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# **OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVES AND THE MILITANT RHETORIC IN RUSSIA, 1650 TO 1700**

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## **OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVES AND THE MILITANT RHETORIC IN RUSSIA, 1650 TO 1700<sup>2</sup>**

Modern historians have widely acknowledged that the traditional Eastern Orthodoxy was less inclined to proclaim the Holy War against the enemies of faith and, thus, to dehumanize the non-Christian adversaries of the Russian tsardom than the confessions of the Western Christendom were by similar circumstances. The presented paper aims to challenge this view. The Russian political and religious propaganda of the late 17th century rarely appealed to the idea of the Holy War and called for extermination or enslavement of the infidels directly. Instead, the complex of Biblical metaphors was used. Whereas the Russian tsardom had been traditionally seen as the ‘New Israel’, the preachers of the 1680s and 1690s recalled the deeds of Moses, Joshua and Gedeon and compared the Muslim enemies of the realm – Tatars and Turks – with the cursed people of Canaan such as Midianites and Amalekites. Parallely, the images of the violence Israelites committed against these people by divine sanction became popular in the religious wall painting, in part, due to some influences from the Western book illustration brought to Russia in the second half of the 17th century. Some religiously zealous contemporaries, from the advisors of the young Tsar Peter I to ordinary gentry, applied these negative Biblical images of religiously and ethnically suspected others not only to the Muslims but even to the Protestant population of the Baltic provinces of Sweden attacked during the Great Northern war adding a confessional dimension to the predominantly secular rhetoric of the government.

JEL Classification: Z

Key words: Old Testament, Book of Joshua, Religious Violence, Peter the Great, Russo-Turkish Wars, Great Northern War

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In Late Medieval and Early Modern Russian culture, the Biblical narrative, and, mainly, the historical books of the Old Testament, had played an immense role in constructing identities as it did in other Pre-Modern Christian cultures across the European continent.<sup>3</sup> As it has been demonstrated in the last decades by David Rowland and some other scholars, the Scripture-based rhetoric and self-images were essential for the perception of the Russian intellectual and political elite<sup>4</sup>. The Princes of Moscow and, later, the Russian Tsars emulated, if only in the imagination of their subjects, religious and military leaders of Israel such as Moses, Gideon, Joshua, and King David. The fact that the images of the ethnically and confessionally "others" were also constructed in line with Biblical patterns, justifying and explaining their violent subjugation has been less studied.<sup>5</sup> The use of Biblical stories on the conquest of the Holy Land, specifically the atrocities committed by the Israelites against the pagan people of Canaan, is discussed in this article using Russian sources from the second half of the 17th century when such rhetoric was at its peak. This rhetoric had not become dominant in the Russian perception of their enemies. However, it might have been essential for the personal combatant's experience and the comprehension of military violence in a religiously-motivated conflict at three different levels. First, intellectuals working for the royal court in Moscow in the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century prolifically used Biblical metaphors justifying the wars with the Ottoman Empire and the Khanate of Crimea in their sermons and moral treatises. Second, images of Israelites' wars and exemplary violence were made available to a larger audience, painted on the walls of Russian churches, both in Moscow and provinces. Third, narrative sources allow us to reconstruct how Russian statesmen, courtiers, and soldiers interpreted Biblical images of Holy violence and how these images may have influenced their political and military policies. Primarily, this article deals with the 17th-century perception of some particular episodes from the Old Testament narrating the enslavement and extermination of the Promised Land's inhabitants by the people of Israel. The Numbers, the Deuteronomy, and Joshua abound

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<sup>3</sup> See some recent works Travis DeCook, *The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge, 2021; Erminia Ardissino and Élise Boillet (eds.), *Lay Readings of the Bible in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden, Boston, MA and Cologne, 2020, esp. part 4: Lay Readings of the Bible in Early Modern Europe: The Formation of Social and Professional Identities; David M. Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justification for Slavery*, London and New York, NY, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel B. Rowland, 'The Third Rome or the New Israel?' *The Russian Review*, 55, 4, October 1996, pp. 591–614; also Joel Raba, 'Moscow – the Third Rome or the New Jerusalem', *Forschungen zur Osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 55, 1955, pp. 299–307; Michael S. Flier, 'Till the End of Time: The Apocalypse in Russian Experience before 1500', in Valerie A. Kivelson and Robert H. Greene (eds.), *Orthodox Russia: Studies in Belief and Practice, 1492–1936*, University Park, PA, 2003, pp. 127–158, here pp. 156–157; Kevin M. Kain, "'New Jerusalem" in Seventeenth Century Russia: The Image of a New Orthodox Holy Land', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 58, 3, September 2017, pp. 371–394.

<sup>5</sup> Compare this to a cautious remark in Rowland, 'The Third Rome', p. 604, discussing the example of Dutch protestants who called for the extermination of their enemies as 'new Amalekites': "I have not noticed this device in Muscovite usage of these terms, but the question of its use remains an open one".

with the stories of both Israel's military victories and the killing of Midianites, Amalekites, and other peoples of Canaan, up to the total extermination of all Midianites, apart from underage girls, prescribed to the Israelites by Moses following Divine sanction (Num.: 31). The most famous of these stories is about the storming of Jericho, when God ordered all of the city's inhabitants to be killed, regardless of gender or age (Joshua 6: 1–27). As modern historians and archaeologists argue, these accounts were far from reality. The Jewish invasion into Palestine was a much more complex process than violent subjugation, and the indigenous population of Canaan was instead assimilated into the Jewish community than exterminated or exiled.<sup>6</sup> However, the Biblical stories had been read as unambiguously true by many generations of believers and had been extensively used by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions to justify the Holy War but also to draw limits for the sacred violence.<sup>7</sup>

For Medieval and Early Modern Western thinkers, the extremes of the Biblical narrative constituted a moral, theological, and political challenge. On the one hand, the enemies of Christendom – whether pagans, Muslims, or heretics – were often equated with the people of Canaan to justify the outrageous violence against them. The most authoritative theologians of Late Antiquity and Middle Ages cited the wars of Moses and Joshua as veritable examples of Divine justification of aggressive war and, in particular, the extermination of infidels and plunder of their property.<sup>8</sup> The argument was often recalled during the wars of religion in Post-Reformation Europe. Late Medieval or Early Modern military law also exploited the Old Testament examples to justify any violence against the enemy, even a Christian one, defeated in an open battle or garrison and inhabitants of the fortress, if taken by storming assault.<sup>9</sup> Among the most influential theorists of Early Modern military law, Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645) believed the killing of innocents to be allowed as God himself did not hesitate to order exterminations of women and children in the course of Israel's history.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, a more sophisticated and moderate reading in the Biblical text was possible. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Francisco de Vittoria (1483 – 1546) and Francisco Suárez (1548 – 1617), the leading theologians of the Spanish Late Scholasticism, appealed to it pleading for mercy for those

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<sup>6</sup> See, e. g., Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300–1100 B. C. E.*, Leiden, 2005, pp. 149–196.

<sup>7</sup> See, in particular, Thomas R. Elßner, *Josua und seine Kriege in jüdischer und christlicher Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Stuttgart, 2008; for a broader discussion on the Scripture as inspiration for holy violence, see Philippe Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror: Christianity, Violence and the West*, Philadelphia, PA, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> See Elßner, *Josua und seine Kriege*, pp. 272–275.

<sup>9</sup> See John A. Lynn, 'Honourable Surrender in Early Modern European History, 1500–1789', in Holger Afflerbach and Hew Strachan (eds.), *How Fighting Ends: A History of Surrender*, Oxford, 2012, pp. 99–112, here p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> See Elßner, *Josua und seine Kriege*, pp. 283–289.

who were not fighting, even the pagan ones.<sup>11</sup> Both Vittoria and Suárez believed killing of innocents only be allowed by a particular and unambiguous Divine sanction. Moses and the judges of Israel had possessed this sanction, whereas the modern Christian Princes and warriors lacked it. This sanction was only possible under the Old Testament and could never have been issued after the Christ incarnation. The theologians' calls for the moderation of violence played a particular role in limiting the Spanish atrocities in the New World. They influenced the modern conception of non-combatants' rights, spreading across Europe and reaching, as we will see, even its Eastern edge.

In the Medieval Rus, the discourse of religious and ethnic hostility based on the Biblical examples also persisted, although it was far less elaborate. The nomadic and semi-nomadic ethnical groups of the Great Steppe, primarily the Cumans, were sometimes referred to as Midianites and Amalekites in the early Russian chronicles. However, another Biblical comparison – with the Ishmaelites or the 'sons of Hagar' – was much more frequent.<sup>12</sup> When the Mongols, known to Russians under the name of Tatars, conquered the Eastern European Steppe and subjugated the Russian principalities in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, local intellectuals expanded the metaphorical language from the Holy Scripture over this new and much more dangerous enemy, describing them as the new people of Canaan in several chronicles and other narrative sources.<sup>13</sup> In the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Moscow-centered state exploited this imagery, seeing itself as the new Israel, its Princes as the new leaders of the Chosen People, and the principal champions for the true faith and its enemies as the new rivals of Israel. The Moscow Metropolitan Makarii (1482 – 1563) urged Ivan IV (1533 – 1584), the first Russian ruler who acquired the title of the Tsar in 1547, to emulate the pious behavior of Israelites under Moses before his successful assault on Kazan, the capital of the Tatar khanate in the Middle Volga, in 1552.<sup>14</sup>

This rhetoric was directed predominantly against Islamic people, speaking Turkic languages. This rhetoric might have also been applied to the West neighbors. According to a literary tradition, Prince Alexander Nevskii prayed for Divine assistance against the Teutonic Order's troops in the

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview, see Elßner, *Joschua und seine Kriege*, pp. 277–283.

<sup>12</sup> See Aleksei V. Laushkin, *Rus' i sosedi: Istoriia etnokonfessional'nykh predstavlenii v drevnerusskoi knizhnosti XI – XIII vv.*, Moscow, 2019, pp. 132–151.

<sup>13</sup> See Rowland, 'The Third Rome', pp. 602–622.

<sup>14</sup> Poslanie mitropolita Makariia v Sviiazhsk k Tsarskomu voisku, in *Akty istoricheskie, sobrannye I izdannye Arkheograficheskoiu komissieiu*, vol. 1, Saint-Petersburg, 1841, pp. 287–290, here p. 289. For Makarii's rhetoric, see Daniel B. Rowland, 'Biblical Military Imagery in the Political Culture of Early Modern Russia: The Blessed Host of the Heavenly Tsar', in Michael Flier and Daniel B. Rowland (eds), *Medieval Russian Culture*, Berkeley, 1994, 2, pp. 182–212, here p. 188; Matthew Romaniello, *The Elusive Empire: Kazan and the Creation of Russia, 1552–1671*, Madison, WI, 2012, pp. 32–33; Christoph Witzzenrath, 'Agency in Muscovite Archives: Trans-Ottoman Slaves Negotiating the Moscow Administration', in Stephan Conermann and Gül Şen (eds), *Slaves and Slave Agency in the Ottoman Empire*, Heidelberg, 2020, pp. 87–130, here pp. 107–108.

13th century, "as Moses prayed against Amalik." His victory over the Germans was compared to Joshua's capture of Jericho.<sup>15</sup> When the Russian garrison of Chernihiv, an important stronghold on the Moscow-Lithuanian border, made a successful night sally against the besieging Lithuanian troops in 1534, a Moscow chronist found an exact parallel in the Scripture recalling Gedeon's night battle: 'Just as Gedeon did against the Midianites, the Tsar's general did against the Lithuanians'.<sup>16</sup>

The use of this symbolic language had its limits. Despite the brutality of the righteous violence, often proclaimed in chronicles on the conquest in the East and West, the actual governing practices in the newly conquered territories were based instead to use the words of Valerie Kivelson on a more consensual relationship between ruler and ruled and a more limited exercise of power, reined in... by moral consensus and Orthodox piety'.<sup>17</sup> Sparing some rare excesses, which took place immediately after battles or assaults on enemy's fortresses, the Russians did not pursue the extermination or merciless enslavement of their 'infidel enemies.' However, they used to integrate the local elites into their empire by tolerating, to some extent, their religion, political autonomy, and juridical customs.<sup>18</sup> Except for some initiatives of individual local hierarchs, the Russian Orthodox Church did not carry out a large-scale mission. Most non-Russian inhabitants of the realm's frontiers escaped the forced Christianization without losing most of their rights.<sup>19</sup> The legal and moral reflections on the *ius in bello*, for which the Biblical examples of religious violence might have been used as arguments, were not rooted in the Orthodox thought as firm as they were integrated into the Catholic one. Thus, the misfortunes of the Canaanites might have provided the Russian authors with some eloquent metaphors but, up to a specific chronological point, never formed the core element of the discourse.

The situation started to change in the 17<sup>th</sup> century due to political and cultural developments. The military rhetoric, pertinent during the age of the state's expansion, became obsolete when the Russian Tsardom entered the Time of Troubles in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Lamenting the internal

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<sup>15</sup> See Laushkin, *Rus' i sosedi*, p. 155.

<sup>16</sup> *Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisei* (further – PSRL), vol. 29, p. 14. The Biblical reference is Judges 7. For further possible parallels in the Russian literacy, see Artem E. Zhukov, "Letopisets nachala zarstva" i russkoe letopisanie XVI veka', unpublished candidate thesis, Saint Petersburg State University, 2017, pp. 106, 124.

<sup>17</sup> Valerie A. Kivelson, 'Rivers of Blood: Illustrating Violence and Virtue in Russia's Early Modern Empire', *Journal of British Academy*, 3, 2015, pp. 69–105, here p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> See Romaniello, *The Elusive Empire*; Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800*, Bloomington, IN, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> For policies of the Early Modern Russian government towards its newly acquired non-Christian subjects and a specific, though limited, religious tolerance of the Eastern Orthodoxy, see Mikhail V. Dmitriev, 'Muslims in Muscovy (15<sup>th</sup> through 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries): Integration or Exclusion', in John Tolan, Ivan Jablonka, Nikolas Jaspert, and Jean-Philippe Schreiber (eds), *Religious Minorities, Integration and the State*, Turnhout, 2015, pp. 69–82; Paul Bushkovitch, 'Orthodoxy and Islam, 988 – 1725', in *Religion und Integration im Moskauer Russland*, Wiesbaden, 2010, pp. 117–144; Andreas Kappeler, *Russlands erste Nationalitäten: Das Zarenreich und die Völker der Mittleren Wolga vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, Cologne, 1982; Michael Khodarkovsky, 'The Conversion of Non-Christians in Early Modern Russia', in Robert Ceraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (eds.), *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, Ithaca, NY, 2021, pp. 115–143.

disturbances and civil wars and the partial occupation of the Russian territories by foreign forces, the local intellectuals also reflected these catastrophic events through the prism of the historical books of the Old Testament, most notably, the story of the Babylonian captivity. The triumphant narrative on the conquest of the Promised Land contradicted reality and was not recalled at the time.<sup>20</sup> In the second half of the 17th century only, the Tsardom fully recovered from the crisis. Russia resumed its expansion towards the West, gaining a part of Ukrainian territory in the war with Poland-Lithuania (1654 – 1667), and fought with Sweden in its Baltic provinces (1656 – 1658), although with no decisive outcome.<sup>21</sup> The extensive colonization of the realm's Southern frontier, gradually preventing the invasions of the Crimean Tatars, led the Tsardom to the conflict with the Ottoman Empire in the Northern Black Sea region. The first large-scale Russo-Ottoman war (1672 – 1681) fought in Southern Ukraine ended up indecisively. During the two campaigns against the Khanate of Crimea fought in 1687 and 1689, the Russian army failed to breach the peninsula's defenses. In 1695 and 1696, Tsar Peter I (1682 – 1725) led two expeditions against Azov, the Ottoman stronghold at the mouth of the river Don and finally took it, making Russia the dominant political power in the region.<sup>22</sup> During this series of primarily successful military clashes, Russia claimed vast territories populated by non-Orthodox Christians or Muslims. The question of how to treat the infidels while taking their cities and making captives emerged, re-actualizing the Biblical narratives on Holy war.

This re-actualization of accustomed rhetoric tools underwent a significant cultural change inspired by the West. The European impulses were crucial for Russian cultural life since, at least, the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Western newspapers and books had been translated for the royal use regularly since the 1640s, the first theatrical performances were organized for the Tsar in the 1670s, and the first Academy, in which Greek, Latin, and liberal arts were taught according to the Jesuit curriculum was opened in Moscow in 1686.<sup>23</sup> For some of these developments, the influence emanating from

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<sup>20</sup> See Isaiah Gruber, *Orthodox Russia in Crisis: Church and Nation in the Time of Troubles*, DeKalb, IL, 2012, esp. p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> For an overview on the Russo-Polish War and the annexation of the Ukrainian lands, see Robert I. Frost, *The Northern Wars: War, State and Society: Northeastern Europe, 1558–1721*, London, 2000, pp. 156–191.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of the Ottoman-Russian conflict in the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, see Brian L. Davis, *Warfare, State and Society on the Black Sea Steppe, 1500 – 1700*, London and New York, NY, 2007, pp. 155–187; recently Andrei G. Gus'kov, Kirill A. Kochegarov, Stepan M. Shamin, 'Russko-turetskaia voina 1686–1700 gg', *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, 6, 2020, pp. 30–49.

<sup>23</sup> See Ingrid Maier and Daniel C. Waugh, 'Muscovy and European Information Revolution: Creating the Mechanisms for Obtaining Foreign News', in Simon Franklin, and Katherine Bowers (eds.), *Muscovy and the European Information Revolution: Creating the Mechanisms for Obtaining Foreign News*, Cambridge, 2017, pp. 77–112; Stepan M. Shamin, *Kuranty XVII stoletii: Evropeiskaia pressa v Rossii i vozniknovenie russkoi periodicheskoi pechati*, Moscow and Saint Petersburg, 2011; Claudia R. Jensen, Ingrid Maier, Stepan Shamin, Daniel C. Waugh, *Russia's Theatrical Past: Court Entertainment in the Seventeenth Century*, Bloomington, IN, 2021; Max J. Okenfuss, *The Rise and Fall of Latin Humanism in Early Modern Russia: Pagan Authors, Ukrainians, and the Resiliency of Muscovy*, Leiden, 1995, pp. 45 – 79; Nikolaos A. Chrissidis, *An Academy at the Court of the Tsars: Greek Scholars and Jesuit Education in Early Modern Russia*, DeKalb, IL, 2016.

the Ukrainian and Belorussian lands, either newly conquered or temporarily occupied during the Russo-Polish war (1654 - 1667), was essential. The local Orthodox clerics, schooled in the Catholic-influenced seminaries, acquired prestigious positions in the Russian ecclesiastical hierarchy and at the royal court and brought to Moscow the art of late humanist rhetoric serving the transfer of late scholastic moral theology. The discourses of the Holy War, based on the supporting Biblical examples and the ideology of the *antemurale christianitatis*, the bulwark of Christianity against the Muslim threat prevalent in the Polish culture, were also objects of this transfer from the West.<sup>24</sup> The conjunction of the borrowed rhetorical practices and the traditional Russian modes to interpret the Scripture resulted in the re-construction of the more articulated enemy's image and the new requirements for military ethics.

### **I. The Biblical Language, Just War Theories, and the Anti-Islamic Rhetoric**

Just as in the previous century, the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Russian ecclesiastical authors saw their country as the new Israel and their rulers as the emulators of Moses and Joshua, in particular, while discussing their foreign policy and wars against the non-Orthodox adversaries.<sup>25</sup> It is not surprising that some of these authors compared Russia's foes with those of Israel. So did Simeon Polotskii (1629 – 1680) graduated from the Church Academy in Kiev and entered the Russian service after his hometown of Polotsk was taken by the Tsar's troops in 1655. Simeon went to Moscow in 1664 to become the most famous Russian poet of his age, the tutor of the royal children, and one of the principal actors in the transfer of the Baroque culture to the Russian capital.<sup>26</sup> When Tsar Alexei (1645 – 1676) visited Polotsk in 1656, preparing the military campaign against the Swedish fortress of Riga, Simeon praised the monarch with the verses, in which he claimed God would have assisted the Tsar in the war with the Lutheran Swedes as He acted through His angel for Joshua at Jericho and against the Amorites.<sup>27</sup> Although Alexei's assault on Riga was not successful, Simeon greeted him upon Alexei's return as 'the exterminator of the hideous heresy and the spreader of the Orthodox faith,' who, like Moses, passed through the sea and 'defeated the Amalek's

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<sup>24</sup> For the *antemurale* ideology, see Paul Srodecki, *Antemurale Christianitatis: Zur Genese der Bollwerkretorik im östlichen Mitteleuropa an der Schwelle vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit*, Husum, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Maureen Perrie, 'Moscow in 1666: New Jerusalem, Third Rome, Third Apostasy', *Quaestio Rossica*, 3, 2014, pp. 75–85, argues that the notion of Russia as the 'New Israel' and, in particular, Moscow as 'The New Jerusalem' was in retreat among Russian ecclesiastical officials after the official deposition of Patriarch Nikon in 1666 being rarely evoked at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This perception might be true with regard to the inner church rhetoric but seems to be questionable while discussing texts and images dedicated to wars with external enemies.

<sup>26</sup> For Simeon's life and writings, see Lidiia I. Sazonova, 'Biografiia pisatel'ia XVII v. v istoriko-kul'turnom kontekste: Sluchai Simeona Polotskogo', in E. V. Ivanova, (ed.), *Biografiia v istorii kul'tury*, Moscow, 2018, pp. 137–179; Margarita A. Korzo, *Nravstvennoe bogoslovie Simeona Polotskogo: Osvoenie katolicheskoi traditsii Moskovskimi knizhnikami vtoroi poloviny XVII veka*, Moscow, 2011; Okenfuss, *The Rise and Fall of Latin Humanism*, pp. 58–63.

<sup>27</sup> Simeon Polotskii, *Virshi*, eds. Vladimir K. Bylinin, Lola U. Zvonareva, Minsk, 1990, 31. The Biblical reference for wars against the Amorite Kings is Joshua 10.



forces by [own] force,' subjugating the new Amalekites, the people of Ammon, the Moabites in Jericho and the city of Tyre and the sons of Hagar.<sup>28</sup>

Simeon was also the first Russian author who discussed the Biblical examples from an ethical point of view, questioning explicitly whether mass killing could be approved by God in religious warfare. In 1676, when the conflict with the Ottoman Empire resolutely escalated from the frontier-small war to the clash of the Tsar's and Sultan's main armies, he completed a short treatise entitled *Discourse on War (Beseda o brani)*. Only one copy of the *Discourse*, taking some twenty pages of small format, survived in a handwritten volume of Simeon's short essays, now in the collection of the State Historical Museum in Moscow.<sup>29</sup> Despite its small size and limited distribution, Simeon's text deserves attention in the history of Russian moral theology, particularly the reflection on the Biblical military imagery perceived through lenses of transconfessional rhetoric tradition.

Like many Christian authors before him, Simeon proved that a Christian community could wage war against its enemies and that killing was not prohibited to Christian soldiers. Relying upon the arguments, first developed by Augustin in the polemic against Faustus Manichean, Simeon denounced the radical pacifistic approach of Erasmus and the Anabaptists.<sup>30</sup> Simeon also attacked the peaceful notion he attributed to Martin Luther and argued that the Christians were obliged to defend themselves against the Turks.<sup>31</sup> As a mandatory argument, Simeon cited a long list of the Old Testament examples of pious warriors from Abraham to Judas Maccabeus, including Moses and Joshua. They, with God's assistance, crushed the troops of the Canaan Kings.<sup>32</sup> He also cited the famous passage from Luke 3:14 regarding the preaching of John the Baptist on the allowance of mercenary service: 'And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them: "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages."' <sup>33</sup> In defense of these principal theses based on the Scripture, Simeon cited a wide range of quotes from Latin and Greek Church Fathers, such as Augustin (354 – 430) and Ambrose

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<sup>28</sup> Simeon Polotskii, *Virshi*, 33. The Biblical references for wars against the Ammonites and the Moabites are Joshua 12 to 13, and 24.

<sup>29</sup> Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Muzei, Sinodal'noe Sobranie, no. 660 (further – GIM, Sin. 660), 159r–178v. For a short overview of the treatise's content, see Andrei P. Bogdanov, *Moskovskaia publitsistika poslednei chetverti XVII veka*, Moscow, 2001, pp. 76–79; Puzikov, 'Obshchestvenno-politicheskie i filosofskie vzgliady Simeona Polotskogo', *Iz istorii filosofskoi i obshchestvenno-politicheskoi mysli Belorussii*, Minsk, 1962, pp. 183–203, here pp. 193–195.

<sup>30</sup> GIM, Sin. 660, 159v–160r. For the pacifistic idea by Erasmus and the Anabaptists, see, e. g., Fred R. Dalmayr, 'A War Against the Turks? Erasmus on War and Peace', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 34, issue 1, 2006, 67–85.

<sup>31</sup> GIM, Sin. 660, 172r – 178v. Simeon contradicts here Luther's treatise *Vom Kriege wider die Türken*, which he might have known through the agency of some Catholic polemicists. On Luther's comprehensive views on the Turkic threat, see e. g. Gregory Miller, 'Luther's Views of the Jews and Turks', in Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and Lubomir Batka (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, Oxford 2014, pp. 427–435, pp. 431–433.

<sup>32</sup> GIM, Sin. 660, 159v, 161v, 167r.

<sup>33</sup> GIM, Sin. 660, 160r, 171r.

of Milan (c. 340 – 397), and from such as Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 390) and John Chrysostom (c. 347 – 407) respectively.<sup>34</sup>

As Simeon argued, following the existing Christian thought, military violence might be allowed by God and did not constitute a sin if four principal requirements were fulfilled.<sup>35</sup> First, it should be ordered by a legal authority, second, for moral reasons, and third, good intentions. Finally, in such a war, the soldiers should behave appropriately according to a common custom ‘not to harm innocents.’<sup>36</sup> Simeon de facto introduced the concept of neutral status for non-combatants who are not responsible for the sins of their superiors and thus should not be subjected to vengeance for the first time in Russian literary tradition. The victor's mercy had to be extended to all those not directly involved in the conflict, such as travelers, merchants, pilgrims, and clerics. Finally, Simeon believed,

Those who are not fit for war, like children, older men, and women... could be taken captive and plundered because they belonged to the citizens. However, one could not kill them except accidentally. If a soldier, firing at the enemy's troop, kills a child or a woman, he did not sin. However, it is a sin if he kills intentionally according to his will. Indeed, the Divine reason teaches us the same. The Lord ordered the Jews in Deuteronomy, chapter 27, to have mercy on children and women.<sup>37</sup>

To make his position stronger, Simeon cited the example of St. Ambrose of Milan. The latter, according to the Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393 – c. 466), an ecclesiastical historian and theologian, blamed Emperor Theodosius (379 – 395) after he massacred the inhabitants of the rebellious city of Thessaloniki in 390.<sup>38</sup> However, the argument remained weak. First, the quoted commandment of Moses from the Deuteronomy referred to the members of the Israelite community and not the foreigners being objects of military violence. Second, the inconsistency between this moral requirement and the massacres of the Canaanites remained evident. Feeling this, Simeon pointed out a necessary clause:

Although Moses sometimes commanded to kill both women and children, as we read from Deuteronomy, in chapters 2 and 3, this stays not free to our soldiers because he, enlightened

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<sup>34</sup> For the notion on just war by Eastern Church fathers, see Yuri Stoyanov, ‘Norms of War in Eastern Orthodox Christianity’, in Vesselin Popovski, Gregory M. Reichberg, Nicholas Turner (eds.), *World Religions and Norms of War*, Tokyo, New York, and Paris, 2009, pp. 166–219, esp. p. 173.

<sup>35</sup> GIM, Sin. 660. 167v.

<sup>36</sup> GIM, Sin. 660, 171r.

<sup>37</sup> GIM, Sin. 660, 171v. The exact quote from Deuter. 27: 19 reads as ‘Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow.’

<sup>38</sup> GIM, Sin. 660, 171v. Simeon followed Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5: 18.

by the Divine Revelation, knows the will of God. Nobody could act in full accordance with his example.<sup>39</sup>

Notoriously, Simeon operated here with the argument of the singularity of the Divine Revelation given to Moses, but not to the modern rulers and generals, disputed by the Late Scholastic theologians. Unfortunately, one could not be sure whether Simeon might have been familiar with the Spaniards' arguments by reading their original works or in later Latin or Polish paraphrased editions. Simeon's primary source on moral theology, *Hortus pastorium* (1626 – 1627) by the Belgian cleric Jacques Marchant (1585 – 1648), did not exploit the examples in question while discussing homicide particular, killing while fighting just war.<sup>40</sup> *Żołnierskie nabożeństwo* (1606) of the Polish Jesuit Piotr Skarga (1536 – 1612), a probable source for Simeon's reflections on soldier's duties and the moral requirements of mercenary service, also did not discuss the Old Testament's atrocities.<sup>41</sup>

Simeon was the most sophisticated Russian author to refer to the conquest of Canaan. However, he was not the only one who did so in the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The equation of Turks with Midianites was a rhetorical tool for some Ukrainian pro-Moscow preachers of the time.<sup>42</sup> Ignatii Rimskii-Korsakov (c. 1639 – 1701), the abbot of the prestigious Novospasskii monastery close to the capital, compared the Russian army ready for the campaign against Turks and Tatars in 1687 with Joshua and his warriors, preaching the liberation of the Christian countries possessed by Islamic states, primarily, the reconquest of Constantinople.<sup>43</sup> Karion Istomin (c. 1640 – 1717), the corrector of the Moscow Printing House and a long time secretary of the Moscow Patriarch Joachim, also cited a list of examples from the Old Testament in the preface to *Strategemata* by the Roman Sextus Julius Frontinus (1<sup>st</sup> century AD) that he translated and presented to the Tsars Ivan and Peter in 1692. Advocating Christian rights to wage a defensive war against the enemies of their religion, in particular, the Muslims, Istomin recalled Moses' words from Num. 31: 3: 'Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian.'<sup>44</sup> Istomin was cautious when he wrote about 'revenge' towards the pagans of recent days,

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<sup>39</sup> GIM, Sin. 660, 172r. The Biblical reference relies here on the extermination of Ammonites and other people living on the Sinai Peninsula.

<sup>40</sup> Marchant, *Hortus pastorum*, pp. 197–198. For Marchant's compendium as the principal source of Simeon's ideas on homicide, see Korzo, *Nravstvennoe bogoslovie*, pp. 114–119.

<sup>41</sup> Piotr Skarga, *Żołnierskie nabożeństwo*, Kraków, 1606. For Skarga's writings on war and soldiers, see Damien Tricoire, 'To Fight or Not to Fight: Piotr Skarga, the Catholic Ideal of Christian Soldier, and the Reformation of Polish Nobility (around 1600)', *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, 4, 2017, pp. 624–636.

<sup>42</sup> See an example from 1688 in Roman I. Shiyan, 'Preaching Politics: Anti-Muslim and Pro-Muscovite Rhetoric in the Sermons of the Ukrainian Orthodox Clergy (1660s – 1670s)', *The Historian*, 71, 2, 2009, pp. 318–338, here pp. 323–324.

<sup>43</sup> See Bogdanov, *Moskovskaia publitsistika*, pp. 157–158.

<sup>44</sup> RGADA, fond 181, opis' 3, no. 257, 3v. For Istomin's translation of Frontinus' work, see Lev N. Pushkarev, *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia mysl' Rossii. Vtoraia polovina XVII veka: Ocherki istorii*. Moscow, 1982, pp. 212–

the Turks and Tatars, meaning the release of the Christian captives from slavery and the prevention of new slave-trading expeditions of the Tatars frequent at the Russian and Polish Southern frontier in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> However, unlike Rimskii-Korsakov, he never called for the resolute conquest of the Islamic countries nor the total extermination or enslavement of the non-Christians.

Also, the texts, written by laic authors, appealed to the Holy examples to justify the religious war or some particular campaign. Andrei Lyzlov, the Moscow nobleman, who served in the field army during the Russo-Turkish war of 1672 to 1681, compared the conquest of Kazan by Ivan in 1552 with the war Moses waged against the Amalekites in his *Scythian History*, a compilation on the history of Turkic adversaries of Russia from native and Polish sources.<sup>46</sup> In his *Report on Military Tactics* (1700/01), Ivan Pososhkov (1652 – 1726), a wealthy and erudite Moscow artisan interested in both military affairs and religious ethics, praised the Israelites and their leaders for elaborate preparation for war and persuaded the contemporary Russian troops, ‘to care about good arms and good commanding and fighting skills and every military administration, because God will not deign to assist us as he assisted Joshua in destroying Jericho.’<sup>47</sup>

The Biblical metaphors persisted in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the Great Northern War with Sweden.<sup>48</sup> The Ukrainian-born Stephan Iavorskii (1658 – 1722), the locum tenens of the Moscow Patriarch seat since 1700 and, thus, the most high-ranking hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church and the principal executor of Petrine ecclesiastical reforms, compared in his public sermons Peter I with Joshua for his success in taking of Swedish fortresses in the Baltic.<sup>49</sup> In 1711, when Peter unsuccessfully resumed the hostilities with the Ottoman Empire for a short period, Stephan celebrated a sermon entitled *The Russian Moses (Moisei*

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216; Bogdanov, *Moskovskaia publitsistika*, p. 107; Sergei I Nikolaev, *Pol'sko-russkie literaturnye sviazi XVI – XVIII vv.: Bibliograficheskie materialy*, Saint-Petersburg, 2008, pp. 194–195.

<sup>45</sup> For slavery and slave trade in the Early Modern Russia and in the Black Sea Steppe, see Christoph Witzentrath, ‘Introduction. Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia: An Overview of the Russian and Ottoman Empires and Central Asia’, in Christoph Witzentrath (ed.), *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom and Abolition in World History, 1200 – 1860*, Farnham, 2016, pp. esp. pp. 8–9; Davis, *Warfare*, pp. 23–27.

<sup>46</sup> Lyzlov, *Skifskaia istoriia*, p. 96.

<sup>47</sup> Ivan T. Pososhkov, ‘O ratnom povedenii’, in Ivan T. Pososhkov, *Kniga o skudosti i bogatstve i drugie sochineniia*, ed. Boris B. Kafengauz, Moscow, 1952, pp. 245–272, here p. 260. On Pososhkov and his writing, see Gary M. Hamburg, *Russia's Path toward Enlightenment: Faith, Politics, and Reason, 1500–1801*, New Haven, Conn., 2016, pp. 286–287; Oleg Rusakovskiy, ‘Foreigners Are Said to Be Wise and Honest but They Teach Us False Things: “On Military Tactics” (1700/01) by Ivan Pososhkov and Western Military Tradition’, *War in History*, 2021 (online first).

<sup>48</sup> For the role of Biblical metaphors in the Russian propaganda of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, see Robert Collis, *The Petrine Instauration: Religion, Esotericism, and Science at the Court of Peter the Great, 1689 - 1725*, Leiden, Boston, MS, Cologne, 2011, pp. 258–298; for a general overview on the Great Northern war, Frost, *The Northern Wars*, pp. 226–300.

<sup>49</sup> Stefan Iavorskii, ‘Kolesnitsa torzhestvennaia’, in *Propovedi blazhennyia pamiati Stefana Iavorskogo, mitropolita Riazanskogo i Muromskogo*, Moscow, 1805, part 3, pp. 140–184, here p. 169. A good collection of sermons composed by the Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchs at the time of the Great Northern war, provided with the original pagination is Natalia N. Borodkina, ed., *Petrovskaia epokha v tserkovnoi publitsistike nachala XVIII veka*, Saratov, 2013.

*Rossiiskii*) – an apparent reference to the Tsar. The hierarch praised the proposed campaign against the Sultan as the first step to liberate Constantinople and then the Promised Land with the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the same places which Moses, Gedeon, and Joshua once conquered for the Chosen People of Israel.<sup>50</sup> Despite militant rhetoric, Stephan did not descant the fate of the non-Orthodox population after the desired Russian victory nor advocate violence against non-combatants. Stephan's protégé, archbishop Gavriil Buzhinskii (1680 – 1731), equated the Swedish King Charles XII with Amalek and Midian for his troops' multitude and ethnic diversity.<sup>51</sup> However, the Lutherans in Swedish Baltic provinces and Muslims of the Ottoman Empire, although equated with the Canaanites rhetorically, were not seriously threatened by extermination, at least, in the official religious discourse.

## II. Holy Violence in Images

Whereas the translations of foreign military treatises, like *Strategemata*, and texts on moral theology, like those of Simeon Polotskii or Ignatii Rimskii-Korsakov, were often available to the royal family and the higher political and religious elite of the Tsardom only, the Biblical narrative on the Israelites' wars in Canaan found a much larger audience being immortalized in the religious paintings, on the walls of churches and, rarely, secular buildings. Since the Archangel Michael was celebrated as one of the most important celestial patrons of Rus' and, in particular, the Moscow Principality, his deeds, including his assistance to the Israelites in their wars with pagans, formed an essential cluster of ideas for icon and fresco painting in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Russian art.<sup>52</sup> The leaders of Israel, receiving the Divine support through the Archangel, stood in these paintings as predecessors and quasi personifications of the Moscow Princes and the Tsars since the 16th century. In numerous fresco paintings and icons of the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, St. Michael was portrayed with the sword alongside the kneeling Joshua to provide him with the Divine sanction to destroy Jericho.<sup>53</sup> Also, several military banners, including Prince Dmitry Michailovich Pozharskii (1578 – 1642), who liberated Moscow from the Polish garrison in 1612, depicted St. Michael and Joshua before the storm of Jericho.<sup>54</sup> However, in all these cases,

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<sup>50</sup> Stefan Iavorskii, 'Moisei Rossiiskii: K osvobozhdeniiu liudei khristianskikh ot raboty egipetskiia-turetskiia', in *Slova Stefana Iavorskogo, mitropolita Riazanskogo i Muromskogo*, Kiev, 1875, pp. 123–145.

<sup>51</sup> Gavriil Buzhinskii, 'V 17-iu nedeliu po Piatidesiatnitse v vospominanie pobedy nad Levengauptom pod Lesnym', in *Propovedi Gavriila Buzhinskogo*, Dorpat, 1899, pp. 243–260, here p. 259.

<sup>52</sup> On the images of St. Michael in the Russian Medieval painting, see Rowland, 'Biblical Military Imagery', pp. 191–192.

<sup>53</sup> See Rowland, 'Biblical Military Imagery', p. 193; Danilova, 'Kontsepsiia "Moskva – osushchestvlenyi Ierusalim" v programme monumental'noi zhivopisi Uspenskogo sobora Moskovskogo Kremliia (k postanovke problemy)', *Iskusstvo khristianskogo mira*, 3, 1999, pp. 58–68, here p. 61.

<sup>54</sup> See Rowland, 'Biblical Military Imagery', pp. 193 and 198; Simon Franklin, *The Russian Graphosphere, 1450–1850*, Cambridge, 2019, p. 88; Arsenii Petrov, "'Znamia Ermaka" iz sobraniia Oruzheinoi palaty: Legenda i fakty', *Questio Rossica*, 4, issue 1, 2016, pp. 157–169.

the defeated and suffering population of Canaan was out of the image. In contrast, merely the schematic silhouette of the city, still staying intact or already shaken by the sound of the Israeli horns, was present with no inhabitants depicted.

A rare but notorious exception was the paintings in the Kremlin Royal Palace, in the so-called Golden Chamber, where the Moscow sovereigns received foreign envoys from the West and the East. First executed soon after the royal palace was constructed in the last decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the paintings of the Golden Chamber and its anteroom suffered then from several fires, being massively restored in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, in the 1630s and then 1670s, before the entire building was demolished because of the disrepair in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup> Before one of the renovations, in 1672, a squad led by Simon Ushakov, the most famous Russian painter, carefully documented the existing paintings in both rooms describing the frescos and copying the bulky explanatory inscriptions.<sup>56</sup> The central theme of the paintings was the Divine predestination of the Moscow rulers, expressed in the circle expressing the dynastic history of the Russian princely house and, as its counterpoint, in the numerous scenes depicting military deeds of the people of Israel, defeating pagans on behalf of God. Most of the modern historians attribute at least the last two iconographic circles to the early 1550s, the time when the young Tsar Ivan IV took Kazan, destroying the Tatar Khanate and establishing Orthodoxy on the Middle Volga, so the spirit of a holy conquest might have inspired the commissioners and the first observers of these paintings.

According to the description of 1672, eight separate compositions narrated the story of Moses' and Gedeons' wars against Midian and Amalek (Num. 25 and Judg. 7 to 8) in the Golden Chamber. Another ten in the anteroom depicted Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land (Josh. 10 to 11). Unlike most of the paintings in the contemporary churches, these frescos depicted scenes of praying and devotional interactions between Moses or Joshua and the Archangel and numerous battles and, not rarely, the atrocities committed during or after the combat against the pagan people and their rulers. Notably, the storming of Jericho was absent from this pictorial narrative. As the description of 1672 clarifies, the painters did not spare bloody details but openly mentioned

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<sup>55</sup> The most detailed summary on the history of the Golden Chamber and its paintings is provided in Olga I. Podobedova, *Moskovskaia shkola zhivopisi pri Ivan IV: Raboty v Moskovskom Kremle 40-kh–70-kh godov XVI v.*, Moscow, 1972, pp. 59–68. Recently, the traditional attributing of most of the painting circles in the Golden Chamber to the age of Ivan IV, has been questioned in Olga V. Chumicheva, "‘Chto est’ alegoriia?’ Smena kul’turnoi paradigmy v reprezentatsii verkhovnoi vlasti v Moskve v pervoi polovine XVI v.,” in *Rus’, Rossiia: Srednevekov’e i Novoe vremia. Shestye chteniia pamiati akademika RAN L. V. Milova, Moskva, 21 – 22 noiabria 2019: Materialy k mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii*, Moscow, 2019, 130 – 133. For the discussion on the iconographic program of the frescos and its possible theological and political implications, see Michael S. Flier, ‘K semioticheskomu analizu Zolotoi palaty Moskovskogo Kremliia’, in Andrei L. Batalov, (ed.), *Russkoe iskusstvo pozdnego Srednevekov’ia: XVI vek*, Saint-Petersburg, 2003, pp. 178–187. For holy violence as a particular theme of its frescos, see Rowland, *The Third Rome*, p. 606.

<sup>56</sup> Ivan E. Zabelin, *Materialy dlia istorii, arkheologii i statistiki goroda Moskvy*, Moscow, 1884, part 1, cols. 1238–1255.

slaughter of the defeated communities and emphasized the direct Divine intervention. Here, the description of the last composition of this sequence is quoted as it had been seen by Ushakov and his assistants:

It is written there, on the same wall, at the third place: 'They set fire on Hazor, and Joshua took their king and smote him thereof with the sword, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded.' Furthermore, it is painted there under the inscription: Joshua stays on a high place with his troops behind him. Beyond his horse, a servant holds the King being smitten, along with his troops. Behind him, a fortress is burning, and the people are burning within.<sup>57</sup>

Whereas the paintings of the Golden Chamber did not survive, another extraordinary pictorial narrative from the age of Ivan IV is available. The Great Illustrated Chronicle was produced on behalf of the Tsar in the late 1560s and narrated the universal history from the World Creation until recent years. The most splendid medieval and Early Modern Russian manuscripts, the Great Illustrated Chronicle, survived in ten volumes, each having up to 1,500 miniatures. The pictorial stuff of the Chronicle, dedicated to the wars with the Tatars and primarily to the conquest of Kazan, had been already discussed by many scholars, most recently by Valerie Kivelson, in the context of Russian imperial ideology and proclaimed religious jealousy.<sup>58</sup> However, its second volume, in which the story of the people of Israel in the Promised Land was narrated, is no less eloquent. Up to twenty small images on slaughtering, burning, plundering, and torturing the Canaan people and sometimes also their rulers, depicted in crowns to mark their higher status.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps this unprecedented theater of atrocities, as well as similar images in the Golden Chamber, which predated the Illustrated Chronicle by fifteen years, mirrored not the common Russian elite's attitudes toward religiously motivated violence, but rather Ivan IV's perception of his Divine mission to exterminate heresies and prepare the second coming of Christ.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the unprecedented massacres happened at the time of Ivan not only on the walls of his Kremlin ceremonial chambers or the pages of the manuscripts, but also in reality, both in the foreign cities taken assault, such as in Polotsk in 1563 and within the Russian realm, in Novgorod, in 1569.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Zabelin, *Materialy*, col. 1255. The Biblical reference is Josh. 11: 10–13.

<sup>58</sup> Kivelson, 'Rivers of Blood', pp. 73–75.

<sup>59</sup> These and dozens of other examples can be found in *Litsevoi letopisnyi svod Ivana Groznogo*, vol. 2, Moscow, 2006.

<sup>60</sup> For Ivan's apocalyptic worldview, see Andrei L. Iurganov, 'Oprichnina i Strashnyi sud', *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, issue 3, 1997, pp. 52–75.

<sup>61</sup> See Sergei Bogatyrev, 'Battle for Divine Wisdom: The Rhetoric of Ivan IV's Campaign against Polotsk', in Eric Lohr and Marshall Poe (eds), *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450–1917*, Leiden, Boston, MS, 2002, pp. 325–363; Robert O. Crummey, 'New Wine in Old Bottles? Ivan IV and Novgorod', *Russian History* 14 (1987), pp. 61–76. For a critical assessment of contemporary accounts about these atrocities, see Charles J. Halperin, *The Double Standard: Livonian Chronicles and Muscovite Barbarity during the Livonian War (1558–1582)*, *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, issue 1, 2018, pp. 126–147.

The scale of these massacres and the role of the Tsar's religious motivation in these bloody events have been actively disputed. However, their chronological coincidence with the creation of the pictorial narratives discussed above is undeniable and symptomatic.

How might the Moscow elite of the 17<sup>th</sup> century have reflected the pictorial heritage of the previous century they saw during the long-lasting receptions in the Golden Chamber and its anteroom? In his article, answering the same question, Daniel B. Rowland argued that the Moscow aristocracy and the lesser servitors at the royal court, even if they were not able to perceive the theological meanings of the iconographic program in all their complexity, certainly have had enough time to examine the frescos in details and to perceive the idea of mandatory loyalty towards the ruler and the country as one of their primary dictates.<sup>62</sup> The military theme presented using the Biblical examples might have been significant for the courtiers as most of them had personal experience in war with Muslims or Western Christians. Probably, the scenes also affected the perception modes of the Tsars as they spent hours gazing at the images since their youth.<sup>63</sup> Good evidence of how this subjective mode of perception might have worked for an outsider is the drawing of Erich Palmquist, a member of the Swedish embassy led by count Gustaf Oxenstierna received by Tsar Alexei in the Golden Chamber in 1674.<sup>64</sup> Most probably, Palmquist was present at the ceremony but certainly did not have a good angle of view, not to mention an opportunity to draw from nature. Palmquist schematically drew an unidentified military scene in his album, including a cavalry squad led by a high-status person on the Chamber's wall to the right side of the royal throne. However, as we know from Ushakov's catalog, a religious scene was depicted there.<sup>65</sup> Palmquist's inaccuracy is symptomatic as the military scenes provided an understandable ideological message to the visitors of the Chamber and were, perhaps, the most significant part of its decoration from a foreign point of view.

Whether or not they were obsessed with the pieces of militant art in the Kremlin palace, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Moscow elite did not commission painters to create a series of images depicting the conquest of the Promised Land, similar to the Golden Chamber. Only two large-scale frescos on the south wall of the Archangel's Cathedral in the Kremlin, where the Moscow Princes and Tsars were buried along with their closest relatives, have survived. The actual painting decoration of the

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<sup>62</sup> Daniel B. Rowland, 'Two Cultures, One Throne Room: Secular Courtiers and Orthodox Culture in the Golden Hall and Orthodox Culture in the Golden Hall of the Moscow Kremlin', in Valerie A. Kivelson, and Robert H. Greene, (eds), *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars*, University Park, PA, pp. 33–57.

<sup>63</sup> The first two Tsars from the Romanov dynasty, Mikhail and Alexei, were only sixteen years old when they ascended the throne in 1613, and, 1645, respectively.

<sup>64</sup> Ulla Birgegård, Laila Nordquist, and Gennadii M. Kovalenko (eds), *Zametki o Rossii, sdelannye Erikom Palmkvistom v 1674 godu = Några Observationer Angående Ryssland = Some Observations Concerning Russia*, Moscow, 2012, 21r.

<sup>65</sup> Zabelin, *Materialy*, col. 1249.



Cathedral was completed between 1652 and 1666, at the time of the generally successful Russo-Polish war. The frescoes may have replicated earlier paintings created during Ivan IV's reign in the early 1560s. However, no detailed description of this earlier pictorial evidence survived, as was the case with the Golden Chamber.<sup>66</sup> As the Cathedral itself had St. Michael as its patron, the circle on the Archangel's deeds also included several scenes from the Old Testament, notably Gideon's victory over the Midianites and the destruction of Jericho by Joshua. Following the Biblical text, the Moscow painters depicted the Israelites slaughtering the Midian soldiers in a cavalry skirmish and massacring Jericho's men, women, and children.

The evidence from the provinces regarding the depiction of the Biblical narrative of the sacred conquest and violence as its integral part is much more diverse than from Moscow for the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Two developments in architecture and figurative art were crucial in this regard. First, the smaller churches constructed on the financial expenses of local religious authorities, merchant corporations, or wealthy individuals were often provided with closed parvises on galleries established around their main buildings. Whereas scenes from the New Testament or the lives of particular saints predominated in the main sacral space of a church, the walls and vaults of the galleries provided additional space for paintings depicting scenes from the Bible's historical books. The galleries, unlike the churches themselves, were not the spaces for devotion but much more for relaxation and communications with other parishioners, their visitors examined the paintings in the immediate vicinity with attention and curiosity.<sup>67</sup> Second, the Western pictorial influence was substantial. The Russian painters profited much from the easier access to European illustrated books on sacred history, most importantly, to the illustrated Bibles edited in the Netherlands since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and brought to Eastern Europe by Dutch merchants. These books provided the Russian masters with comprehensive multi-figure compositions to replicate or create more sophisticated interpretations on the walls of the Orthodox churches. The scenes from Holy history were among the primary objects of this transfer.<sup>68</sup>

The trends mentioned above were significant in Yaroslavl, where the trade route from Arkhangelsk to Moscow, where most European merchants traveled with their goods, crossed the Volga, the leading trade artery connecting Russia's interior with its frontier regions and Oriental markets via the Caspian Sea. The local merchant communities were compassionate towards Western

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<sup>66</sup> See Tatiana E. Samoilo, *Kniazheskie portrety v rospisi Arkhangel'skogo sobora Moskovskogo Kremliia: Ikonograficheskaia programma XVI veka*, Moscow, 2004, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> For the architectonic features of the Russian galleries and their pictorial decoration in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, see Mariia A. Nekrasova, 'Novoe v sinteze zhivopisi i arkhitektury XVII veka (Rospis' tserkvi Il'ia Proroka v Iaroslavle)', in Viktor N. Lazarev, Ol'ga I. Podobedova, and Vladimir V. Kostochkin, *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo*, Moscow, 1964, vol. 1964, pp. 89–109.

<sup>68</sup> See Tatiana L. Karpova, ed., *Bibliia Piskatora – nastol'naia kniga russkikh ikonopistsev*, Moscow, 2019.

influences and patronized the artistic experiments of the local artists.<sup>69</sup> From 1640 to 1641, St. Nicolas (*Nikola Nadeina*) Church, built and decorated at the expense of the wealthy merchant family of Sveteshnikov, was painted by the squad from nearby Kostroma. The frescos had decayed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were re-painted in 1882, but the selection of subjects and, mostly, the composition of singular images remained intact. In the southern gallery, Gideon's victory over Amalek and the taking of Jericho are depicted. However, the main emphasis in both scenes was placed on Moses's praying and the carrying of the arch around the walls of Jericho, rather than on the atrocities committed.

The murals in several churches in Yaroslavl and the surrounding area followed the pattern, first applied in the St. Nicolas church in the last third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The battle with the Amalekites was depicted on the vault in the southern gallery of the Resurrection Church in the Metropolitan's residence in Rostov Velikii near Yaroslavl, which was painted in the first half of the 1670s. In contrast, the primary attention was paid to the cavalry skirmish.<sup>70</sup> Equally, numerous battle paintings were present in the Southern gallery of St. Nicolas (*Nikoly Mokrogo*) Church in Yaroslavl, decorated by the local masters at the expense of the parish community.<sup>71</sup> From 1703 to 1704, the masters from Kostroma painted the gallery in the John Baptist's Church in Yaroslavl's suburb Tolchkovo, sponsored by the local merchant community, producing the detailed cycle on the wars with the Midianites and the Amalekites and also on the deeds of Joshua, including some diverse compositions on Jericho's taking. Due to the extensive use of Dutch illustrated Bible editions, the Kostroma masters enriched their pictorial narrative with exclusive scenes missing in other Russian paintings, such as the story of Rahab, the harlot from Jericho, who concealed the Israelite spies in her house before the attack on the city and, thus, was granted with mercy after Jericho was taken and its inhabitants slaughtered.<sup>72</sup>

The same squad from Kostroma worked in the Prophet Elias' Church, the most famous and best-surviving chef-d'oeuvre of the late 17<sup>th</sup>-century Yaroslavl fresco painting. The historical images from the Old Testament played a significant role in the decoration of its galleries, painted, most probably, in the 1680s with possible minor changes in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>73</sup> On the Western gallery's central vault, just opposite the church's main entrance, the visitors were confronted with the skirmish of the Israelites, sided by the preaching Moses and the Amalekites, some of them

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<sup>69</sup> On Yaroslavl's frescoes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, see Marie Ann Polo de Beaulieu and Victoria Smirnova, 'Visual Preaching in Russia (Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries)', in Timothy J. Johnson, Katherine Wrisley Shelby, and John D. Young, eds., *Preaching and New Worlds: Sermons as Mirrors of Realms Near and Far*, London, 2018, pp. 201–226.

<sup>70</sup> See Tat'iana L. Nikitina, *Russkie tserkovnye stennye rospisi 1670-kh–1680-kh godov*, Moscow, 2015.

<sup>71</sup> See Nikitina, *Russkie tserkovnye stennye rospisi*.

<sup>72</sup> See T. S. Zlotnikova, *Tserkov' Ioanna Predtechy v Iaroslavle*, Iaroslavl', 2001, esp. p. 38.

<sup>73</sup> See Tamara A. Rutman, *Tserkov' Il'ii Proroka v Iaroslavle*, Iaroslavl', 2004, 154 – 162.

lying on the ground being killed. The paintings of the Southern gallery are dominated by the story of Joshua, including five diverse compositions: Joshua's encounter with St. Michael (Josh. 5: 13 – 15), the taking of Jericho (Josh. 6), the taking of Hazor (Josh. 11), and two other battles which are challenging to identify. Beyond the deeds of Joshua, the story of Gedeon and the fleece of wool which symbolized God's promise of victory to the people of Israel (Judg. 6: 36 – 40), was presented in the gallery's vault. The emphasis in all of these images was primarily on Israelite warriors and, as in the scene of the ark's bearing beneath walls of Jericho, the Israelite priests. Physical violence inflicted on the defeated enemy's soldiers was not a rare occurrence there. However, the painters spared the most brutal scenes of the massacre over the Canaanite women and children, the burning of pagan cities, and the plundering and destruction of the properties.

### **III. The Biblical Narrative and the Military Reality: Two Concluding Examples**

Soldiers who fought for Russia in the wars with the Ottomans, Tatars, and Swedes in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century might have heard the preaching of Ignatii Rimskii-Korsakov, Stephan Iavorskii, and Gavriil Buzhniskii. They might have glanced at the paintings in Moscow, Yaroslavl, Rostov, or other churches where the contemporary paintings have not survived. The political and intellectual elite might also have been familiar with the treatises of Simeon Polotskii and Karion Istomin and attended the royal receptions in the Golden Chamber. Did the knowledge about the extremities of the sacred violence sanctioned by God influence their behavior during actual military campaigns? The evidence to fill the gap between the Biblical imagery and the reality of Early Modern warfare is, in the case of Early Petrine Russia, scarce as it has been for many other regions and epochs in Christian history. However, the two following cases seem significant enough to end this article with their analyzes.

The first example is derived from the letter Andrei Vinius (1641 – 1717), the then head of the Apothecary Chancery, sent from Moscow to Tsar Peter, to the camp under the walls of Azov on July 16, 1696. Vinius, the son of the Dutch merchant and fabricant, was born in Moscow and made an extraordinary career, first as the translator and envoy, due to his knowledge of several foreign languages, and later as the head of some central governmental institutions, such as the state-run postal service, the Apothecary Chancery, responsible for the royal health, and the Siberian Chancery governing Russia's Eastern provinces. Vinius also belonged to the intimate circle of the young Tsar Peter, whom he instructed in Dutch in the 1690s. Being well-connected both in Russia and abroad, Vinius was one of the country's primary agents of Western cultural influence. He also

collected a comprehensive library of foreign secular books, probably the best in Moscow before the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>74</sup>

The Russian army, led by Peter, took Azov on July 10, 1696. However, Vinius, who stayed in Moscow and informed Peter about the diplomatic reports coming to the capital, did not have accounts about this victory when he sent his letter to the Tsar on July 16. However, he was optimistic about the progress of the siege and expressed his hope that Azov would have been taken in a short time. On this occasion, Vinius wrote:

God sends fear and trembling to your enemies and all pagan people living near Azov, just as he did in the past to all people of Canaan who could not stand up to God's people. Jericho, their capital, was captured on the seventh day of the Ark's journey, with its walls falling to the sound of horns. Now, let the almighty hand of God, which gives all victories, help you, our pious monarch. Let the walls of this nefarious nest [...] fall in the same or lesser number of days by marching around with great brazen horns that emit fire, smoke, and iron.<sup>75</sup>

An experienced courtier, Vinius knowingly combined here the standard parallel between Peter and Joshua and the more specific adulation towards the young Tsar who boasted with his artillery skills and personally took part in the bombardment of Azov as a simple gunner. Further, Vinius used the Biblical metaphor comparing the Turks, inhabiting the fortress, and the Tatars living in the country around it with the people of Canaan and, thus, equating Peter's military campaign with the conquest of the Promised Land. We can assume that Vinius, a master of courtly adoration, wrote what his addressee enjoyed reading, even though the Tsar himself never used Biblical metaphors in his letters.

The second and final example is even more fascinating. It originates from an anonymous text, entitled *The Chronicle of the Year 1700 (Letopisets 1700 godu)* and is composed soon after the events described, probably in winter 1700/01. As historians suggest, based on scarce information from the Chronicle, its author was a Moscow nobleman. He served in the cavalry troops under boyar Boris Petrovich Sheremetev (1652 – 1719) in the campaign against Sweden, which ended with the catastrophic defeat at Narva on November 30, 1700.<sup>76</sup> The anonymous chronicler combined the first-hand military experience of a lower or middle-rank serviceman with the solid

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<sup>74</sup> See Vinius' biographies in Kees Boterbloem, *Moderniser of Russia: Andrei Vinius, 1641–1716*, Basingstoke, 2013; Igor' N. Iurkin, *Andrei Andreevich Vinius, 1641–1716*, Moscow, 2007.

<sup>75</sup> *Pis'ma i bumagi imperatora Petra Velikogo*, Saint-Petersburg, 1887, vol. 1, p. 517.

<sup>76</sup> For an overview of the Narva campaign of 1700, see Frost, *The Northern Wars*, 229 – 230; Christopher Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West: Origins and Nature of Russian Military Power, 1700 – 1800*, London and Boston, MA, 1987, 15 – 17; Vladimir S. Velikanov, *Rugodivskii pokhod i srazhenie pod Narvoi 19 (30) noiabria 1700*, Moscow, 2020.

erudition, primarily in the Holy Scripture but also in historical and, to a certain extent, in theological texts. Disappointed with the progress and disastrous outcome of the Narva campaign, he saw the main reason for the defeat in the abolition of old customs and the neglect of the religious commandments by the Russians, not least by the Tsar. Using theological arguments, the author criticized some of the most radical Petrine cultural reforms, such as the adoption of the Western Anno Domini year count instead of traditional Russian chronology, starting with the Creation of World, the European-style New Year festivities, and the mandatory abolition of the customary Russian attire for the European one.<sup>77</sup> He was also dissatisfied with Petrine innovations in military affairs, such as the introduction of bayonets instead of pikes and the drilling of Russian soldiers according to Western samples.<sup>78</sup>

In the chronicler's eyes, one of the recent shortcomings which contradicted the Russian military custom and the Biblical prescriptions was the policy towards the population and resources of the occupied territories of Swedish Estonia during the siege of Narva. The chronicler declared the regular contribution system, based on the centralized collecting of provisions from the locals and the prohibition to plunder the peasant households for troops' benefits, as harmful to the army. Pityingly, he described the miseries of the gentry servitors, who, deprived of plunder, suffered from bad weather, hunger, and the lack of supplies in their camps surrounding the besieged Swedish fortress. Instead of acquiring the European idea of military discipline and exercising mercy on the 'heretical' enemy's population, the chronicler believed that the Orthodox monarch had to follow the sanctified example of the Biblical heroes who did not hesitate the extremes of violence:

The brave primary and saint warriors, Moses and Aaron, Joshua, leaders and the judges of Israel... won over Amalek, entered the Promised Land, took pagan fortresses, smote all the pagans there, took [their] villages and lands. The scribes registered [them] soon and delivered to all the brave Israelites as inherited settlements. Furthermore, they took those pagans, who were not killed in slavery, and made them hewers of wood and drawers of water. [The people of Israel] did not honor them but executed God's will and slaughtered the enemies with sharp swords.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> For these reforms, see James Cracraft, *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture*, Cambridge, MS, and London, 2004, p. 189.

<sup>78</sup> 'Letopisets 1700 godu', in *Letopis' zaniatii Arkheograficheskoi komissii, 1865 – 1866*, vol. 4, Saint-Petersburg, 1868, pp. 131–157, here p. 148.

<sup>79</sup> 'Letopisets 1700 godu', p. 139. Comp. Josh. 9, esp. 9: 27: And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.

This text is unique for the Russian literacy of the era. The anonymous chronicler made full literal use of the Biblical metaphor as he coherently compared the Russian Tsar with Joshua (not to the favor of Peter), the Russian army with the host of Israel, and the foreign population of another Christian confession with the pagan people of Canaan, in this particular case, the Midianites. The author also clarified that the Biblical narrative should provide overall spiritual guidance for the Orthodox warriors and rulers and be an ultimate source to consult in particularities regarding military service. He certainly knew the Scripture well enough not just to compare the two situations in general but to find out the suitable quote concerning hewers of wood and drawers of water – the two services that the subjugated civilians were obliged to fulfill for the benefit of the troops in the Early Modern time.<sup>80</sup> However, even this fundamentalist thinker mentioned the possibility of physical extermination of confessional others on the margins of his proposal but concentrated pragmatically on their exploitation and chose a rare description of enslavement in Joshua's story instead. The extremities of religious violence, prescribing a merciless massacre, remained primarily unnecessary and, thus, unwanted.

## **Conclusion**

As various examples from a wide range of sources – from theological treatises to artworks and ego-documents – demonstrate, the late-17<sup>th</sup> century Russians were well aware of the brutality of the Biblical narrative. They exploited it for their reflection on sacred violence. Usually, the Islamic people of the Great Steppe and the Ottomans were presented as the new people of Canaan in the Russian narratives. However, the use of a similar rhetoric tool against the Western non-Orthodox Christians was also possible. The interest in the Biblical stories of the defeated Amalekites or Midianites and the destroyed Jericho was growing among different social groups, both in Moscow and the provinces, manifested through preaching, propaganda, and artwork. Western influences, either via Catholic moral theology or Protestant illustrated books, contributed sufficiently to the reemergence of militant rhetoric.

Despite this growing popularity of Biblical stories and images of sacred violence, profound reflection on the Biblical narratives, whether to justify the extremes of holy war or deny them regarding contemporary warfare, was rare. Simeon Polotskii proved the limits of religious violence by applying sophisticated reading and interpreting the Biblical text he learned from the late scholastic Catholic theology. On the contrary, the anonymous author of the "Chronicle of the Year 1700" took a direct approach to the Old Testament's accounts, interpreting them almost as practical instructions for an army occupying a foreign territory and exploiting its resources. Both ways to

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<sup>80</sup> See, e. g., Peter Burschel, *Söldner im Nordwestdeutschland des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts: Sozialgeschichtliche Studien*, Göttingen, 1994, pp. 184–188.

instrumentalize the Biblical narrative were exceptional for the Russian culture of the time. Neither of them had a visible impact on the standard policies of the Russian administration and military toward conquered non-Orthodox peoples in both the East and the West. However, they were constantly present in the public discourse. They might explain the decisions and perceptions of some military and political leaders, officers, and soldiers of the age.

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