeon).

The resulting 'Epitafion' ('Epitaph', 25 August 1680) of twelve quatrains foregrounds Simeon's role as a wise 'teacher' (*uchitel'*), validated in relation to the three sources of authority discussed above – Church, kingdom, people:

Муж благовѣрный, Церкви и царству потребный,

Проповѣдию слова народу полезный,⁸⁰

A faithful man, by Church and kingdom needed,

Through his preaching of the word valuable to the people,

Simeon's fidelity to church doctrine receives the most emphasis throughout the poem and enables him to assume the role of the nation's moral teacher. He is a 'truthful theologian' (*bogoslov pravyi*), an 'honest hieromonk' (*ieromonakh chestnyi*), and the creator of many wise books, including sermons, theological tracts, the verse Psalter, *Rifmologion* and

⁷⁹ Panchenko, *Russkaia stikhotvornaia kul'tura XVII veka*, p. 117.

⁸⁰ Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvĕtnyj*, vol. 3, p. 536.

Vertograd, who has ‘brought learning to the Russian people’ (*v nauchenie rodu Rossiisku iavivyi*).⁸¹

Silvester included his poem in the manuscript copy of *Vertograd* prepared for presentation to the tsar. Even more remarkably, Fedor gave orders for the whole epitaph to be engraved on two huge stones and set above Simeon’s tomb in the Zaikonospasskii monastery.⁸² It would be difficult to imagine a more powerful or lasting form of memorialisation, investing Simeon and his pupil with the combined authority of tsar and church. Silvester’s poem marked the beginning of the tradition of a writer elevating the status of a literary predecessor (cast in the role of teacher) to buttress his own position as a worthy successor. This practice later became widespread among aspiring poet-prophets seeking to validate their position in relation to a chain of predecessors.

This promising start was soon reversed, however. In the summer of 1689, when Sophia, acting as regent to her half-brother, Peter, failed in her attempt to take over the throne, Silvester was implicated in the plot and found himself on the wrong side of the conflict, ranged against the Tsar and his supporter, Patriarch Joachim. In September 1689, he was arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and sentenced to death. In February 1691, by order of Peter I, he was finally beheaded.

⁸¹ Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 536-37.

⁸² The epitaph was first published by N. I. Novikov in 1775. The original engraved stones were moved to Kolomenskoe in the 1930s. See the editorial notes, *ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 627-28. For a photograph of two sections of the stones, showing the first six quatrains, currently held in the stone carving section of the Moscow State museum at Kolomenskoe, see <http://www.mgomz.ru/kollektsii/belyiy-kamen> [accessed 17 July 2016].

At the time of Silvester's arrest, taking advantage of the changed political circumstances, the Patriarch revived his long-standing theological disputes with Simeon and his disciple. Both monks were accused and found guilty of disseminating heretical teachings, including the Catholic view of the precise moment when transubstantiation occurs during the liturgy. Silvester was promptly defrocked. In December 1689, just a few months before his own demise, Joachim convened a church council to review the matter in the light of Silvester's recantation. The council forgave Silvester, but kept him under surveillance and ordered the public burning of his controversial book, *Manna* (1687).

Joachim was determined to protect the purity of the Eastern Orthodox church from the tainting influence of the Catholic Latin church with its dangerous modern teachings. This struggle pitted East against West, Greek against Latin, Orthodoxy against Catholicism, and conservative Muscovite clergy against Western-educated innovators. To reinforce the orthodox position and eliminate deviant beliefs, he gave instructions that an account of the whole affair should be put together and written up in his name by Evfimii Chudovskii. The resulting collection comprised several polemical essays on Silvester's Latin heresy and recantation.⁸³ The longest contribution by far, 'Slovo pouchatel'noe sviateishago Ioakima,

⁸³ See essays III-V: 'O rostrige, byvshem monakhe, Sil'vestre Medvedeve, vvodivshem eres' latinskuiu v velikorossiiskii narod', 'O pokaiannom pis'me Sil'vestra Medvedeva', 'Pokaiannoe ispovedanie byvshego monakha Sil'vestra Medvedeva', in *Osten. Pamiatnik russkoi dukhovnoi pis'mennosti XVII veka* (s portretom patriarkha vserossiiskogo Ioakima) (Kazan': V universitetskoi tipografiii, 1865), pp. 70-104. *Osten* was compiled in the early 1690s, after the church council in December 1689, but not published at the time. The version published in 1865 is from a manuscript copy of the original, dated 1708. See the preface, *ibid.*, p. 13.

patriarkha vserossiiskogo' ('An Instructive Discourse by the Most Holy Joachim, Patriarch of All Russia'), contained a sharp indictment of Simeon's religious profile and works, including his *Psalter*. Its author (evidently Joachim, but possibly Evfimii writing on his behalf) presented himself as the mouthpiece of a tradition that stretched back to the Hebrew prophets and adopted a suitably biblical declamatory tone for his denunciation of the false prophet. He introduced Simeon as a learned man, educated by the Jesuit papists and well versed in the latest Latin books, who had passed himself off in Moscow as a follower of the Eastern orthodox faith. The Tsar and clergy believed him and entrusted him with various ecclesiastical matters. However, since Simeon did not know Greek, he could not be a 'true son of the Eastern church'.⁸⁴ His theological works were full of heresy. His *Psalter*, unlike David's psalms, was not inspired by God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Instead, it was copied from Polish books by Catholic authors like Jan Kochanowski and from other heretical sources, and corrupted by many 'additions and omissions' (*prilogi i ot'iatii*). Simeon had tried to instil new alien ways of thinking into the Russian Orthodox people, but God's just sentence curtailed his activities through death. Simeon had already managed, however, to print some of his books, falsely claiming to have received the Patriarch's blessing. 'All orthodox sons' were therefore forbidden from reading these heretical works, whether at home or in church, under threat of excommunication.⁸⁵

After Silvester's detention, Simeon's library and papers, were confiscated, bundled into a large trunk, and consigned to the vestry of the Moscow patriarchate where they

⁸⁴ *Osten*, p. 130. Simeon's lack of Greek is also mentioned in an earlier essay in the context of a theological dispute between the Grecophile Epifanii and Simeon. See 'O mudreishem ieromonakhe Epifanii slavinetskom i o Simeone polotskom', *ibid.*, p. 71.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-39.

languished, largely untouched, for over two centuries.⁸⁶ Simeon's *Psalter* – the earliest Russian translation of the psalms – thus gained the dubious distinction of becoming the first literary book to be banned in Russia, while his closest disciple became the first writer to lose his life in Russia.⁸⁷ Although their posthumous literary reputations were put on hold for some time, it is important to note that the pro-Western cultural orientation which they both championed and introduced to the Russian court ultimately prevailed, as can be seen from the reign of Peter the Great onwards. In other words, although defeated politically, they won the long-term cultural battle. Furthermore, the dissident and martyrological (in the case of Silvester) elements of their biographies as court poets subsequently came to be associated with the image of the prophetic writer as the suffering opponent of some form of authority, whether imperial, ecclesiastical, or public.

During the eighteenth century, some significant references to Simeon flagged two aspects of his profile as a poet, each of which carried a clear association with prophecy. The first aspect centred on his *Psalter*, while the second drew on his familiarity with astrology and ability to predict the future of tsars. By the time Novikov's entry on Simeon appeared in his dictionary of Russian writers (1772), both these strands had merged together; the entry

⁸⁶ Occasional inventories were made during this period. For details, see Panchenko, *Russkaia stikhotvornaia kul'tura XVII veka*, p. 141; Hippisley, *The Poetic Style of Simeon Polotsky*, p. 2; Sazonova's introductory essays in Simeon Polockij, *Vertograd mnogocvėtnyj*, vol. 1, p. xv, vol. 3, p. ix.

⁸⁷ Panchenko, 'Simeon Polotskii', p. 372.

opens with a description of his rhymed *Psalter* and includes a special mention of his poetic prediction of the birth of Peter the Great.⁸⁸

Novikov's determination to stress the importance of Simeon's *Psalter* and its legacy also informed his entry on Lomonosov in the same dictionary. His claim that Lomonosov derived his youthful passion for poetry from frequent readings of Simeon's *Psalter* was subsequently repeated by numerous biographers seeking to build a national literary tradition, starting with Radishchev in 1790.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Nikolai Novikov, *Opyt istoricheskogo slovaria o rossiiskikh pisateliakh* (St Petersburg, 1772), pp. 166-167, at http://imwerden.de/pdf/novikov_opyt_istoricheskogo_slovarya_o_rossijskykh_pisateliakh_1772_ocr.pdf [accessed 5 March 2017]. For an overview of Simeon's legacy, see A. S. Kurilov, 'Simeon Polotskii i russkaia istoriko-literaturnaia mysl' XVIII veka', in Robinson, ed., *Simeon Polotskii i ego knigoizdatel'skaia deiatel'nost'* (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), pp. 318-33, and the introduction to Irina Podtergera, 'Pis'ma i poslaniia Simeona Polotskogo' (unpublished doctoral thesis, St Petersburg State University, 2000), at <http://www.dissercat.com/content/pisma-i-poslaniya-simeona-polotskogo> [accessed 1 August 2016].

⁸⁹ Novikov, *Opyt istoricheskogo slovaria*, pp. 119-120. Radishchev's 'Slovo o Lomonosove', written as an independent work, was included as the last chapter of his *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu* (1790). Lomonosov's debt to Simeon's *Psalter* is repeated, unchallenged, despite the lack of evidence in Lomonosov's own writings. Doubts have only recently been cast on this view. See Steven A. Usitalo, *The Invention of Mikhail Lomonosov: A Russian National Myth* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013), pp. 84, 95.

The tradition initiated by Silvester's stone epitaph but then aborted was revived some seventy-five years later by Trediakovskii. In a pioneering essay of 1755, after crediting Simeon with introducing syllabic verse based on Polish models to Russia, he described him as 'the very first writer of verse in our Great Russia in the Slavonic language'. He cited his *Psalter* as the first book written in rhyming verses according to the Polish manner, and also mentioned an impressive manuscript copy of *Vertograd*.⁹⁰ Significantly, he then recalled having seen Silvester's 'enormous' epitaph carved on two standing stones set over the poet's grave in the lower church of the monastery.⁹¹ From 1723 to 1726 Trediakovskii had studied at the Slavic Greek Latin Academy (founded by Silvester in 1682 in accordance with Simeon's plan, and housed in the monastery); by mentioning the epitaph, he was able to inscribe himself in a direct line of succession to both poets.

Not long before writing this essay, Trediakovskii had already followed in Simeon's footsteps: in 1752 he published his own poetic versions of ten psalms and prophetic odes, and completed the entire *Psalter* in 1753. Like his predecessor, he wanted Russia to catch up with other Christian European nations in this respect. In his opinion Simeon's *Psalter* was not adequate to this task, as it was neither lyric nor poetic. This was not Simeon's fault; it resulted from the fact that he wrote at a time when Russian rules of versification had not yet been sorted out.⁹²

⁹⁰ V. K. Trediakovskii, 'O drevnem, srednem i novom stikhotvorenii rossiiskom', in his *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, ed. by L. I. Timoveev, pp. 425-50 (p. 436).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

⁹² See 'Preduvedomlenie', in Trediakovskij, *Psalter 1753*, p. 3. Trediakovskii copied Simeon's aims and the structure of his preface but gave more weight to individual emotion and drama. For a comparison of both versions, see A. P. Tusichishnyi, 'Obraznost' v

Trediakovskii's comments show how important the Psalter was in forming a connecting link between Simeon's legacy and the next century. The second such link was built around the verses on the birth of Peter the Great that Simeon presented to Tsar Aleksei at the christening of his son in June 1672. As noted above in relation to *Rifmologion*, this poem was the main source of Simeon's reputation as a prophetic poet who could read the stars and predict the fate of tsars. Its posthumous fame was largely due to its inclusion (embellished with further prophecies) in a popular account of Peter the Great's early life compiled by one of his first biographers, Petr Krekshin (1692 or 1693-1764). Although he liked to identify himself as 'the nobleman of Great Novgorod', Krekshin had in fact settled in St Petersburg from at least 1712 and witnessed Peter's reforms at first-hand. An ardent supporter of the tsar, he began collecting written and oral sources about him from around 1722 (by 1759 he claimed to have amassed enough material to fill forty-five books).⁹³ In 1742 he completed the first volume of his work and presented the manuscript to Peter's daughter, Empress Elizabeth, a year after she had assumed the throne. His tale was frequently copied and circulated in different versions before its partial and anonymous publication in 1787 (twice) and 1795.⁹⁴ It was first identified and attributed to Krekshin by Ivan Sakharov,

perevodakh psalmov Simeonom Polotskim i V. K. Trediakovskim', in A. S. Kurilov, ed., *V. K. Trediakovskii i russkaia literature* (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2005), pp. 51-72.

⁹³ For an account of Krekshin's life based on meticulous archival research, including the correction of his dates of birth and death (usually given as 1684-1763), see P. A. Krotov, 'Pisatel' P. N. Krekshin – chelovek Perekhodnoi epokhi XVIII veka (k voprosu o genezise intelligentsii), *Trudy istoricheskogo fakul'teta SPbGU*, 2011, no. 6, 352-67 (p. 353).

⁹⁴ For details of different manuscript copies and published versions, see E. V. Kolosova, 'K probleme traditsii drevnerusskoi istoricheskoi povesti v literature XVIII veka ("Skazanie" P.

who published a reduced and amended version of the original manuscript of 1742 three times between 1838 and 1841.⁹⁵ Over the hundred years that elapsed from 1742 to 1841, the tale was therefore widely known, whether through manuscript circulation or published versions.

The following account follows the version of Krekshin's tale published by Sakharov in 1841, as this text is closer to the original manuscript of 1742 than the amended version printed in 1787. Krekshin's colourful narrative, subtitled 'Istoricheskoe rozyskanie' ('A Historical Enquiry'), starts with a series of fantastic prophecies of Peter's glorious future (a stock framing device for quasi-hagiographic tales of this type). Almost all the prophecies are attributed to Simeon. The opening sentence introduces him not by his usual title of hieromonk, but as a 'man, filled with the reason of enlightenment (*razumom prosveshcheniia*) [...] who knew the movement of the stars'. After mentioning his two books of sermons and

N. Krekshina o Petre I kak poslednii etap razvitiia istoricheskoi povesti XVII veka', in O. A. Derzhavina, ed., *Drevnerusskaia literatura i ee sviazi s novym vremenem* (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), pp. 288-316 (pp. 294-96), and the annotated list in M. B. Pliukhanova, 'Istoriia iunosti Petra I u P. N. Krekshina', *Uchenye zapiski Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, 513 (1981), 17-39 (pp. 36-37, note 18).

⁹⁵ For this version of the tale, entitled 'Kratkoe opisanie blazhennykh del velikogo gosudaria, imperatora Petra Velikogo, samodorzhtsa vserossiiskogo', see 'Zapiski novgorodskogo dvorianina Petra Nikiforovicha Krekshina', in I. Sakharov, ed., *Zapiski russkikh liudei. Sobytiia vremen Petra Velikogo* (St Petersburg: V tipografii Sakharova, 1841), reprinted with an introduction by Hans-Joachim Torke (Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1980), pp. 1-115 (2nd pagination). This published version only goes up to the year 1697.

role as Fedor's tutor, the chronicler notes that Simeon observed the stars at night and predicted (*predveshchal*) much about Russia and other states.⁹⁶

In this way, the scene is set for the first prose characterisation of a Russian writer as a prophetic figure, whose knowledge of astrology enabled him to foresee and shape world affairs. The story unfolds through a sequence of four episodes that reveal Simeon's prophetic skills at the key moments of Peter's conception, birth and christening. While the first three episodes find no support in Simeon's papers, the last one is built around and includes part of his poem on Peter's christening.

The first episode occurs during the night of 11 August 1671. Tsar Aleksei and his wife conceive a child, and a bright new star appears in the heavens next to Mars. Simeon identifies the star and names the infant in the womb Peter. On the following morning, he goes to congratulate the Tsar on the conception of his son. He predicts the exact date of birth (30 May 1672) and utters a lengthy prophecy about the Tsar's future reign: Peter will be greater than all monarchs past and future, he will overcome enemies, inspire fear in distant lands, pacify uprisings at home, create great buildings, destroy evil people, love the industrious, and spread virtue. Simeon delivers this 'true astrological prophecy', seen by him as clearly 'as in a mirror', in written form, signed by him as proof of its veracity. The Tsar calls in his wife and introduces Simeon, who recites to her the same congratulatory prophecy, adding that she will survive a three-day labour.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Sakharov, ed., *Zapiski russkikh liudei*, p. 8.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9. In an editorial note Sakharov states that he does not believe that Simeon predicted Peter's birth; in his view Krekshin based this episode on popular rumours that were spread after the event. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

The second episode takes place two and a half months later. On 1 November, the Tsar summons Simeon for a discussion of many matters. When questioned ‘about this science’ (*ob onoi nauke*), Simeon explains at length that the movement of the stars reveals the future ‘like the present’. The Tsar then invites Simeon to be a regular guest in his home, and the empress confirms that she has been pregnant (*ne prazdna*) from the time of Simeon’s first notification.⁹⁸ This interlude validates Simeon’s prophetic abilities and shows how important they are in establishing his close relationship with the tsar.

The third episode begins on 28 May. Simeon makes his way to the tsar’s home, where the empress is already in labour. He advises the anxious Tsar to trust in God, tells him that labour will last for two more days, and joins him in prayer. On the third day, the empress appears to be on the verge of death and prepares to take the last rites. Simeon reassures everyone that she will give birth in five hours. However, when the fifth hour arrives, he begins to pray to God for the child not to be born for another hour. The Tsar angrily asks why the agony of his ‘nearly dead’ wife should be prolonged. Simeon explains that if the tsarevich is born in the first half of the hour, he will live for about fifty years, but if he is born in the second half of the hour, his lifespan will extend to some seventy years. During this conversation (while Simeon is distracted from prayer) the tsarevich is born (he will therefore die at the age of fifty-two). As predicted, the date is 30 May and he is given the name of Peter. Simeon is lavishly rewarded with velvet, sable furs and gold from the treasury, many criminal sentences are annulled, prisoners are freed, and celebrations last for three days.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

The fourth episode takes place a month later at Peter's christening.¹⁰⁰ Simeon and Epifanii Grek (both identified as hieromonks) present the Tsar with a written 'prognostic' (*prognostik*). The poem that follows contains only thirty-one lines (as opposed to the forty-six or forty-eight lines of later published versions) and omits the first two lines.¹⁰¹ As already noted, it draws on astrology and the influence of the planets to prophesy Peter's future greatness in military, political and religious terms, linking his destiny to the Russian Orthodox mission to restore Constantinople to its Christian origins. It offers a much more developed and detailed prophecy than any of the previous episodes.¹⁰²

Although Simeon's poem concludes the opening series of his oral and written predictions, we should note that it is not his only 'prophetic' work quoted in the tale. The narrative continues with a detailed account of the final instructions given by Tsar Aleksei on his deathbed to members of his household. His testament is copied almost verbatim (without

¹⁰⁰ Krekshin gives the wrong date of 2 July. As Sakharov points out in a note, the christening was held on 29 June, the name day of Saints Peter and Paul. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 119. Before this episode a holy man (*blazhennyi*) prophesies the massive height and girth of the tsar; the numbers stand for the years of his life and the breadth of his state.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12. The poem is not included in the shorter amended versions of the tale published in 1787 and 1795. Epifanii Grek is evidently included alongside Simeon as a co-presenter (rather than co-author) of the poem. The extract cited by Krekshin is much closer (although not identical) to the version published in 1969 in Golubev, 'Zabytye virshi Simeona Polotskogo', pp. 258-59, than to the text published in 1876 in Archimandrite Leonid, 'K biografii Simeona Polotskogo', p. 398.

¹⁰² Simeon's biographer found Krekshin's tale especially noteworthy for its 'predictions regarding the future fate of the newborn child'. Tatarskii, *Simeon Polotskii*, p. 126.

acknowledgement) from Simeon's lament, 'Glas poslednii' ('The Last Word', 1676), discussed above. In this way, Krekshin 'historicises' Simeon's imagined speeches, reporting them as if they were the Tsar's actual words.¹⁰³

Krekshin has concocted Simeon's reputation as a prophetic poet well versed in astrology out of a potent mix of 'fact' (based on the existence of his verses) and fiction. In his own life, the 'nobleman of Great Novgorod' displayed a similar talent for mystification (exaggerating his modest rank and evading Russian Orthodox rules to conclude a fourth marriage with a woman twenty-six years his junior).¹⁰⁴ In its combination of hagiography with 'history' and of religious prophecy with enlightenment 'science', his tale reflects the transitional time at which it was composed. Its 'pre-modern' approach belongs to the formative period of the Petrine cult, 'to the pre-history of Russian historical science'.¹⁰⁵ Krekshin has been credited with the foundation of 'epic prose' in Russia.¹⁰⁶ With its characteristic blurring of the boundary between fact and fiction, this genre provided the perfect breeding-ground for the emergence of the figure of the literary prophet in the context of a new myth of national historical destiny.

The sense of a growing tradition of native prophecy was strengthened in the 1787 first printed version of the tale. As noted above, this anonymous version, although published *before* Sakharov's edition, is based on a *later* manuscript redaction incorporating various

¹⁰³ For the paraphrase of 'Glas poslednii' and editor's note, see Sakharov, ed., *Zapiski russkikh liudei*, pp. 14-17, 121.

¹⁰⁴ Krotov, 'Pisatel' P. N. Krekshin', pp. 363, 358-59.

¹⁰⁵ Lindsey Hughes, Review of Petr Kreksin, *Peters des Grossen Jugendjahre* (1989), *Slavonic and East European Review*, 69 (April 1991), 365.

¹⁰⁶ Krotov, 'Pisatel' P. N. Krekshin', p. 364.

additions and cuts. A significant change is flagged at the outset of the narrative. Alongside the opening mention of Simeon, Dimitrii Rostovskii (1651-1709) is also introduced. Both are described together as men ‘by the grace of God enlightened in reason and most learned in the sciences’ (*blagodatiu Bozhieiu v razume prosveshchennye i naukami preispolnennye*), who spend their nights observing the stars and making prophecies about Russia and other states.¹⁰⁷ The addition of the phrase ‘by the grace of God’ is an early indication of this text’s increased emphasis on the religious context of prophecy. After a brief reference to Dimitrii’s main works (his lives of the saints and *Minei Chet'i* [*Monthly Readings*]), the narrative repeats almost word for word the account of Peter’s conception and birth given in the Sakharov edition.¹⁰⁸

Three additional prophecies were inserted into this version of the tale. The first one occurs during a prayer service ordered by the Tsar during the empress’s difficult labour. The officiating monk-deacon unexpectedly ends his recital of the names of the tsar’s children with that of Peter (who was not yet born). When questioned, he explains that a fellow deacon

¹⁰⁷ *Skazanie o rozhdenii, o vospitanii i narechenii na Vserossiiskii Tsarskii prestol Ego Tsarskago Presvetlago Velichestva Gosudaria Petra Pervogo, nakhodiashcheesia v Biblioteke Ego Siatel'stva Grafa Petra Borisovicha Sheremeteva, izdannoe Bibliotekarem Vasil'em Voroblevskim* (Moscow: V tipografii Ponomareva, 1787), pp. 1-2. This published version only goes up to the year 1682.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-18. Differences include a few minor phraseological changes (the addition of clarifications, titles of members of the imperial family, references to religious practice, e.g. to icons and the Virgin Mary during Simeon’s prayer) and some factual adjustments (the date of conception is changed from 11 August to 28 August, perhaps to bring it more in line with a nine-month pregnancy ending on 30 May).

poked him in the ribs and told him to include Peter's name; his colleague's outright denial makes it clear that the utterance of the name was miraculous.¹⁰⁹

The second interpolation relates that the 'aforementioned Dimitrii Rostovskii' composed an identical account of Peter's conception, birth and future deeds (just like Simeon's first written prophecy, handed to the Tsar on the morning after Peter's conception). Although he did not dare give it to the Tsar during his lifetime, 'this prognostic' (*onoï prognostik*) was discovered after the death of his Holiness when an inventory of the contents of his cell (presumably at the Kiev Caves monastery) and writings was drawn up, 'and in everything it was like Polotskii's'.¹¹⁰ There is no evidence that Dimitrii ever composed such a work.

The third additional prophecy was delivered in 1537, one hundred and thirty-five years before Peter's birth, by the miracle-working saint Kirill Novoezerskii. The narrative quotes his famous 'Prorechenie o Rossiiskoi zemle' ('Prophecy about the Russian land') describing the rule of a tsar who overcomes enemies and subdues other nations, without direct reference to Peter. The chronicler explains that its full significance is clarified in the saint's *Life*, and that it was often read by Peter the Great.¹¹¹ At this point the tale recounts the beginning of the christening (omitting the text of Simeon's poem) and then moves straight on to Tsar Aleksei's deathbed instructions.

Why did the version of 1787 add these three prophecies and remove Simeon's poem from the account of the christening? The additions were evidently designed to reinforce the liturgical and sacred context of the tale. In view of Simeon's posthumous fall from

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 17-18. The date of 1537 is wrong, Kirill died in 1532.

ecclesiastical favour, it may also have seemed appropriate to balance his dominant role in the narrative with the uncontroversial name of Dimitrii (appointed Metropolitan of Rostov by Peter in 1702, and canonised in 1757) – whose reputation for composing historical chronicles (*letopisi*) made him an obvious choice.

Krekshin's tale has been discussed in some detail because of its pivotal role as the first Russian literary work to present the writer explicitly as a prophetic figure. As we have seen, using a known prophetic text by Simeon, Krekshin worked backwards to create a series of retrospective fictional prophecies attributed to the same author. His carefully constructed narrative defined the image of the poet-prophet in six important ways: i) it established a close association between poet and tsar on the basis of prophetic skills, which enable the poet to gain influence over the ruler; ii) it grounded the poet's prophetic powers in his knowledge of 'science' (astrology) alongside his religious standing; iii) it gave the poet full 'control' over the entire spectrum of the tsar's life – from before birth (in the case of Peter) until after death (in the case of Aleksei); iv) it embedded the poet's prophetic words in the prose fabric of a 'historical' narrative, making them 'real' by historicising them; v) it introduced the practice of quoting texts which were either openly prophetic (as in the prediction of Peter's birth and poem presented at his christening, both based on astrological calculations), or prophetic in the looser sense of looking towards the future (as in Aleksei's deathbed testament) as 'proof' texts to forge a myth of national identity; vi) it suggested that the poet can do more than simply 'see' the future as in a mirror – he can also determine its shape (this is particularly clear from Simeon's prayer during the empress's labour to extend the future Tsar's lifespan).

Many of these defining characteristics continued to play an active role as the tradition of literary prophecy developed. Interestingly, they are all reflected in the first poetic response to Krekshin's tale, composed by one of the main architects of this tradition – Derzhavin's verses of 1791 on the prophecy of Simeon Polotskii and Dimitrii Rostovskii. As can be seen

from his joint reference to both writers, Derzhavin was working with the version of the tale published in 1787. His poem first appeared anonymously under the title ‘Na rozhdenie Petra Velikogo’ (‘On the Birth of Peter the Great’) in the November 1791 issue of N. M. Karamzin’s *Moskovskii zhurnal*, followed by a note in brackets ‘From Petersburg from an unknown Person’.¹¹² In his authoritative edition of Derzhavin’s verse, Grot published a somewhat different version of the poem from a clean manuscript copy. Its longer, more explicit title, ‘Na prorochestvo Simeona Polotskogo i Dimitriia Rostovskogo pri rozhdenii Petra Velikogo’ (‘On the Prophecy of Simeon Polotskii and Dimitrii Rostovskii at the Birth of Peter the Great’), signalled more clearly that the subject of the poem was not the birth of the tsar, but the writers’ prophecy of this event. This version reads as follows:

Когда Димитрий, Симеон,
Молясь, на небеса смотрели,
Господень осветился трон,
Полки небесных Сил воспели,
Повеял теплый майский ветер;
Небесны громы вострубили,
Волхвы российски возвестили:
«Рожденный отрок будет Петр,
Сотрет невежеству, внутри изменам выю;

¹¹² *Moskovskii zhurnal*, part 4, book 2 (November 1791), 117. The poem (the first item in the journal) is followed by ‘(Iz Peterburga ot neizvestnoi Osoby)’. Derzhavin’s authorship is likely to have been well known, as Karamzin publicly vaunted his intention to publish the verses of ‘our first poet’ in a note printed in the first issue of his new journal.

Как громом, поразит и внешних он врагов
И просветит все, как света бог, Россию».

Сбылся пророческий глас слов!¹¹³

When Dimitrii and Simeon,
Deep in prayer, gazed at the heavens,
The Lord's throne lit up,
The throngs of the heavenly Powers sang out,
A warm May wind blew;
The heavenly thunders trumpeted,
The Russian wise men proclaimed:
“The new-born boy will be Peter,
He will destroy ignorance, the neck of inner betrayals;
Like thunder, he will also defeat external enemies
And, like the god of light, he will enlighten all Russia”.

The prophetic voice of [these] words was fulfilled!

¹¹³ *Sochineniia Derzhavina*, ed. by Ia. Grot [9 vols.], vol. 1, *Stikhotvoreniia: Chast' I* (St Petersburg: V tipografii Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk, 1864), p. 444. In the version published in 1791 (three quatrains written in iambic tetrameters), the actual prophecy is quoted in just two lines (8-9), followed by three lines (10-12) describing its subsequent fulfilment in the past tense. In the cited version published in 1864, the quotation of the original prophecy is extended to four lines (8-11), three of which (9-11) are written in iambic hexameters rather than tetrameters. Both versions share the same rhyming scheme (alternating in the first and third quatrains, enclosed in the middle quatrain).

Although Derzhavin has reproduced several details from Krekshin's tale of 1787, the thrust of his poem is quite different.¹¹⁴ Instead of dwelling on the content of the original narrative, he reveals the inner workings of prophecy: the relationship between prayer and prophecy, and the way that writers use the power of the word to influence the world around them. The prayers that Dimitrii and Simeon utter while contemplating the heavens provoke a series of responses, first in the upper realms (light, song and sound), and then in the lower world (the warm May wind, presaging the birth of Peter). In unison with the heavens, the writers are then able to proclaim their prophecy of Peter's splendid future. The poet concludes by confirming that their prophetic words were fulfilled.

In his poetic reworking of the original narrative, Derzhavin has introduced a strong emphasis on Peter's role as the champion of enlightenment in Russia: variants of the word 'light' (*svet*) appear three times in the poem. This is the message which the 'unknown Person' from Petersburg (the 'European' capital created by Peter) wishes to deliver to Moscow (the historic seat of Russia's religious identity). Karamzin founded his journal after returning from his travels in Europe and used it as a forum for publishing translations and reviews of contemporary European literature as well as his *Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika* (*Letters of*

¹¹⁴ Derzhavin has preserved the names of the two poets, their observation of the heavens, their prophecy of Peter's name and future defeat of inner and external enemies. He has transferred the quality of enlightenment from the poets ('v razume prosveshchennye' in the tale) to Peter ('prosvetit' in the poem). Other phrases from the tale echoed in the poem include: 'oba oni po vsia noshchi nabliudali zvezdnoe techenie, i mnogaia [...] o Rossii [...] predvozveshchali', 'iavilas' na nebe presvetlaia Zvezda', 'imia narekli PETER', 'mnogie ot mecha Ego sosedi vrazhduishchiia smirit', 'mnogaia nestroeniia i miatezhi prekratit', 'zlykh istrebit'. *Skazanie o rozhdanii* (1787), pp. 1-4.

a Russian Traveller). In a sense, his journal was a project designed to bring the ‘light’ of Europe to Moscow. In this context, Derzhavin’s presentation of Peter’s enlightening mission as the outcome of prophecies uttered by Dimitrii Rostovskii and Simeon Polotskii (Moscow’s leading court poet) fitted well with the journal’s agenda; it consolidated the bridge that Simeon had already instigated between Western culture and the religious traditions of old Russia.¹¹⁵

By portraying Simeon and Dimitrii as prophets of enlightenment, Derzhavin could ‘backdate’ to the end of the previous century the tradition of literary prophecy that he was seeking to build up through his own verse and adaptations of the psalms. As the author of this poem, confirming the ‘truth’ of the earlier writers’ predictions, he validated his role as their successor and inscribed himself into the same tradition. It is remarkable, but perhaps not entirely surprising, that Pushkin’s only reference to Simeon crops up in precisely this context. When he was taking notes for his history of Peter the Great in 1835, Pushkin transcribed several passages from I. I. Golikov’s *Deianiia Petra Velikogo (The Deeds of Peter the Great, 1788-89)*, an influential compilation of source materials including contributions from Krekshin.¹¹⁶ Like Derzhavin before him, Pushkin was clearly fascinated by the writers’ prophecies of Peter’s destiny and dwelled in some detail on this episode. After noting that Simeon and Dimitrii were both engaged in making astrological observations and predictions at the court of Tsar Aleksei, he quoted a close paraphrase of Simeon’s prophecy of Peter’s

¹¹⁵ Derzhavin’s poetic message from Petersburg to Moscow was later paralleled by Tsvetaeva’s ‘gift’ of Moscow to the poets of Petersburg in her cycle ‘Stikhi o Moskve’ (1916).

¹¹⁶ E. Shmurlo, ‘Golikov, Ivan Ivanovich’, in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Brokgauza i Efrona*, 86 vols. (St Petersburg: Tipo-Litografiia I. A. Efrona, 1890-1907), vol. 9 (1893), p. 45.

birth and future deeds at the time of his conception, following the appearance of a bright star near Mars. As external evidence, he cited the contemporary correspondence of two Dutch scholars residing in Moscow and Utrecht about the predictions surrounding Peter's birth.¹¹⁷ In this way, Simeon's original poetic prophecy, filtered through the 'historical' compilations of Krekshin and Golikov, found its way into Derzhavin's and Pushkin's later versions of the literary cult of the writer-prophet as a figure closely associated with the tsar.

Conclusion

This article set out to reconstruct a neglected early stage in the formation of the image of the poet as a prophetic figure. The biographical and textual evidence presented demonstrates that Simeon did indeed establish the foundations of this image through his public role as Russia's first professional poet, articulated in his collections of panegyric and didactic verse and rhymed version of the Psalter. His two collections of verse reflect the centrality of biblical prophecy to his world view, and show how he adapted the prophetic voice to define his role as spiritual adviser to the tsar and moral teacher of his contemporaries. In his rhymed *Psalter*, he merged his own poetic voice with that of the psalmist and prophet, King David.

Given the obscurity which engulfed Simeon's literary legacy soon after his death, the survival of his prophetic image may seem surprising. A partial explanation of this phenomenon can be found in the prescient observation cited as an epigraph to this investigation. In a letter written some ninety years after Simeon's death, the poet, editor and archivist Ippolit Bogdanovich (1744-1803) described Simeon as a poet who should not be

¹¹⁷ A. S. Pushkin, [Istoriia Petra: Podgotovitel'nye teksty], in A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 16 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1937-59), vol. 10 (1938), *Istoriia Petra. Zapiski Moro-de-Braze. Zametki o Kamchatke*, pp. 7-8.

forgotten – precisely because of his association with prophecy: ‘ce poète n’est pas un personnage à être oublié, car je me souviens d’avoir lu quelque part qu’on lui attribue certaines prophéties et que ses prédictions de Pierre le Grand se sont réellement accomplies’. As if seeking to substantiate this somewhat vague claim, he added a telling comment: ‘Il n’est pas surprenant qu’il eût été un bon prophète, car l’imagination des poètes avait si souvent contribué à notre bonheur, que la superstition veut réaliser et que le bon esprit approuve. Il était agréable de croire ces prédictions lorsque Pierre le Grand les avait justifiées, bien qu’il ne les crût pas.’¹¹⁸ In other words, Simeon was a ‘good prophet’ because he contributed through his poetic imagination to the creation of a positive national myth, which resonated with popular aspirations and ‘good sense’. The public’s *desire* to believe in his prophecies overrode the fact that their subject (Peter the Great) did not believe in them himself. In this revealing aside Bogdanovich put his finger on an important point: the tradition of poetic prophecy initiated by Simeon was sustained not because of its historical ‘truth’, but because it articulated and anticipated aspirations which were more fully realised a century later. In this context, it deserved to be remembered.

This observation leads us to the second, related but distinct question addressed by this article. We have shown that Simeon’s work was the earliest *manifestation* of the image of the writer as a prophetic figure, but can we claim that it was it the *source* of the later development of this image by subsequent writers? This question is a complex one, requiring a nuanced approach. Out of Simeon’s three main books, only the *Psalter* was published in his lifetime and thus widely known. His prognostic poem on the birth of Peter also acquired a historic reputation through its inclusion in Krekshin’s popular accounts of the Tsar’s life.

¹¹⁸ Letter to Ia. Ia. Shtelin (no later than 1772), in Makogonenko, ed., *Pis'ma russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka*, p. 249.

Both these works, as we have seen, played important roles in transmitting Simeon's legacy and prophetic image to later readers. His poetic prediction of Peter's future reign gave rise to Derzhavin's poem and to Pushkin's reflections on the poet's role in shaping history. The model of his *Psalter* generated a long line of imitations of the psalms by numerous writers, including Feofan Prokopovich, Lomonosov, Trediakovskii, Sumarokov, Derzhavin and Fedor Glinka. Given the crucial impact of this practice on the construction of the image of the poet as prophet, Simeon's role was pivotal. Without his pioneering initiative, the later tradition would not have come into being.

Despite these clear lines of transmission and continuity, it would be wrong to exaggerate the argument that Simeon's literary works were the *source* that prompted the later flowering of the image of the poet as prophet. The widespread adoption of this image in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century arose in different historical contexts, and was shaped by fresh Western literary influences. Writers such as Derzhavin and Pushkin cited Simeon's works to confirm their own existing preoccupation with poetic and historical prophecy, not to invoke or explain its origins.

This caveat regarding the extent of Simeon's direct influence on the emergence of the later tradition does not mean that we should disregard some of the broader channels of his impact on posterity. A full appreciation of his contribution opens several new perspectives on the roots of the tradition of viewing the writer as a prophet figure. His example shows that this tradition did not start off as a romantic or secular construct, but originated in the writings of a member of the clergy. Like Feofan Prokopovich who followed him, Simeon was a hieromonk who straddled the worlds of theology and literature. Trediakovskii, although the son of a priest, was not a clerical figure, nor were the subsequent writers who cultivated the image. It was not until the Silver Age that the image was re-absorbed into the Russian Orthodox theological tradition; following the teachings of Vladimir Solov'ev, it was taken up

by the polymath Pavel Florenskii (1882-1937) and philosopher Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), both ordained into the priesthood in 1911 and 1918, respectively.

Simeon's example also reveals how the image of the writer as a figure of prophetic authority was born out of the complex interaction of Greco-Slavic orthodoxy with Latin Catholicism. In Russia, which had not experienced a renaissance, Western baroque culture was superimposed onto an essentially medieval world view, and therefore regarded with considerably more suspicion. Simeon struggled for his 'Latinising' tendencies to be accepted by conservative members of the Grecophile Russian Orthodox church.

This polemical context explains why literary adaptations of sacred texts from the outset acquired dissident overtones. Like many of his successors, Simeon had to conduct delicate negotiations with the state and church to establish his own independent authority. In several crucial areas, he put in place strategies of self-validation which had an enduring influence. As Russia's first court poet, benefitting from the close support of two successive tsars, he played the role of moral advisor to the ruler and set a model for numerous subsequent poet-tsar relationships (Feofan and Peter I, Derzhavin and Catherine II, Zhukovskii and Alexander I, Pushkin and Nicholas I, to name but a few). His attempts to overcome the resistance of the church anticipated the struggle faced by writers such as Trediakovskii or Fedor Glinka over the publication of their religious works.

In the field of cultural exchange, Simeon's contribution cannot be ignored. As G. M. Hamburg put it, his writings 'constituted a Christian paideia, the most elaborate and comprehensive thought system developed in pre-Petrine Russia.'¹¹⁹ Through his works, sermons and pedagogical activities, he achieved a fundamental and lasting reorientation of

¹¹⁹ G. M. Hamburg, *Russia's Path Toward Enlightenment: Faith, Politics, and Reason, 1500-1801* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 202.

traditional Muscovite culture towards the West. Two of his prominent eighteenth-century successors, Lomonosov and Trediakovskii (both acknowledged their debt to his *Psalter*) were educated at his brainchild, the Slavic Greek Latin Academy. His writings served as a series of ‘translations’ of Western rhetorical practices, transplanted onto native soil.¹²⁰ They made it possible for the Polish Jesuit view of the writer as a demiurge to enter Russian letters. This open-ended dialogue was developed in many directions, including Adam Mickiewicz’s later influence on Pushkin’s cult of the poet-prophet.

Bearing in mind all these factors and returning once more to Ronald Vroon’s perceptive observation, we may conclude that without the fundamental ‘shift in consciousness’ brought about by Simeon through the example of his life and works, the later widespread cult of the poet as prophet could not have come into being.

¹²⁰ On Simeon’s debt to Western baroque rhetoric in his sermons, see M. S. Kiseleva, ‘Barochnaia antropologiya: nraivstvennoe bogoslovie v propovediakh Simeona Polotskogo’, *Voprosy filosofii*, 7 (July 2008), 115-29.

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