

ENDRE SASHALMI

**God-Guided Contract and Scriptural Sovereignty:  
The Muscovite Perspective of  
*Pravda voli monarshej v opredelenii naslednika derzhavy svoej\****

*Abstract:* The study intends to examine the two related concepts of contract and sovereignty which (practically unknown in Muscovite Russia) are commonly referred to as proofs of dominance of western concepts in PVM. By examining these concepts in the text I try to point out the Muscovite legacy of the argumentation. I claim that the contract of government between the people and the ruler contains the Muscovite idea of God acting through the people (“the will of the people is the will of God” – the crucial premise legitimating succession both in 1598 and 1613 in official documents) while the concept of sovereignty is predominantly justified by traditional references to the Bible and not so much by arguments taken from western political theory.

*Key words:* contract, sovereignty, rule of law, natural law, Muscovite ideology, Petrine ideology, limits of power, will of God.



### **I. Exposition of the problem**

The ideological framework of *Pravda voli monarshej* (PVM), the most important political tract of the Petrine period, is a puzzling question for historians of Russian political thought.<sup>1</sup> As the full title eloquently shows, the purpose

---

\* This paper is part of a research supported by János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (BO 00171/09/2). The paper was delivered at Cambridge in 2009 and was part of a panel on Petrine Russia together with the paper of Antony Lentin published in this volume.

<sup>1</sup> The translation of the full title, ‘*The Justice of the Monarch’s Will in Designating an Heir to His Realm.*’ The best analysis of the treatise in any language is A. LENTIN, *Peter the Great: His Law on the Imperial Succession. The Official Commentary*, Oxford, 1996. ‘Introduction.’ (hereafter: LENTIN 1996) Other useful works dealing with the ideas of PVM and Petrine ideology in general: G.

of the treatise published under the name of Feofan Prokopovich,<sup>2</sup> was to defend the succession statute of Peter the Great (1722) which *discarded birthright* and plainly *declared the uncontested right of the reigning monarch* to name his successor.

The designation of the heir was the *exclusive right of the grand prince* by the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and, seen from this angle, Peter's statute which *merely enacted this right* was not, in my view, as remote from Muscovite principles as some historians assume.<sup>3</sup> But after 1722, in principle, the nominated heir could indeed be any person: even *a woman*, even *non-orthodox*, and even *a person having no ties of blood to the ruling family at all*. Seen from these angles the statute, of course, meant a clear break with the past, especially when one considers the importance attributed to *descent and orthodoxy* as the basis of legitimacy in pre-Petrine Russia.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the succession statute tried to hide the novel consequences of the right of *free designation* behind the mantle of tradition because it invoked the past, the decisions of Ivan III (1498, 1502) as a precedent, even though Ivan's designation of the heir *remained within the dynasty* in both cases. Tradition, however, played a part in the succession statute of 1722 in another way as well: as Pierre Gonneau has shown, the *wording of passages describing Ivan's decisions* reflected the direct influence of the relevant passages of important 16<sup>th</sup>-century sources, the Book of Degrees and the Nikon Chronicle.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the statute "did not merely borrow

---

GURVICH, 'Pravda voli monarshej' Feofana Prokopovicha i eya zapadnoevropejskie istochniki, Yurev, 1915; N. I. PAVLENKO, 'Ideya absolyutizma v zakonodatel'stve XVIII veka', in: *Absolyutizm v Rossi*, Moscow, 1964. (pp. 389–459); S. BENSON, 'The Role of Western Political Thought in Petrine Russia', in: *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* VIII:2 (Summer, 1974), (pp. 254–273); J. CRACRAFT, 'Empire versus Nation: Russian Political Theory under Peter I', in: *Harvard Slavic Studies* 10:3–4 (December, 1986), (pp. 524–541); D. OSTROWSKY, *Muscovy and the Mongols. Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier 1304–1589*, Cambridge, 1998. (hereafter: OSTROWSKY 1998)

<sup>2</sup> For the most recent discussion of authorship and its historiography see Antony Lentin's study in the present issue.

<sup>3</sup> E. SASHALMI, 'La succession dans la Russie moscovite, 1425–1613', in: F. LACHAUD – M. PENMAN (eds), *Making and Breaking the Rules. Succession in Medieval Europe, c. 1000 – c. 1600.*, Turnhout, 2008. (pp. 145–160) pp. 153–154.

<sup>4</sup> For this see M. PERRIE, *Pretenders and Popular Monarchism in Early Modern Russia*, Cambridge, 1995; Ch. L. DUNNING, *Russia's First Civil War. The Time of Troubles and the Founding of the Romanov Dynasty*, Pennsylvania, 2001., and my study: E. SASHALMI, 'Some Remarks on «Proprietary Dynasticism» and the Development of the Concept of State in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Russia. (Richard Pipes' s Interpretation of Muscovy and the European Perspective)', in: M. FONT (ed), *Specimina Nova. Pars Prima. Sectio Mediaevalis III.*, Pécs, 2005. (pp. 157–194) (hereafter: SASHALMI 2005) pp. 188–191.

<sup>5</sup> P. GONNEAU, Pierre le Grand, lecteur de la Stepennaja Kniga, *Revue d'études slaves* LXXVI:1, (pp. 51–59)

certain parts from these sources” but also “modernized their terminology and even edited them so that their idea of tsardom would coincide” with Peter’s needs.<sup>6</sup>

My paper examines the treatise defending the abovementioned succession statute from a different point of view: I concentrate not on the aspect of succession but the so-called “ideological frame”<sup>7</sup> of PVM. I intend to analyze just two related concepts, *contract and sovereignty* which are commonly referred to as proofs of the dominance of western concepts in PVM. Their importance in the new ideology, together with other concepts such as *natural law, common good* etc. cannot be denied. Yet, a careful examination of these two main concepts in the text will reveal an ongoing Muscovite legacy in the argumentation.

Antony Lentin’s introduction to his edition and translation of PVM takes into account not only Western borrowings but also the Muscovite perspective. His contention that PVM “while occasionally branching out into political theory”, “seldom strays far” from “its original starting-point in Saint Paul”<sup>8</sup> (“There is no power but of God”) is well founded in my view.

In accordance with the title of the paper I try to trace and demonstrate the Muscovite legacy in the following fields:

- 1) With regard to the notion of *contract*, i.e. the so-called “original contract” concluded between the people and the ruler, I claim that it contains the *Muscovite idea of God acting through the people* which surfaced in official ideology immediately after, and as a result of the extinction of the old dynasty in 1598.
- 2) As for the concept of *sovereignty*, I will argue that it is *predominantly supported by traditional references to the Bible*, rather than by arguments taken from political theory, despite the fact that Hugo Grotius is quoted in the text in the definition of sovereignty.
- 3) Last but not least, I intend to highlight that *the idea of the rule of law absent in Muscovite ideology was also to remain a foreign notion to the new official ideology*.

In order to assess the role of persistent Muscovite notions in PVM it is necessary to give a summary of the main premises of Muscovite ideology.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Lentin’s phrase, LENTIN 1996. (see note 1) p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> A superb historiographical account of the main issues and literature on the topic has been given most recently by N. S. Kollmann in her contribution to *The Blackwell Companion to Russian*

## II. Key premises of Muscovite ideology

One of the most recent concise histories of early modern political thought, *European Political Thought 1450–1700* (New Haven, 2007) has as its subtitle *Religion, Law, Philosophy*. Daniel Rowland, the author of the chapter on Russia in the volume, has shown that until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, and even until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century practically nothing can be written on the *role of law and philosophy* in Muscovite thought on power, for the “religious side of political thought was hypertrophied.”<sup>10</sup> What we call “political” issues were conceived of as “religious” issues in Muscovy, expressed mostly in *iconography, in religious public rituals, and in admonitions by clergymen* if we include written sources.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the following premises should be kept in mind:

Since thought on power existed primarily *within the framework of Orthodox theology*, the “*origin, purpose and limits*” of the tsar’s authority “were almost always discussed in a religious context.”<sup>12</sup> “Once we remove God and His relationship with tsar and subject, we are left without any coherent set of ideas at all” – without God Muscovite ideology “makes no sense.”<sup>13</sup>

As the Muscovite perception of rulership was neither “law-”, nor “polity-based”, the tsar was conceived of as a *God-appointed and divinely inspired “stern but merciful father”* of Orthodox Christians and not a holder of a public office.<sup>14</sup> The tsar’s power was not devoid of all *norms (“limits”)*, however,<sup>15</sup> and these norms were defined by his *duties (or the purpose of his power)*: first of all, he had to defend and uphold Orthodoxy, to take care of his Orthodox people, i.e. to maintain order, dispense justice and hearken to his people’s problems. These norms, at the same time, *were not of a legal but of an ethico-religious nature* and in my view they are more appropriately defined as

---

*History*. N. S. KOLLMANN, ‘Muscovite Political Culture’, in: A. GLEASON (ed), *The Blackwell Companion to Russian History*, Oxford, 2009. (pp. 89–104.)

<sup>10</sup> D. ROWLAND, ‘Muscovy’, in: H. A. LLOYD – G. BURGESS – S. HODSON (eds), *European Political Thought 1450–1700. Religion, Law, Philosophy*, New Haven – London, 2007. (pp. 267–299.) (hereafter: ROWLAND 2007) p. 269.

<sup>11</sup> ROWLAND 2007 (see note 10) and M. S. FLIER, ‘Political Ideas and Rituals’, in: M. PERRIE (ed), *The Cambridge History of Russia. Vol. I. From Early Rus’ to 1689*, Cambridge, 2006, (pp. 387–408)

<sup>12</sup> D. Rowland’s words are quoted by V. KIVELSON, *Autocracy in the Provinces. The Muscovite Gentry and Political Culture in the Seventeenth Century*, Stanford, 1996, (hereafter: KIVELSON 1996) p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> D. ROWLAND, ‘The Problem of Advice in Muscovites Tales about the Time of Troubles’ *Russian History – Histoire Russe* 1979:2, (pp. 259–283) pp. 278–279.

<sup>14</sup> KIVELSON 1996. (see note 12) p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> D. ROWLAND, ‘Did Muscovite Literary Ideology Place Limits on the Power of the Tsar (1540s–1660s)?’, *Russian Review* 1990. (pp. 125–150).

expectations rather than limitations.<sup>16</sup> These expectations were “norms of proper behaviour” that tsars had to follow or “ideals to be accomplished” but they were never formalized legally.<sup>17</sup>

Not surprisingly the vocabulary of the sources was “predominantly biblical in origin” dominated by passages from the Old Testament<sup>18</sup> as well as St. Paul’s crucial words on the origins and obedience to authorities (Romans 13). If we were to summarize Muscovite ideology in two sentences they would be: “There is no power but of God”, “The Tsar’s heart is in God’s hand”. The latter passage, from the Old Testament (Book of Proverbs), was the core of Muscovite ideology and was so common that it was thought to be a proverb in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup>

To conclude: In comparison with the West what is “striking about both the form and the language” of Muscovite ideology “is the degree to which philosophical [and we can add legal] abstractions remained foreign to it”,<sup>20</sup> i.e. abstractions and concepts such as *sovereignty*, *contract*, *natural law*. Seen from this angle, i.e. the introduction of a *new language* of ideology,<sup>21</sup> and the *free use of all the main political concepts of that time (forms of government, common good, natural law, social contract, subject, sovereignty etc.) in a single writing*, PVM was, indeed, a major turning point.

### III. God-guided contract

“The will of the people, is the will of God” – that was the crucial premise legitimating the Muscovite succession in 1598 and in 1613 in official documents.

The *Confirmation Charter of Mikhail Romanov* (1613) reads:

“Merciful Lord, Mikhail Fedorovich! Do not oppose the providence of the Most High God, but obey His will [...] for

---

<sup>16</sup> E. 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: W. BLOCKMANS – A. HOLENSTEIN – J. MATHIEU (eds), *Empowering Interactions. Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe 1300–1900*, Farnham – Burlington, 2009. (pp. 131–147.) (hereafter: SASHALMI 2009) p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> P. V. LUKIN, *Narodnye predstavleniya o gosudarstvennoj vlasti*, Moscow, 2000. p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> S. DIXON, *The Modernisation of Russia 1676–1825*, Cambridge, 1999. (hereafter: DIXON 1999) p. 190.

<sup>19</sup> SASHALMI 2009. (see note 16) p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> DIXON 1999. (see note 18) p. 190.

<sup>21</sup> LENTIN 1996. (see note 1) pp. 33–35. See also SASHALMI 2005, (see note 4) (pp. 183–186.) For the political terminology of PVM see J. CRACRAFT, *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture*, Cambridge, Mass., 2004. (hereafter: CRACRAFT 2004) pp. 180–182.

previous tsars had also ruled as tsars pre-selected by God, (*predizbrannye Bogom*) and their pious root led to the pious and true [...] tsar and grand prince Fedor Ivanonovich; but this root was completed and came to an end with him. And in his place God entrusts you with this royal honour as you are a God-elected flower (*Bogom izbrannyj tsvet*), from royal seed [...]. As Denis the Aeropagite [...] has said: God has favoured mankind with the most precious honour, that is with royal honour. Whomsoever God wants to endow with this boon, He endows the person with this honour already in the mother's womb and prepares the person for it from infancy. Indeed, you were pre-selected in the same way [...]. Mikhail Fedorovich, and not through the unanimous thinking of the people, or in accordance with human choice. For it was by the just judgment of God that you have been entrusted with this royal election (*izbranie*) [...] because *the voice of God is the voice of the people* [in the other version: *the voice of the people is the voice of God*]."<sup>22</sup>

The meaning of the passage is clear: the people did not confer power on Mikhail in 1613, they were, in the wording of Valerie Kivelson, just seen as the vehicle "for expressing and confirming God's will."<sup>23</sup> Election by the people was not thought of as a legitimating instrument on its own right, it was merely the means by which divine pre-selection was communicated to this world.<sup>24</sup> The theme of 'God acting through the people' was fully discussed recently by Maureen Perrie in an article relating to Mikhail Romanov, in addition to the other elements substantiating claims to legitimacy. She called attention to the recurring phrase of the sources, "to elect one [...] who is going to be given by God" which surfaced in various sources of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup>

As for the origin of power in the Confirmation Charter, the underlying idea is basically the same in PVM: "God acts through the people". But in the latter case this notion appears in a new garb.<sup>26</sup> The major difference between

<sup>22</sup> S. BELOKUROV (ed), *Utverzhennaya gramota ob izbranii na gosudarstvo Mikhaila Fedorovicha Romanova*, Moscow, 1906. p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> KIVELSON 1996. (see note 12) p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> M. PERRIE, 'Izbrannyj tsar i prirozhdennye gosudari. Mikhail Romanov i ego soperniki', in: A. P. PAVLOV (ed), *Gosudarstvo i obshchestvo v Rossii XV–nachala XX veka*, St. Petersburg, 2007. (pp. 233–246) p. 235, 236.

<sup>26</sup> OSTROWSKY 1998, (see note 1) pp. 216–217; B. A. MIRONOV, *Sotsial'naya istoriya Rossii perioda imperii (XVIII – nachalo XX v.*, St. Petersburg, 1999. II, p. 127., and E. SASHALMI 'Contract Theory

the Confirmation Charter and PVM is that the latter mentions a “first agreement”, in fact, a so-called “original contract”. Of course, there was not the slightest hint of an actual contract in 1613 but merely an election of a tsar under divine guidance.

The notion of “original contract” implies a “non-political” existence of a given people, for in this speculative case there is *neither a ruler nor an organized government*. The different types of contract theory (together with the emergence of contractual ideas in Russia) were discussed by me in a previous article.<sup>27</sup> It is enough to say here that the “original contract” is a contract of government made in the past when *not only the ruler but also the political community are established at one and the same time*. Let us see now what is written on contract in PVM.

First, there is a *general theoretical proposition*:

*“every form of government [...] derives its origins from an initial agreement among this or that people, in every case at God’s volition and under his wise and active providence.”*<sup>28</sup>

Then comes the description of the origin of monarchies, elective and hereditary respectively. Since it is hereditary monarchy alone which applies to Russia, according to the author of the treatise, I quote the corresponding passage:

*“In an hereditary monarchy, however, the people’s will with respect to its first monarch was expressed as follows, in fact if not in word: We all unanimously desire you to rule over us for our common good for ever, that is, for as long as you shall live; and you yourself shall leave an hereditary successor to rule over us after you; and we, having once renounced our freedom, will never avail ourselves of it hereafter, not even after your death; but we bind ourselves by a solemn oath to submit to you and after you to your successors, and we bind our heirs after us by the same obligation.”*<sup>29</sup>

---

and the Westernization of Russian Ideology of Power under Peter the Great’, in: M. FONT (ed), *Specimina Nova. Pars Prima. Sectio Mediaevalis II.*, Pécs, 2003. (pp. 89–100) (hereafter: SASHALMI 2003) p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> SASHALMI 2003. (see note 26)

<sup>28</sup> Here and elsewhere quotations are from Lentin’s bilingual edition of PVM. LENTIN 1996. (see note 1) pp. 204–205. Italics here and hereafter are mine.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206–207.

But the *contract*, in fact, is merely the old idea (*God acting through the people*) in a new garb. And it provides a “supplementary legitimation”<sup>30</sup> as the following explanation will reveal:

“It should also be understood that the *will of the people*, both in an elective and in an hereditary monarchy and in the other forms of government, *does not make itself felt without God’s special providence* (as was mentioned above), *but operates at God’s instigation; for Holy Writ clearly teaches, as was amply shown above, that there is no power but of God.*”<sup>31</sup> Hence all duties, both those of the subjects towards their sovereign and those of the sovereign in respect of his subjects’ common good *derive not only from the will of the people (ot edinoj voli narodnoj), but also from the will of God (ot voli bozhiej) [...].* Even if the people insisted on changing its mind (which would be highly inconsistent, and an hereditary monarchy could never subsist under such circumstances), it cannot change *the will of God, which inspired the will of the people and acted in concert with it in establishing the monarchy and in the election of the first monarch, as was amply shown above.*”<sup>32</sup>

What is absent here, of course, in comparison with 1613 is the principle of heredity as it was known to Muscovy.

#### IV. Scriptural sovereignty

With regard to the problem of sovereignty in Muscovite thought it is again worth turning to Daniel Rowland: “Although the Russians were ignorant of the concept of sovereignty as a term in formal political discourse, if we were to ask who was sovereign in the Russian state, the only correct answer from any abstract or theoretical point of view would be that God Himself was sovereign.”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> A. B. ZAJCHENKO, ‘Teoriya prosveshchennogo absolyutizma v proizvedeniyakh Feofana Prokopovicha’, in: *Iz istorii Russkogo prava*, Moscow, 1984. (pp. 76–83) p. 80. E. Anisimov (without mentioning the idea of *God acting through the people*) writes that “divine origin of the Tsar’s power was filled up with ideas popular at that time, that of ‘social contract’ and ‘natural law.’” E. V. ANISIMOV, ‘Imperiya. Vozniknovenie i rost. Povорот k Evropе’, in: B. V. ANAN’ICH, *Vlast’ i refomy v Rossii*, St. Petersburg, 1997. (pp. 113–152.) p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> Here we have what Lentin calls the “original starting point in St Paul”. LENTIN 1996. (see note 1) p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208–213.

<sup>33</sup> ROWLAND 2007. (see note 10) p. 279.



Let us compare what is written on sovereignty in PVM. Prokopovich makes use of the concept and defines it as “the supreme legislative, judicial and executive power [...] which is itself not subject any laws whatsoever.”<sup>34</sup> He adds:

“Such is the definition of *majesty* (*velichestvo*) given by the most eminent jurists, including Hugo Grotius who says as follows: ‘The supreme power (called majesty) is that whose actions are not subject to the power of anyone so as to be annulled at the will of another; when I say another, I exclude him who wields this supreme power; for he is free to change his mind.’”<sup>35</sup>

Then comes the explanation of sovereignty and its relation to law:

“It must be understood, however, that when the jurists say that the supreme power called *majesty* (*velichestvo*) is not subject to any other power, they mean any human power; for it is subject to God’s power, and it must obey the laws of God, both those which he has written in men’s hearts and those which he has handed down in the Decalogue; but it is not subject to the laws of man, even if they are good and promote the general welfare. But it is subject to God’s law only in the sense that it is answerable for transgressing it to God’s judgement alone, and not to man’s: and so no sovereign monarch is obliged to observe man-made law.”<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, there is a shift in the argumentation. For the contention that the ruler is not subject to any other power, i.e. subject to the judgements of others, in the interpretation of Prokopovich meant that the ruler was *not subject to any kind of law*.<sup>37</sup> The contrast with 17<sup>th</sup> century France is eloquent! In 1667 Louis XIV stated in an ordinance:

“Let it be not said that the sovereign is not subject to the laws of his State; the contrary proposition is a *truth of natural law* [...] what brings perfect felicity to a kingdom is the fact that the king is obeyed by his subjects and that he himself obeys the law.”<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> LENTIN 1996. (see note 1) pp. 186–187.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 186–187.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp. 186–187. This is none other than the conflation of two concepts: law as a coercive force and law as a directive force.

<sup>37</sup> For this issue and the classification of ideas of PVM (absolutism-autocracy) see E. SASHALMI, ‘Some Remarks on the Typology of Petrine Political Ideology’, in: Gy. SZVÁK (ed), *Russia and Eurasia*, Budapest, 2001. (pp. 233–243.)

<sup>38</sup> Quoted by B. Z. TAMANAHA, *On the Rule of Law. History, Politics, Theory*, Cambridge, 2004. p. 22.

When Prokopovich turns to the justification of sovereignty, the secular reasoning is tautological:

“We know this, first, from natural reason: for since this power is called, and is, the supreme, highest and utmost power, how can it be subject to man made laws? If it were subject to them, it would be not be supreme.”<sup>39</sup>

Instead of discussing the concept of sovereignty as such, i.e. *its purpose, its necessity, its marks or its scope* (namely what sovereignty meant in church affairs, though we can draw some inferences with regard to this elsewhere)<sup>40</sup> or *its relation to outside powers*, Prokopovich turns to the “Scripture” and the Church Fathers (even Latin Church Fathers) and concentrates on one issue within the *sovereign-subject* framework: *the sovereign cannot be judged by anyone, except God, and therefore is not obliged to keep the laws*. He tries to prove this contention on several pages with numerous quotations. The crucial passage, which he quotes and analyses at length, comes from the Book of Proverbs: “*It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but a king’s glory is in respecting his commands. The Heaven for height, the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable.*”<sup>41</sup>

Two questions arise immediately:

‘Does this perception mean that God is sovereign’ — as in Muscovite times?

‘Does Prokopovich argue from the divine mystery of monarchy?’ For both of the notions mentioned here are contained in the crucial passage of Muscovite ideology which also comes from the Book of Proverbs, “*The heart of the tsar is in God’s hand.*” Moreover, this passage is not far in its meaning from the one just quoted, “*The heart of kings is unsearchable.*” If we look at the discussion of the latter passage, it is clear that Prokopovich *did not think of it in terms of divine inspiration*:

“The Heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable, *as if to say: let every man honour the king’s commands, and not seek to know why he commands or ordains this or that*: for just as the height of heaven and the depth of the earth cannot be probed, *it is not meet to probe into a heart of the king. This is the meaning (razum) of the passage in Proverbs.*”<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> LENTIN 1996. (see note 1) pp. 186–187.

<sup>40</sup> See later the main text relating to footnote 43.

<sup>41</sup> LENTIN 1996. (see note 1) pp. 190–191.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 190–193.

In other words, the passage enjoins men not to question the deeds of the tsar but to obey all his commands.

Remaining faithful to the title Prokopovich concentrates on the *monarch's will* in general, which is *not subject to any scrutiny, that is to man made law*. And he concludes:

*"A sovereign monarch (monarkh gosudar') can lawfully command of the people not only whatever is necessary for the obvious good of his country (k znatnoj pol'ze otechestva), but indeed whatever he pleases (vse, chto emu ni ponravitsya), provided that it is not harmful to the people and not contrary to the will of God. The foundation of this power, as stated above, is the fact, that the people has renounced in his favour its right to decide the common weal, and has conferred on him all power over itself: this includes civil and ecclesiastical ordinances of every kind, changes in customs and dress, house-building, procedures and ceremonies at feasts, weddings, funerals, etc, etc, etc."*<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, contract and sovereignty (the latter being a legally unlimited or autocratic power in Prokopovich's interpretation) were closely connected. *'Whatever the monarch declared, has the force of law', for he is not to be judged by anyone, except God* ☉ laconically speaking, that was sovereignty for him.

Yet, the notion that the king is not to be judged by anyone, except God, was an age-old commonplace of divine right monarchy West and East.<sup>44</sup> Most of the passages quoted in PVM had indeed been commonplaces of Muscovite divine right ideology. Yet, there is a new element here: the *explanation of Biblical passages and the words of the Church Fathers*. As James Cracraft observed, Biblical passages familiar from Muscovite writings are no longer quoted as merely authorities *per se*: in the context of PVM they are presented as "reasons and arguments"<sup>45</sup> subject to a discussion to demonstrate that they are not inconsistent with each other and with natural law, i.e. common sense.<sup>46</sup> Thus, *"The Tsar's heart is unsearchable"* is now used in new a context by Prokopovich as a Biblical grounding of sovereignty.

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp. 222–223.

<sup>44</sup> SASHALMI 2005. (see note 4) pp. 186–194.

<sup>45</sup> CRACRAFT 2004. (see note 21) p. 182.

<sup>46</sup> As Lentin also remarked aptly: "In almost every section of the book, the central issue is analysed from two and sometimes three or more separate but mutually supportive standpoints: Scripture (including patristic exegesis), from natural law and from 'civil laws' and customary law." LENTIN 1996. (see note 1) p. 35.

#### IV. Conclusions

1. Viewed from a functional aspect of power, the concept of monarchical power in PVM could make sense even without God. God could be removed from the arguments in the sense that His constant interference in the affairs of this world was not assumed, only at the time of the origin of government and the election of the first ruler (i.e. during the so-called “original contract”). Therefore in PVM the perception of power was not “God-dependent” in the way it had been in Muscovite ideology. But as for the *origin* of power: we can speak of an old idea in a new garb.
2. As far as the *purpose* of power is concerned what was really new was that the *duties of the ruler* were not towards God but towards the people (the common good), ostensibly at least, and they were exclusively secular duties. The *rights of the monarch* were also derived from contract and sovereignty: these notions were also *new, though deeply religious in their justification*.
3. As for the *limits* of power: traditional *Muscovite expectations* were removed in favour of a totalitarian view.<sup>47</sup> Petrine ideology, as reflected in PVM, indeed, “brought the concept of autocracy much closer to a claim of total authority than it had been in Muscovy.”<sup>48</sup> Though the ideology became “law-centred” in the sense that it *made use of law*, it did not become “law-bound”. Therefore, in compliance with old Muscovite ideology, there was *no idea of the rule of law* at all.



---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, pp. 36, 40, 50. This is also reflected in the ending “etc, etc. etc”. See the main text relating to footnote 43.

<sup>48</sup> N. S. KOLLMANN, *By Honour Bound.. State and Society in Early Modern Russia*, Stanford, 1999. p. 155.