

Endre SASHALMI:

**Written and Visual Representations of Russian  
History in the 1660s:  
Fedor Akimovich Griboedov's 'History of the Tsars  
and Princes of the Rus' Land' and Simon Ushakov's  
Icon called 'The Planting of the Tree of the Muscovite  
State'**

The relations between tsar Alexis and patriarch Nikon between 1652–1658 can be seen as the realization of the Byzantine idea of *symphony*, but there was a sharp break from 1658 on which finally led to the deposition of Nikon. It means that by the time Fedor Griboedov set out to write his work in the 1660s, the symphony between the tsar and the patriarch had already been over. The ideological struggle between the tsar and the patriarch exerted a great influence on the chronicle which must be interpreted in the context of this conflict. Griboedov's chronicle completely abandoned the idea of symphony apparent in the *Book of Degrees*, though its structure closely resembled the latter and it quoted extensively from the *Book of Degrees*. The icon called *The Planting of the Tree of the Muscovite State* painted by Ushakov was a visual representation of the symphony existing only during Moscow's historical past, and it also connected the salvation of Russia to the piety of the tsar and his family.

*Key words:* 'Book of Degrees', Fedor Griboedov's *Chronicle*, political iconography, the icon: 'The Planting of the Tree of the Muscovite State', the problem of symphony



## Introduction

The *terminus ante quem* of the completion of Fedor Akimovich Griboedov's chronicle can be established on the basis of a chancery source: fulfilling Tsar Alexis's order (*ukaz*), Griboedov was remunerated on 27 December 1668 for having written the "*Stepennaia Kniga*" ("Book of Degrees") of the

faithful and pious root of the Romanovs".<sup>1</sup> According to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century editors of this work, the chronicle was possibly intended to be a basic manual of Russian History for the tsar's children.<sup>2</sup> This view, however, was challenged by I. Thyrêt who claimed: "Most likely the work was commissioned by the court to showcase the Romanov dynasty."<sup>3</sup> Z. Kohut, likewise, commented that Griboedov's "Russian history is the history of dynastic rule, and his principal concern is to establish dynastic legitimacy and continuity from Volodimer to Aleksei Romanov".<sup>4</sup> I agree with the latter two interpretations, yet, they tell just half of the story in my view. For I think it is crucial to place Griboedov's history in the very context of the time when it was written and this issue requires to give a short survey on the prehistory of this chronicle.

In 1657 a new chancery, the *Chancery of Records* (Zapisnoi prikaz) was created by the order of Tsar Alexis: the task of the chancery was to write an updated "Book of Degrees" of the Russian rulers from the death of tsar Fedor, the last member of the Rurikids (1598) to the present, i.e. the time of Alexis.<sup>5</sup> The small chancery was terminated in 1659 because it could not accomplish the task.<sup>6</sup> A. Sirenov concluded that this attempt of the tsar showed on the one hand the need and the intention to provide a course of Russian History from ancient times to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, and "the impossibility of accomplishing this task on the basis of the Book of Degrees", on the other.<sup>7</sup> Though the chancery disappeared from the scene, the intention to write an updated history of the tsars was not abandoned and the work was taken over by a clerk, named Grigorij Kunakov. Yet, the 'history of the Romanovs' was written by someone else, Fedor Akimovich Griboedov around 1667.<sup>8</sup>

The time gap between Alexis's initiative and the realization of the work is of great importance in my view for it coincided with the deterioration of

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<sup>1</sup> Aleksei Vladimirovich SIRENOV: *Stepennaia kniga i russkaia istoricheskaia misl' XVI–XVIII vv.* Moscow – St Petersburg, 2010. (hereafter: SIRENOV 2010.), p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> *Fiodora Griboedova Istoriia o tsariah i velikikh kniaziaikh zemli Russkoi.* Ed. Sergei Fedorovich PLATONOV – Vladimir Vladimirovich MAIKOV. St. Petersburg, 1896. (hereafter: GRIBOEDOV 1896), p. I, XI–XII, XV; Zenon E. KOHUT: A Dynastic or Ethno-Dynastic Tsardom? Two Early Modern Concepts of Russia. In: *Extending the Borders of Russian History. Essays in Honour of Alfred J. Rieber.* Ed. Marsha SIEFERT. Budapest, 2003. p. 17–30. (hereafter: KOHUT 2003.) here: p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Isolde THYRÊT: *Between God and Tsar: Religious Symbolism and the Royal Women of Muscovite Russia.* De Kalb, 2001. (hereafter: THYRÊT 2001.), p. 199, e.n. 91.

<sup>4</sup> KOHUT 2003. p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> SIRENOV 2010. p. 289.

<sup>6</sup> SIRENOV 2010. p. 289.

<sup>7</sup> SIRENOV 2010. p. 290.

<sup>8</sup> Aleksei Vladimirovich SIRENOV: *Dinasticheskii krizis XVI–XVII vv. Rossii i Stepennaia Kniga.* *Cahiers du monde Russie* 50. (2009:2–3), p. 557–566. (hereafter: SIRENOV 2009.) here: p. 562.

relations between tsar Alexis and patriarch Nikon. While their close relationship between 1652–1658 can be seen as a realization of the Byzantine idea(l) of *symphony* (i.e. cooperation and harmony between the emperor and the patriarch) these relations were getting worse and worse from 1658 onwards, leading to the self-exile of Nikon. Though Nikon did not resign, he did not perform his functions as patriarch either. Alexis summoned a Russian Church Council in 1660 to solve the problem which eventually deposed Nikon but the patriarch declared the decision null and void. The ‘Nikon-affair’ was only solved in 1666 with the Great Church Council attended by two eastern patriarchs, the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch – this council also deposed Nikon but left his Church reforms in force.

By the time Griboedov set out to write his work in the 1660s the symphony between the tsar and the patriarch had already gone, and the impact of the conflict was inevitably reflected in his writing: both in its structure and content. For Griboedov’s chronicle completely abandoned the idea of symphony which had been crucial both to the structure and content of *Stepennaia Kniga* (hereafter: SK), the work that Griboedov otherwise heavily relied on. Although the structure of Griboedov’s chronicle resembled that of the SK and he even quoted extensively (very often even verbatim) from it, the message of his chronicle was *that the piety and the sanctity of the Rurikids and Romanovs developed independently of the Russian Church and its hierarchs*.

The outcome of the conflict between Alexis and Nikon is crucial to the understanding of the other source to be analysed here, i.e. Simon Ushakov’s icon ‘*The Planting of the Tree of the Muscovite State*’ (1668). Seen from this context the icon can be considered a visual representation of the *contrast between past and present, i.e. the symphony characteristic of Moscow’s historical past on the one hand, and the present dominance of the tsar over the Church on the other*. This state of affairs ensued that salvation of Russia was inexorably and solely linked to the piety of the reigning tsar and his family.

As it has become evident from the above introduction, SK exerted a great influence on Griboedov’s chronicle, and my contention is that the same can be said of Ushakov’s icon. Consequently, it is indispensable to give a basic sketch of ideas of the SK to understand these sources. Before that, however, a short comment on 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup>-century Muscovite ideology seems plausible, for History in Russia at that time was mainly used and interpreted to express the divine right of Russia’s rulers and SK was not an exception to that. Rather, it was the most grandiose written manifestation of divine right presented through the course of Russian History from Vladimir to Ivan IV.

Until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century divine right of the tsars allowed no place for law and philosophy, therefore “political” issues were conceived as “religious” issues<sup>9</sup> which even questions the use of the term “political thought” in Muscovy. Muscovite thought on power existed primarily within the framework of Orthodox theology and was expressed mostly in iconography, religious public rituals, and admonitions by clergymen.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the “*origin, purpose and limits*” of the tsar’s authority “were almost always discussed in a religious context.”<sup>11</sup>

The preface of the SK is an eloquent example of this theological perception of power and the flow of Russian History. In G. Lenhoff’s wording the preface “sets forth the book’s *theological premises* in terms of *metaphors* serving as figures or types for Russia’s historical course: *the tree* (linking the *genealogical tree of the rulers, the Jesse Tree, and the tree in King Nebuchadnezzar’s prophetic dream*); *the ladder* (a conflation of Jacob’s ladder and *St. John Climacus’s divine ladder of perfection*); and *water* (baptism).”<sup>12</sup> These metaphors are manifested in the preface as follows:

“A tale of the *holy piety of Russia’s rulers and their holy seed, and others; a book of degrees of the royal genealogy, which was (manifested) in the piety of the divinely-affirmed scepter-holders who shone forth in the Russian land, who were from God, like trees of paradise, planted by the rivers of water, and who were watered with Orthodoxy, and nurtured with divine wisdom and grace; and who shone forth with divine glory; who were like a garden: luxuriant, and with beautiful foliage and blessed flowers; fruitful and ripe and exuding a divine fragrance; great and tall, and with many noble offshoots, extending like bright branches, growing through virtues pleasing to God. And many from its root and its branches through diverse labors, as on golden steps, erected a ladder, which ascends to heaven and does not*

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel B. ROWLAND: Muscovy. In: *European Political Thought 1450–1700. Religion, Law, Philosophy*. Ed. Howell A. LLOYD – Glenn BURGESS – Simon HODSON. New Haven – London. 2007. p. 267–299, here: p. 269.

<sup>10</sup> Endre SASHALMI: ‘God is high up, the Tsar is far away.’ The Nature of Polity and Political Culture in Seventeenth-Century Russia. A Comparative view. In: *Empowering Interactions. Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe 1300–1900*. Ed. Wim BLOCKMANS – André HOLENSTEIN – Jon MATHIEU. Farnham – Burlington. 2009. p. 131–147.

<sup>11</sup> D. Rowland’s words from his unpublished paper are quoted by Valerie KIVELSON. *Autocracy in the Provinces. The Muscovite Gentry and Political Culture in the Seventeenth Century*. 1996. Stanford. p. 213. Italics in the above quoted text are mine: E.S.

<sup>12</sup> Gail LENHOFF, Book of Degrees. In: Gale Encyclopedia of Russian History. <http://www.answers.com/topic/book-of-degrees> – downloading date: 25 February 2012. Italics in the above quoted text are mine: E.S.

falter, securing for themselves and for those who came after them unhindered access to God.”<sup>13</sup>

Since ideology of power in Russia was, in fact, theology of power, and considering the fact that Orthodox theology was/is incomprehensible without the concept of image/icon (because the “icon [in L. Uspenskii’s well-known wording] is a painted theology”), the use of metaphors is a good proof of the peculiarity of Muscovite ideology of power which even in written sources heavily relied on metaphors, i.e. (religious) “images”.

The story of the Russian princes in the SK is presented in 17 degrees in the framework of the abovementioned theological premises to which the Orthodox idea of symphony must be added. Indeed, the *symphony* between the Russian Church and the Russian rulers is the golden thread of Russian History in the SK<sup>14</sup>. This history is moving towards the present on the basis of premises laid down in the preface, and symphony is reflected in the counsels of the metropolitans given to the rulers and also in the prayers of the Church hierarchs and the whole Russian Church which “provide the protection of higher powers” for Russia.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the idea of symphony is clearly reflected in the very structure of the SK for each degree is a story of a ruler and his contemporary metropolitan(s). Having known the most important notions of SK relevant to our topic, now we can turn to the analysis of the two sources.



“The Planting of the Tree of the Muscovite State”

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to Gail Lenhoff for providing me with her translation of the preface. Italics in the above quoted text are mine: E.S.

<sup>14</sup> *Stepennaia Kniga tsarskogo rodosloviia po drevneishim spiskam*. I–III. Ed. Nikolai Nikolaevich POKROVSKII – Gail LENHOFF. Moscow, 2007–2011. (hereafter: STEPENNAIA KNIGA) Pokrovskii’s introduction: I. 2007. p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> STEPENNAIA KNIGA I. 2007. p. 113–114.

## 1. Interpretation of “The Planting of the Tree of the Muscovite State”

How did this icon of Ushakov reflect *Russian History* and how were the basic *notions of SK* modified by the Russian political context of the 1660s? These are the *only* principal issues to be addressed here.

Ushakov’s icon tells a history but, to be sure, in a very special way. As L. Hughes aptly formulated, the icon presents a “selective version of Moscow’s sacred history, taking account of the long-term context of divine history and Russia’s place within it and the orthodox view of the world”.<sup>16</sup> At the same time the icon had an immediate *political relevance* when it was painted. The fact that Ushakov “specifically dated his work with reference to Alexis’s reign” is not only crucial to the interpretation of the icon<sup>17</sup> but was also quite unusual. Even more unusual than the practice spreading in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Russia that icon painters, as Ushakov in this case, wrote their name on the bottom of the icons. In my view the indication of *historical time* in an icon i.e. a special genre of visual expression to which otherwise the conception of *timelessness* or *eternity* is essential,<sup>18</sup> is of great significance.

Moving to the short description of the conceptual framework of the icon, three layers of time and space can be separated in the compositional structure.<sup>19</sup> “On the bottom – the earth, the present, the material dimension – the earthly tsar with the tsaritsa and the children; on the top – the heaven, the future, the spiritual sphere – the heavenly king.”<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the antithesis of these two spheres “is complemented with the idea of a link between them as represented by the tree” thereby making a third zone.<sup>21</sup> In this space-and-time triad the mediators are the deceased figures, the representatives of Russian History.<sup>22</sup> Russian History, however, is represented not only through the tree but also by the “national” icon, the icon of the Vladimir Mother of God which not only provides the link with the Kievan *past* but also functions as the most important intercessor for Russia.

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<sup>16</sup> Lindsey HUGHES: Simon Ushakov’s Icon ‘The Tree of the Muscovite State’. In: *Russische und Ukrainische Geschichte vom 16–18. Jahrhundert*. Hrsg. Robert O. CRUMMEY – Holm SUNDHAUSSEN – Ricarda VULPIUS. Wiesbaden. 2001. p. 223–234. (hereafter: HUGHES 2001) here: p. 232.

<sup>17</sup> HUGHES 2001. p. 232. “This icon was painted in the 7176<sup>th</sup> year [i.e. 1667–68] from the creation of the world flowing under the sun in the time of the pious and Christ-loving sovereign Tsar and Great Prince Aleksei Mikhailovich, Autocrat (samoderzhets) of all Great and Little and White Russia.” HUGHES 2001. 227. footnote 12.

<sup>18</sup> For the conception of time in icon art see Clemena ANTONOVA: *Space, Time and Presence in the Icon*. Aldershot. 2010.

<sup>19</sup> V. G. CHUBINSKAIA: Ikona Simona Ushakova ‘Bogomater Vladimirskaia’. In: *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* 38 (1985), p. 290–308. (hereafter: CHUBINSKAIA 1985.) here: p. 292.

<sup>20</sup> CHUBINSKAIA 1985. p. 292.

<sup>21</sup> CHUBINSKAIA 1985. p. 292.

<sup>22</sup> CHUBINSKAIA 1985. p. 292.

The tree is a modified *Tree of Jesse*<sup>23</sup> for besides princes it depicts various Russian saints representing different forms of sainthood. Christ is on the top of the icon, in accordance with princely genealogical trees modelled on the *Tree of Jesse*, but he is separated in a cloud (marking the boundary between heaven and earth) and he holds a mantle in his right hand (probably a mantle of protection associated with Mary)<sup>24</sup> while a crown in his left. He is in the company of two angels floating below him on both sides.

The tree growing out (not of Jesse's groin or the founder's of the dynasty as usual but) of the Assumption Cathedral of the Kremlin is planted by the real founder of Moscow's greatness, Grand Prince Ivan Kalita (1325–1341) and watered by metropolitan Peter, the first metropolitan who transferred the metropolitan see to Moscow in 1326 and died there the same year. On the left side of the tree there are important metropolitans and two patriarchs in chronological order: all metropolitans are from the times of the Rurikid rulers, while the two patriarchs, Iov (1589–1607) and Filaret (1619–1633) provide the continuity from the Rurikids to the Romanovs, Filaret being, at the same time, the father of the first Romanov tsar, Mikhail. The top three figures are princes: tsarevich Dmitrii (1591) on the very top and (going down and from left to the right) Tsar Fedor (1584–1598) the last Rurikid tsar, and to his right most possibly the first Romanov tsar, Mikhail.<sup>25</sup>

On the right side we find, also in a chronological order, one prince-saint, Alexander Nevskii (also a dynastic and spiritual link) and 6 monastic saints (the most famous of them is Sergii Radonezhskii) followed by the top 3 figures who are holy fools: Ivan the Big Hat (on the very top), and (going down and from left to the right) Basil the Blessed (the most famous of all the holy fools) and finally Maxim the Blessed. As for the figures depicted on the tree, it must be mentioned that "all the men on the left hand branch were buried in the Kremlin [...] and thus intimately associated with the icon's landscape", while "most of the saints on the right were associated with the expansion of Moscow".<sup>26</sup> Thus, the sacred landscape is the Kremlin area which is clearly recognizable in the lower register.

On the bottom, on the left side of the tree stands the reigning tsar Alexis – emblematically near the Saviour's Bastion/Gate of the Kremlin and praying to Christ. It was this gate, "the most sacred of all the Kremlin entrances

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<sup>23</sup> Franz KÄMPFER: *Das Russische Herrscherrbild. Von Anfängen bis Peter dem Grossen*. Recklinghausen. 1978. p. 242.

<sup>24</sup> Wil VAN DEN BERCKEN: The Canonisation of Nicholas II in Iconographical Perspective: Political Themes in Russian Icons. In: *Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Europe*. Ed. Jonathan SUTTON – Wil VAN DEN BERCKEN. Leuven – Paris – Dudley (MA). 2003. p. 183–209. (hereafter: VAN DEN BERCKEN 2003.) here: p. 186.

<sup>25</sup> THYRËT 2001. p. 71.

<sup>26</sup> HUGHES 2001. p. 232,

through which major processions of the cross" passed – these processions started from the Assumption Cathedral.<sup>27</sup> The wife of the tsar and their two sons, Aleksei Alekseevich (the heir to the throne presented publicly in 1667) and Fedor are near the St. Nicholas's Bastion/Gate. One curiosity of the icon is that living people, the reigning tsar and his family are depicted in the sacred space of the icon, and they are even nimbed as the saints are. Each of the figures in the icon (except Christ, the Mother of God and tsarevich Fedor) holds a scroll in their hand with an inscription on it. The inscriptions call the *plant* invariably a *tree* or a *vine* which is not unusual considering that the Tree of Jesse was often (as here) depicted in the form of a vine. G. Filimonov summarized the conception of Ushakov's icon as follows: "He wanted to depict the strength of Moscow in its historical development, which in his interpretation was nurtured by a special grace coming from above. This was the very reason he needed the Assumption Cathedral with its founders and the blossoming tree growing out of it and containing the Mother of God in its centre, the saints of Moscow on its sides, and the walls of the Kremlin with the then reigning ruling house."<sup>28</sup> This grace and protection began with Ivan Kalita and metropolitan Peter and now it is enjoyed by the Romanovs.<sup>29</sup> The icon is unusually rich in inscriptions. Some of them are taken from the Bible, from the Psalms and the Revelations; for the most part, however, the texts (the inscriptions on the medallions and on the scrolls held by the tsaritsa and her son) are written in the genre of the Akathistos hymn, with occasional adaptations of the original.<sup>30</sup>

The idea that "there are analogies" between the icon and the SK was already raised by L. Hughes but only in a very general way and this claim was not substantiated by any analysis.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, only the motif of the tree was singled out as an analogy<sup>32</sup> while the role of other premises/metaphors was not mentioned. It seems quite plausible on the basis of the engravings published by Chubinskaya that the Ukranian engravings of the 1660s provided the concrete models for Ushakov.<sup>33</sup> Yet, it cannot be excluded, in my view, that SK served as an *inspiration* for the icon because its theological premises, such as the *tree* and the *water* are present in the icon explicitly. Likewise, as I intend to prove, *the ladder of perfection*,

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<sup>27</sup> HUGHES 2001, p. 231.

<sup>28</sup> Georgii Dmitrievich FILIMONOV: *Simon Ushakov i sovremennaia emu epokha Russkoi ikonopisi*. In: *Sbronik na 1873 god*. Moscow. 1873. (hereafter: FILIMONOV 1873.), p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> FILIMONOV 1873, p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> THYRËT 2001, p. 74–76., p. 212. notes 96, 105.

<sup>31</sup> HUGHES 2001, p. 230.

<sup>32</sup> HUGHES 2001, p. 230.

<sup>33</sup> CHUBINSKAIA 1985, p. 293.



or in other words, the “spiritualization of man”<sup>34</sup> is also implied in the icon, though not so explicitly as in the SK, together with the idea of *symphony*.

In the relevant section of the SK the founding of the Assumption Cathedral and the blessing of God on Muscovy is described with the following words given to the mouth of metropolitan Peter addressing Ivan Kalita:

“[...] listen to my advice, my son, and erect in your town, in Moscow a cathedral church of stone dedicated to the immaculate Mother of God, and you shall be blessed and glorified by the Lord preferring you to other princes [...] and the rulers from your seed shall not wither away who shall possess and rule this place from generation to generation for ever [...]. And even the prelates shall dwell in here [...]. And there was always a spiritual harmony (*veselie dukhovnoe*) between them [...]”<sup>35</sup>

The left branch of the tree (where princes and prelates “dwell” in harmony) and the lower register show remarkable similarity with this quotation.

The idea of symphony is clearly apparent in the icon in the close cooperation where Ivan the “Moneybag” *plants* while Metropolitan Peter *waters* the tree/vine. The identification of the plant as a vine by some of the inscriptions (a vine which curiously enough produces not only grapes but also roses) means the Church metaphorically. This meaning of the vine is decoded visually by the depiction of the Assumption Cathedral<sup>36</sup> (from which the vine grows out) the foundations of which were, indeed, laid down by Ivan and Peter.

Commenting on what the meaning of planting and watering could mean in the political context when the icon was painted, Hughes wrote: “Ushakov reminded viewers of the ‘symphony’ of Church and State, which officially remained a pillar of the Muscovite ideology, but in the light of recent historical events suggested reconciliation and co-operation [...] rather than equality. Nikon’s fate underlined the fact that the ruler was dominant.”<sup>37</sup> *I claim, however, that the symphony depicted in the icon is merely the symphony of the past, not of the present, and the aim of the icon was not to hide but rather express the contrast between past and present.*

It is eloquent that the acting patriarch is not depicted.<sup>38</sup> And it is also eloquent in my view that the crown in the hand of Christ is very similar to

<sup>34</sup> THYRÉT 2001. p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> STEPENNAIA KNIGA I. p. 562.

<sup>36</sup> HUGHES 2001. p. 229.

<sup>37</sup> HUGHES 2001. p. 232.

<sup>38</sup> HUGHES 2001. p. 232.

the deposed patriarch's great crown – a fact noted only by Filimonov but without drawing any conclusion from it.<sup>39</sup> Hughes agreed that “there are undoubtedly political aspects to Ushakov's icon”<sup>40</sup> – at the same time she criticized Chubinskaia who saw the icon as the “most important political document of this era” and even claimed that Tsar Alexis usurped the functions of the patriarch.<sup>41</sup> V. van den Bercken also underlined the political concerns of the icon stating that it expressed “the Byzantine ideal of ecclesiastical and political symphony in the Muscovite empire”.<sup>42</sup> At the same time he also noted that the icon was painted after the conflict between Nikon and Alexis had been settled in 1666: therefore, the icon was termed a “religious-ideological icon” by him.<sup>43</sup> “The ideological meaning is not in the religious portraying of monarchs, but in the portrayed unity of the church and state” – he claimed.<sup>44</sup> *However, I have to state again that symphony in the icon was a symphony of the past (beginning with Ivan and Peter), and not of the present. I can second to the view which treats the icon “as a polemical treatise about the changing nature of rulership” – as Hughes summarized Chubinskaia's interpretation.*<sup>45</sup> But I have to add immediately that, in accordance with the notions of Muscovite thought on rulership, this polemic was inevitably expressed in a theological framework – a statement, one would say, sounds quite tautological in case of an icon. In this sense we can treat the icon a visual representation of the *de facto* situation which characterized the relations between the tsar and the Church after 1666: though there was a patriarch, his influence became negligible.

At the same time, the icon could have been a visual response to the challenge posed by Nikon's theory of two swords claiming for himself an independent sphere of action: the right to govern the affairs of the Church without the interference of the tsar. There is a further hidden evidence supporting this interpretation besides the missing figure of the acting patriarch.

The only living people depicted in the icon are the tsar himself and members of his family. Tsar Alexis prays *directly to Christ* (“*Save, Lord, your people and bless your heritage*”), while his wife and his children, together with the deceased saints (among them even Church hierarchs) represented on the tree, pray *to the Mother of God*.<sup>46</sup> In my view the enhanced role of the tsar is implied by the very words of his praying which make

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<sup>39</sup> FILIMONOV 1873. p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> HUGHES 2001. p. 233.

<sup>41</sup> HUGHES 2001. p. 233; CHUBINSKAIA 1985. p. 306–307.

<sup>42</sup> VAN DEN BERCKEN 2003. p. 186.

<sup>43</sup> VAN DEN BERCKEN 2003. p. 186.

<sup>44</sup> VAN DEN BERCKEN 2003. p. 186.

<sup>45</sup> HUGHES 2001. p. 233; CHUBINSKAIA 1985. p. 306–307.

<sup>46</sup> THYRËT 2001. p. 74–75.

him appear to perform a priestly function! My claim is based on the fact that the above Biblical words uttered by him were part of the Orthodox liturgy of St John Chrysostom where they are said *by the priest*. Visual and textual (liturgical) evidence taken together the message is clear: salvation for Russia is rested with the living pious tsar and his pious family, who are supported by the intercession of holy ancestors and Russian saints, and first of all, by the Mother of God. The prayers of saintly ancestors and saints are important but the role of any other living people, including even the patriarch, can be neglected.

I think we can also trace the motif of *perfection* in the icon which was crucial to the SK. The inscription in the icon above metropolitan Peter and Ivan Kalita reads:

“Lord, look down from Heaven and see. And visit this vineyard and *complete* (*sovershi*) it which your right hand has planted.”  
(Psalms 80:14–15 adjusted)

The wording “complete it” with regard to the vine striving upwards to heaven, towards Christ, who is represented in the company of angels, and the words surrounding Christ (“*Be faithful to me until Death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who is victorious will be dressed in a white shirt, and his name will not be erased from the book of life.*” Rev. 2:10, and 3:5.) clearly implies the same ideas expressed by the visual representations (icons or manuscript illustrations) of the *Ladder of Paradise* where the faithful and pious climbing to the very top of the ladder are received and rewarded by angels and by Christ himself when they enter the Paradise.

I contend that in the icon the *place of the ladder* was taken by the representation of the *Mother of God*. Not only the size of the image implies this conclusion but also the fact that Mary is called “*the ladder leading to heaven*” in the Akathistos hymn which undoubtedly exerted a great influence on the icon. My interpretation is substantiated by the fact that the *rose* is the symbol of both Mary and the Paradise, and roses are abundant in the icon especially around Mary. The roses and the grapes and the inscriptions referring to the gorgeous tree/vine also suggest the image of the Paradise.<sup>47</sup>

Though Thyrêt does not mention the metaphor of the Ladder of Perfection/Paradise she probably had in mind the same notion but her argument rests on a different ground: “The cosmological perspective of the icon can also be gleaned from the layout of the tree motif, which depicts the Christian salvation drama in terms of spiritualization of man [...]. The spiritual status of each figure in the tree is reflected in its position within

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<sup>47</sup> Stephen L. BAEHR: *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia*. Stanford. 1991. p. 26–27.

the branches."<sup>48</sup> Therefore the three holy fools, or fools-in-Christ are on the top "because they enjoy greater charisma" than the monastic saints.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the fact that the spiritualization of man features prominently in the icon it is questionable to claim in my opinion that "Ushakov's rendition of the tree places less emphasis on dynastic than on spiritual succession",<sup>50</sup> considering the painful efforts the Romanovs made to represent themselves as true relatives of the Rurikids. The greater number of saints compared to the number of saintly ancestors can be interpreted as the proof of Russia's sanctity. The following analysis of Griboedov's chronicle, written at the same when the icon was made, underlines the crucial importance of dynastic continuity.

## 2. Griboedov's chronicle and the SK

In his analysis of Griboedov's chronicle Z. Kohut, while comparing the chronicle with the SK, paid no attention to the alterations Griboedov introduced into the structure and the content of his work. Referring to SK Kohut wrote: "It was this narrative sequence, even to the extent of noting the 'degree' of each ruler that Griboedov adopted. He updated the story by adding all the tsars who came after Ivan IV. Griboedov's main contribution consisted in his multifarious attempts to link the Romanov dynasty with Volodimer."<sup>51</sup> A. Sirenov claims that Griboedov's work, though it used SK and was called a "the Romanovs SK", cannot be considered the continuation of SK because "the division into degrees is missing from it which is the genre specialty of *Stepennaia Kniga*".<sup>52</sup> Consequently Sirenov calls Griboedov's work a "historical treatise" which had SK as its main source.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, Griboedov *adapted*, rather than *adopted* the structure of SK. Although it is true that he did not use the word "degree" itself when he structured his work (he called his units "chapters" in the contents) yet, he numbered the *same princes* until Ivan IV in the *same order* as the SK had done it. Therefore, his division corresponds to the division into degrees in the SK. Furthermore, as it also had been the case in the SK, occasionally he even used the term "degree" itself when mentioning the genealogical distance of some rulers from Vladimir and Rurik. The crucial difference between Griboedov's chronicle and the SK in terms of the "structural-conceptual

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<sup>48</sup> THYRÉT 2001. p. 74.

<sup>49</sup> THYRÉT 2001. p. 74.

<sup>50</sup> THYRÉT 2001. p. 73.

<sup>51</sup> KOHUT 2003. p. 22.

<sup>52</sup> SIRENOV 2009. p. 562.

<sup>53</sup> SIRENOV 2009. p. 562.

framework" is that until the 17<sup>th</sup> ruler ("step"/ "degree") Griboedov mentions only rulers both in the table of contents and in the narrative itself when he defines the chronological units, whereas metropolitans, lives of saints etc. are missing from the chronicle.

In my forthcoming analysis I intend to concentrate on the structural and conceptual differences between the SK and Griboedov's chronicle. The chronicle contains a very short *foreword*, followed by the table of contents of 36 chapters (the original extended version contained 36 units), and their exposition.

Foreword:

*"The history, or you may say, the chronicle or tale in short about the noble, the most mighty God-given tsars and grand princes living holy life who have ruled the Rus' land in a way pleasing to God, and who began with the holy Vladimir Stvyatoslavich, a ruler equal to the apostles, the baptizer of the Rus' land with holy baptism, and also about others descending from his holy and true kin, similarly about the God-elected [...] Mikhail Fedorovich the autocrator of all Rus' and his royal son Aleksei Mikhailovich [...] at what time they became great lords [...] of the countries of the Russian state [...] and how in them the God-planted root which has strengthened and grown and then blossomed gave such a well-shaped beautiful fruit."*<sup>54</sup>

Here we have the well-known tree motive associated with the Romanovs. This motive is immediately reinforced and historicized, for the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of the chronicle begins with the introductory paragraph of the SK quoted above – it is almost a word by word quotation (except for one word which might well be a miswriting).<sup>55</sup>

Olga's eulogy which follows the preface in the SK is, however, missing from Griboedov's chronicle.<sup>56</sup> Instead, Griboedov immediately considers Vladimir's real and legendary ancestors mentioning Rurik and Prus, the fictive brother of Emperor Augustus, thereby establishing the connection between Vladimir and "the universal monarchy of Rome".<sup>57</sup> The story then covers the history of the rulers from Vladimir to 1667 when the presentation of Aleksei Alekseevich, the heir to the throne took place. As it has been said, until Ivan IV Griboedov's division closely follows the division of SK: in SK Ivan IV was the 17<sup>th</sup> degree (whose reign was the culmination of Russian History), so was he in Griboedov's chronicle. The message of Griboedov's work is as follows: "At every step Griboedov tries

<sup>54</sup> GRIBOEDOV 1896. p. 1. (Italics in the above quoted text are mine: E.S.)

<sup>55</sup> In the STEPENNAIA KNIGA we have *blagorazumnyi* instead of *bogorazumnyi*.

<sup>56</sup> KOHUT 2003. p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> KOHUT 2003. p. 17.

to promote the notion that Moscow and its dynasty were divinely elected."<sup>58</sup> Crucial to us is the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter/degree dealing with Daniil, the founder of the Moscow dynasty which is even marked by an inner heading ("*On the Moscow princes*") – the only one in the whole work. Griboedov states that God's blessing went over to and was conferred on Moscow for ever:

"And this blessed Daniil was selected by God and God committed him the God-given government of the abovementioned town of Moscow as an inheritance and his true seed was loved and glorified by God and who even wanted them to reign from generation to generation."<sup>59</sup>

This passage was again an almost verbatim quotation from the SK as was the 10<sup>th</sup> degree written on Ivan Kalita who was called the "*faithful and God-elected receiver and heir of the pious state of the God-loved Russian tsardom*."<sup>60</sup> Ivan is glorified here and in the icon as well. But where is metropolitan Peter? – he is not mentioned at all by Griboedov!

After Ivan IV Griboedov exposes the remaining 8 decades of Russian History until 1667 in 19 stages – thus the history of cc. 80 eighty years covered is divided into more units than the previous cc. 600 years, and this relatively short time span occupies more space (31.5 pages) compared to the previous 17 degrees (24.5 pages). The Romanovs' story, from the election of Mikhail, is given in the chapters starting from 26. It is thus clear that after Ivan IV Griboedov completely abandoned the idea structuring the SK in which each degree was one generation: the numbering of chapters became quite hectic which explains the great number of degrees after Ivan IV. In Griboedov's presentation not only the rulers following Ivan IV (such as Fedor or Godunov) but also the genealogy of Anastasia or the death of tsarevich Dmitrii and even the translation of his relics are treated as separate degrees! This free treatment of degrees is even more apparent with the Romanovs: family events, such as the tsar's marriage, death of the tsar or tsaritsa, or even a coronation, i.e. important events within a single reign, are numbered as separate degrees.

Nevertheless, similarly to the previous period only rulers (and sometimes their wives) feature in each step – the role of Church hierarchs is neglected, (except Filaret) and there is no mention of the Church reform and the "Nikon affair" at all. Even the name of the acting patriarch is left unmentioned. There is not the slightest hint of the symphony between the

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<sup>58</sup> KOHUT 2003, p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> GRIBOEDOV 1896, p. 18–19.

<sup>60</sup> GRIBOEDOV 1896, p. 19.

tsar and the patriarch. As family events, marriages, births, deaths dominate the story of the Romanovs, the culmination of Russian History is also a family affair: the presentation of the heir to throne in 1667 where the role of the patriarch and other Church hierarchs was merely to give blessing.

Griboedov's "attempts to link the Romanovs" to the Rurikids<sup>61</sup> were not new at all. The three ways mentioned by Kohut which were used by Griboedov "to legitimize and glorify the Romanov dynasty" (i.e. establishing dynastic links between the different members of Rurikids and Romanovs through the mixture of sometimes fictive, sometimes real relations;<sup>62</sup> the pre-selection of Mikhail by God while he was in his mother's womb; the election of Mikhail by God and the people alike)<sup>63</sup> were neither new at all nor were they the only means of the Romanov legitimization. They were not new, not the least, because they were taken by Griboedov from earlier sources written in 1613 and after that. In dealing with the ideological issues of the chronicle the editors even state that Griboedov "did not include any idea of his own"<sup>64</sup> in his writing which, in fact, was merely a compilation and not an individual intellectual piece of work.<sup>65</sup> (The sources of the compilation were also identified and documented by the editors.)

There is one more question which needs to be answered. Since the number of degrees was consciously chosen 17 in the SK, for 17 was the number of prophets foretelling the coming of Christ,<sup>66</sup> it can be thought that a similar motivation, i.e. a conscious calculation was behind the 36 chapters/degrees contained in the *original extended version* of Griboedov's work which he thought as final (the shorter redaction had 34 units). Here follows some possible explanations taking into account the different meanings attributed to number 36 in Christian numerology.

Both East and West established the number 36 as the backbone of the *Fast*, with some extra days added – "Sundays are not included in the numbering of the days of the Lent."<sup>67</sup> Number 36 "represented, and still represents, giving a tithe or a tenth of the year back to God."<sup>68</sup> 36 became a mystical and a symbolic number with other meanings: *the Revelation of John contains*

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<sup>61</sup> KOHUT 2003. p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> Therefore Griboedov's work is not free of contradictions.

<sup>63</sup> KOHUT 2003. p. 18–19.

<sup>64</sup> PLATONOV – MAIKOV 1896. p. XV.

<sup>65</sup> PLATONOV – MAIKOV 1896. p. XIII–XV.

<sup>66</sup> Gail LENHOFF: Politics and Form in the *Stepennaia Kniga*. In: *The Book of Royal Degrees and the Genesis of Russian Historical Consciousness/ Stepennaia Kniga Tsarskogo Rodosloviia I Genezis Russkogo Istoricheskogo Soznaniia*. Ed. Gail LENHOFF – Ann M. KLEIMOLA. Bloomington. 2011. p. 157–174, here: p. 170–171, en. 80.

<sup>67</sup> E. Carver MCGRIFF: *Lectionary Preaching Workbook. Series VI. Cycle C*. Lima – Ohio. 2000. (hereafter: MCGRIFF 2000.), p. 101.

<sup>68</sup> MCGRIFF 2000. p. 101.

36 visions; it is also the number of days Jesus spent in the wilderness. Last, but not least it could convey “such ideas as *eternity, the endlessness of time*”.<sup>69</sup>

Examining the text of the chronicle I argue that the last meaning of number 36 seems the most plausible. Chapter 35 contains the presentation of the heir on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1667, which took place as part of the (annual) New Year’s Ritual. Until 1700 1<sup>st</sup> September was the beginning of the new year, and during this liturgy identical Biblical passages were read on behalf of both the tsar and the patriarch: these passages expressed the hope in the blessing of God for the future.<sup>70</sup> Chapter 36 contains the long prayers delivered by both the tsar and then by the church hierarchs who appealed to the Holy Trinity in the end to keep the dynasty before uttering “*Amen*”. The content of these two closing chapters points to the interpretation of 36 units as suggested above.



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<sup>69</sup> MCGRIFF 2000 p. 101.

<sup>70</sup> Michael S. FLIER: Political Ideals and Rituals. In: *Cambridge History of Russia*. I. Ed. Maureen PERRIE. Cambridge. 2006. p. 387–408, here: p. 401–402.