

Stanisław Boridczenko

(University of Szczecin)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5343-5388>

The Concept of Power and Political Thought
of the 16th-Century Tsardom of Russia.
A Study of the Political Thought of Ivan Peresvietov,
Fyodor Karpov and Andrey Kurbsky

*Koncepcja władzy i myśl polityczna XVI-wiecznego Carstwa Rosyjskiego.
Studium myśli politycznej Iwana Pereswietowa, Fiodora Karpowa
i Andrieja Kurbskiego*

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the main assumptions of Russian political thinkers of the XVI century. The large body of scholarship that explores themes related to political philosophy, history of ideas, and history of the Tsardom of Russia (in context of political and social change across the sixteen century Russian state) demonstrates the importance of the historical evaluation of changes in political conceptions. There is, however, minimal science investigating the relationship between dominant social values and tsarist autocracy from the basis of then political philosophy. For this reason, the main focus of the text was to highlight the perception by the thinkers of the ideal ruler and his relationship with subjects. This article illuminates previously unexplored connections between conceptions of the 'Law and Truth', 'State and Tsar' in 16th century Russia. The main subject of research is the works of Andrey Kurbsky, Fedor Karpov and Ivan Peresvietov. Based on the study of written historical sources and historical criticism of sources, a model of their perception of the ideal state was created.

Key words: History of political thought, Tsardom of Russia, Grand Duchy of Moscow, Ivan Peresvietov, Fyodor Karpov, Andrey Kurbsky

INTRODUCTION

The history of Ruthenia and Russia is of great interest to Polish historians. Fundamental works on the history of Ruthenia were created already in the 1920s and the facts they contain are described in a thorough way. Nevertheless, there is an abundance of issues that have been somewhat omitted. The secular political thought of the 16th-century Tsardom of Russia has not been the subject of separate scientific research in Poland so far. Many factors have contributed to this state of affairs. It is worth noting that even in Russian literature on the subject there are very few studies referring to this issue. The majority of works on this subject were written only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, as it often happens in humanities, selected issues were usually presented in a subjective manner. This trend intensified at the beginning of the 21st century. There are no historians in the Russian Federation who would take a neutral position in relation to this matter.

The author of the article would like to focus on the nature of power and, because it is an extremely broad subject, to investigate one specific issue associated with the topic. The aim of this text is to present the main assumptions of the political thought of the 16th-century Russia. The subject of the analysis includes journalistic materials written in that century. The investigation presented in the article is based upon several main concepts, the authors of which were Fyodor Karpov, Ivan Peresvietov and Andrey Kurbsky. Due to the lack of Polish studies on this subject and the subjectivity of Russian works, little use was made of existing studies, and a greater focus was put on source texts. The hypothesis is that the main motive for intellectual debates in the 16th-century Russia was the conflict between old aristocratic families and the new nobility. The direct use of sources is an attempt at a new conceptualisation of the problem and a search for new approaches and theoretical frameworks within which the analysed issue would be considered. It should be noted that correspondence of Ivan the Terrible is excluded from the subject matter of this article, as it constitutes a separate thread. Ivan IV was a ruler with real power and his texts can hardly be considered theoretical studies.

The sixteenth century was a time of prosperity and the fall of estate monarchy in the Grand Duchy of Moscow. Social and political reforms carried out at the time were connected with the evolution of the system of governance specific for Ruthenia; with the implementation of modern methods of state management (administration): the system of *prikazes*, which stands at the source of later absolutism. The conflict between the aristocracy (descendants of knyaz and boyar families) and the new

nobility led to an intensification of the tendency to institutionalise power. The Russian elite was embroiled in a dispute regarding the direction of reforms in the Tsardom of Russia. The centre of power to the east of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was transformed from what was considered to be a remaining fragment of Ruthenia into a new entity called Russia.

These factors contributed to the development of social and political journalism. Intellectuals tried to uncover the true nature of the Tsar's system of government. The phenomenon of Tsarist autocracy, which reflected the tradition of the Golden Horde, was in conflict with the tradition originating in Kievan Rus'. Thinkers of that century repeatedly tried to develop the concept of an ideal government system for Russia. Their works mostly revolved around the issues of rationality of power (the tsar, his rights and duties) and social justice.

Two extreme opinions about the 16th century are visible in the literature. On the one hand, this period is marked by the emergence of the Tsardom of Russia as a state with centralised government and deprived of most feudal institutions (as opposed to the Grand Duchy of Moscow). On the other hand, many historians point out that the chosen direction of development later led to despotism. Moreover, the end of the 16th century brought the Time of Troubles, during which the existence of an independent Tsardom of Russia was threatened. Soviet historians believed that the 16th-century political thought was a manifestation of conservative thought aimed at achieving the maximum sovereignty of the tsar over the Tsardom. Polish researchers, however, see Karpov's and Peresvietov's thoughts as manifestations of 'democracy'. This article attempts not only to describe the political thought of the three thinkers, but also to interpret the theoretical model within the categories of the 16th century. The text proposes an attempt to abandon the assumptions characteristic of the era of nation states.

THE THOUGHT OF FYODOR KARPOV

For centuries Russian historians have been arguing about the kind of political thought that Fyodor Ivanovich Karpov represents¹. He was a diplomat and a prominent figure in the Tsar's court, as he was in the

¹ This matter is also examined by lawyers and political scientists, but their deliberations refer to other issues. For example, А.А. Васильев, *Охранительная концепция права в России*, Москва 2017; Ю.В. Пуздрач, *История российского конституционализма IX–XX веков*, Санкт Петербург 2004; Л.А. Черная, *Антропологический код древнерусской культуры*, Москва 2008.

closest circle of Ivan III and later Vasily III. From the perspective of the 16th century, Fyodor Karpov can be considered an outstanding intellectual. He knew foreign tongues: Latin, Greek and Eastern languages. He had a huge collection of manuscripts and books (new to Moscow) in his own library; he was interested in theology and astrology. Undoubtedly, Karpov's interest in classical languages had a significant impact on his political attitude. He studied not only the traditional sources, which were translations of Byzantine theologians, but also the works of Western and ancient philosophers. This claim is based on an in-depth analysis of his texts which proved that Fyodor Karpov referred to the authority of Aristotle and also quoted Ovid². It should be noted that the model to follow in Russia was the Byzantine tradition, and not the Roman tradition, as in the case of Western Europe.

Taking into account the few Karpov's works available today (most of them have been lost), the greatest interest of publicists is attracted by the correspondence between Fyodor Karpov and Metropolitan Danil and Maximus the Greek. From the point of view of a historian, out of the four letters currently available to us the most important are the message to Danil³ and the letter to Philotheus of Pskov⁴ (the monk who created the concept of Moscow as the Third Rome). Fyodor Ivanovich differs from other thinkers of Ruthenia and Russia in his humanist approach to human capabilities – every human being is able to live according to the humanistic ideals of reason and morality. His texts show rationalism similar to that of Western Europe in the early Enlightenment⁵. It seems that Karpov's thought is similar to Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski's vision.

Some researchers consider Karpov to be a supporter of boyar ideology⁶, dreaming of restoring the feudal order⁷ in Kievan Rus'. That arrangement was typically feudal: the ruler was only the first among equals

² J. Axer, *Łacina jako język elit*, Warszawa 2004, p. 351.

³ The content of which was first made available to the general public by В.Г. Дружинин, *Несколько неизвестных литературных памятников из сборника XVI-го века*, in: *Летопись занятий Археографической комиссии*, no. 100, Санкт Петербург 1909, pp. 106–113.

⁴ The article uses the version of the text available in: А.А. Зимин, *Общественно-политические взгляды Федора Карпова*, Москва 1956, pp. 172–173.

⁵ А.А. Зимин, *Федор Карпов, русский гуманист XVI в.*, Прометей 5, Москва 1968, pp. 364–370; M. Bohun, J. Goćkowski, *Zagadnienie rosyjskie: myślenie o Rosji: oglądy i obrazy spraw rosyjskich*, Kraków 2000, pp. 226–250.

⁶ An interesting example of such approach is the transformation of the views of the Russian historian А.А. Зимин. In the 1950s, the historian regarded Karpov as a conservative, while in later years he focused on the democratic aspects of the author's vision.

⁷ The essence of the vision was the work of А.В. Арциховский, *Очерки русской культуры XVI века*, Москва 1977, pp. 122, 125–127.

and did not have any significant privileges distinguishing him from the rest of the aristocracy. However, other researchers point out that Fyodor Karpov supported the emerging petty nobility. In Western Europe, where monarchs sought to gain as much power as possible ever since the first half of the 14th century, a similar discussion began much earlier than in Russia. What is more, the theoretical assumptions of Fyodor Karpov – if he is to be considered an ideologist of the new nobility – must be called pro-Western by their very nature⁸. The pro-Western trend in the political thought of the Tsardom of Russia was a novelty, because the discourse of the Grand Duchy of Moscow was dominated by post-Byzantine concepts. Karpov was the first Russian thinker to refer to Aristotle. This shows that his views were at least partly based on Western European models.

Karpov's letter to Metropolitan Danil was a response to an epistle written earlier by Danil. In the epistle, the Orthodox hierarch, following the traditional Orthodox assumptions about the relations between the ruler, tsar, and his subjects, described the ideal government system. He advocated the notion of 'suffering' and supported the order that had existed 'forever'. In this way, he represented the conservative position of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The correspondence is the first example of a Russian philosophical discussion known to us. The letter to Philotheus of Pskov can be considered a private letter: Karpov's aim was not to conduct a dispute between the two, but rather maintain contact with the monk.

The major topic of Fyodor Karpov's considerations was the classification of two terms: 'truth-law' and 'suffering'. In his letters, Karpov repeatedly referred to the problem of the ideal system for the emerging Tsardom of Russia. He came to the conclusion that Russia would become a power only through the centralisation of government. Karpov claimed that strong institutions of centralised government and fight against powerful families are unavoidable. Fyodor Ivanovich Karpov's 'truth-law' is a model of a system that ensures social justice⁹, a system that should be based on principles established by the tsar, not customary practice. 'Suffering', in turn, is an allegory of a system of customary law, exercised solely because of the beliefs of the participants. 'Suffering is for all, to a greater or lesser extent [...] depending on the circumstances and time'¹⁰. Karpov claimed that 'suffering' had not come from

⁸ A similar theory was developed at the beginning of the 20th century. For more information on this, see В.Ф. Ржига, *Боярин-западник XVI в. (Ф. И. Карпов)*, in: *Ученые записки. Институт истории. Российская ассоциация научно-исследовательских институтов общественных наук*, 4, Москва 1929, pp. 39–48.

⁹ H. Kowalska, *Kultura staroruska XI–XVI w. Tradycja i zmiana*, Kraków 1998, pp. 271–274.

¹⁰ Е.Н. Кимеева, „Послание митрополиту Даниилу” Фёдора Карпова, in: *Труды*

any institution, but had been developed by powerful families throughout history. This model was based on an unwritten law, transmitted orally in line with the principles of feudalism. In such a system, the feudal ladder ensured social order. Karpov seemed convinced that 'suffering leads to evil'¹¹, '[suffering] weakens the power [of the state], leads social [life] to collapse, makes people poor and disobedient [...]'¹².

The utopian system that ensures the dominance of 'truth-law' is based on the fair distribution of wealth. According to Fyodor Karpov, favouring old families when filling positions and distributing honours had to be replaced by choosing people with the right skills, predispositions and capabilities. This led to him being recognised as an ideologist of petty nobility due to the fact that this group benefitted the most from filling positions in such a manner. Old boyar families, whose origins went back to pre-Christian Ruthenian warriors, were not in favour of a similar direction of reorganisation. This disrupted the social order – the order that had guaranteed the political domination of the most powerful families for 500 years. 'The purpose of law is to ensure that the stronger one cannot do anything they please'¹³. 'Suffering' was the opposite of Karpov's 'law', as customary law could only apply to clergymen, who had renounced their earthly life by choosing life in the clergy.

Fyodor Karpov supported the separation of the Church and the state. Because of the excessive 'suffering', 'the national cause in cities and tsardoms is lost'¹⁴. A system of law was as necessary for the nation as it was for those in the position of authority. 'People have always had to live under the rule of law'¹⁵. Karpov believed that without a guarantee of social justice the state would become weak and the tsar's actions would be called into question. 'Every country needs a tsar [...]'¹⁶. According to the letters, Fyodor Karpov continued the Russian journalistic tradition which elaborated on the thought of the Byzantine Empire. In this stream of political thought, the most important element was the assumption that power came exclusively from God; God granted power only to worthy persons. Hence the well-known bias of 'a good tsar and bad boyars'. If God granted the right to rule to those chosen by him, then the rulers could not be bad. All evil came from the people who surrounded the tsar. This model

Отдела древнерусской литературы, 9, Москва 1953, p. 229.

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

long dominated the public discourse in the Tsardom of Russia (later also in the Russian Empire). The letter to Danil contains a sentence embodying the essence of Karpov's vision: 'every authority comes from God, and there are no authorities [of rulers] that are not established by God'¹⁷. The above quotation refers to St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, which held an important place in the Russo-Byzantine tradition. Nevertheless, Fyodor Karpov was convinced that the tsar was responsible to God for his own sins: '[The tsar] will have to face God's judgment'¹⁸.

Karpov claimed that even with a gift from God – power, the tsar should take care of his subjects: 'Mercy supported by truth, and truth adorned with mercy will provide the tsar with reign for many years to come'¹⁹. It should be noted that Russian rulers bore the title of Grand Duke at that time, but there had been attempts to use the title of tsar since the time of Ivan III.

Fyodor Karpov can undoubtedly be considered an outstanding thinker and philosopher who lived and created during times of change. In his letter, he criticised the reality of the Grand Duchy of Moscow. It is difficult to consider Fyodor Karpov an idealist, as he was a statesman seeking the prosperity of his country. However, his texts do not lack idealistic aspirations. Karpov's own *logos* and *ratio* made him call the Grand Duchy of Moscow a place where 'gold' ruled and personal 'dignity' was forgotten. Similar arguments set a pessimistic tone in the letters. 'I think [...] that "the time of darkness" has come, we are close to the Apocalypse'²⁰. In his correspondence, Fyodor Karpov condemned the hypocrisy and moral falsehood of the Russian aristocracy. His ethics should be considered idealistic by nature as he invented a model of interpersonal relations that were utopian at the very core.

THE THOUGHT OF IVAN PERESVIETOV

The relics of feudalism were also criticised by another 16th-century thinker in the service of the Tsar, who came from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Ivan Peresvietov was born in Lithuania and served the Polish, Czech and Hungarian kings²¹. He arrived in Moscow around 1538.

¹⁷ А.А. Зимин, *Общественно-политические*, p. 172.

¹⁸ Е.Н. Кимеева, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ This hypothesis was argued by J.S. Lurie. To learn more on this subject see: *Сочинения И. Пересветова*, ed. Д.С. Лихачев, Москва 1956, pp. 300–303.

Peresvietov hoped to get rich quickly by reselling the design of a 'Macedonian shield', however, the project failed and Russians did not show interest in the concept of a new weapon. Peresvietov tried to obtain patronage of the mighty for 10 years since his arrival in Russia. Finally, brought to despair by the indifference of the Russian aristocracy, he wrote a short petition in which he asked the Tsar for help. Later, he wrote a great petition to Ivan IV in which he urged the young tsar to put reforms in place²². It was, in fact, composed in praise of the Tsar and his qualities, and criticised the stupidity and thoughtlessness of Russian boyars of that time. What is more, he wrote three treaties.

The boldness of Peresvietov's visions and the similarity of the concept developed by him to the politics of Ivan the Terrible have raised a few eyebrows. Some researchers believe that Ivan Peresvietov was a fictitious person. The treaties written by Peresvietov propose that the Tsar's role be reinforced. They can be considered a programme of absolute monarchy, the kind of monarchy that the Tsar was striving for. This assumption is justified by the history of Ivan IV, because he showed that he would use every opportunity in pursuit of absolute power. Moreover, he was one of the first rulers of Russia to pay attention to the correctness of the description of his own history by chroniclers and to presenting himself in a good light before future generations.

The existence of Ivan Peresvietov and his biography can be questioned. Nevertheless, it is a fact that several publications²³ that undermined the existing social structure and promoted reforms were published in the 1640s and 1650s in Moscow. They were written by someone who was against the old order. It is well known that the Tsar and the emerging nobility were on one side in the 16th-century conflict over the division of powers. The prerequisites for strong government of the Tsar included eliminating the existing privileges of old families and enlarging a social class which would support the Tsar.

Peresvietov pointed out that the Tsardom of Russia was a religious state. Russians lived according to the principles of Christianity and this ensured good relations with God. Russia, argued Peresvietov, was close to God. However, even in such a great country there is no 'truth' and 'if

²² Peresvietov's biography is still a subject of discussion. Most doubts have been raised based on the content of his works and data from tsarist archives. The most important data are gathered in a collection edited by S.O. Schmidta: *Описи Царского архива XVI века и архива Посольского приказа 1614 года*, ed. С.О. Шмидт, Москва 1960.

²³ The most important of which is traditionally the 'great petition'. A revised version of the original text has been published *Сочинения Фёдора Ивановича Карпова*, in: *Библиотека литературы Древней Руси*, 9, Санкт Петербург 2000, pp. 433–451.

there is no truth, then there is nothing'²⁴. Similarly, an assumption was formulated about the primacy of law (or, broadly speaking, the tsar) over religion and the whole social system. 'God does not help lazy people, [he helps] those who work and call on God for help, [God helps] those who like the truth and make righteous judgements'²⁵. Similar considerations were a novelty for the Orthodox tradition, since the symbiotic model of 'clerical power – state power' had not been questioned before. According to Ivan Peresvietov, strengthening the central government would ensure stability and internal peace. The 'good Christians' in Russia lacked a 'heavy hand' which would ensure prosperity.

Russian courtiers were criticised severely in Peresvietov's treatises. They were presented as fraudsters or even embezzlers, who only cared about their own interests at the expense of the state property. 'The Russian nobility is getting richer and lazier, [...] they are ruining the country'. 'A wealthy man never dreams of war, but of peace. Let a hero become wealthy, then he will immediately become lazy'²⁶. The texts of Ivan Peresvietov explain that the old order, which consisted in the practice of *kormlenie*, caused impoverishment of the state and social chaos. Boyars had forgotten what 'truth' (justice) was. They exercised judicial authority in their own best interests. The Tsar had been deprived of his God-given rights. Meanwhile, old families had become rich and concentrated all power in their own hands. Such a situation could only anger God, because it distorted the social system established by him.

Peresvietov contended that Jesus was the epitome of 'justice' and the perfect role model²⁷, which proves that he treated him in a slightly different way than it was accepted in the Orthodox tradition. 'The true truth is Christ, our God [...]'²⁸. Regardless of the religiousness of the nation, the country itself had collapsed and was in ruins. In the treatises by Ivan Peresvietov, the future of the Tsardom of Russia looks quite grim.

Flattery towards Ivan IV can be found in every paragraph of the treatises written by Peresvietov²⁹. It is likely that Ivan Peresvietov carefully praised the policy of Ivan IV seeking the favour of the young ruler. In his great petition to the Tsar, for example, he pointed out that the fame of the wise

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 433–451.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 450.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 436.

²⁷ *Сочинения И. Пересветова*, p. 181.

²⁸ *Сочинения Фёдора Ивановича Картова*, pp. 433–451.

²⁹ The most important works of Ivan Peresvietov were published in the following collection: А.В. Сурин и др., *Классики теории государственного управления: управленческие идеи в России*, Москва 2008.

and strong Russian ruler had spread all over the world. '[...] they speak of you as the great tsar. Wise Greek philosophers and Latin doctors write about it. They claim that you will achieve great glory, like Caesar or Alexander the Great'³⁰. Nevertheless, the thinker was not afraid to openly criticise the existing system despite trying to get the Tsar's support.

According to Peresvietov, the role of the tsar was to ensure 'great justice'³¹, seek punishment for 'sinners' (criminals) and support the Orthodox faith. He described the Tsar's future duties, because he believed that the predecessors of Ivan IV had been focused on religious matters and failed to do what they had been supposed to do. On the other hand, the young Tsar had already demonstrated his ability to exercise the highest authority; if the Tsar followed the ideas of the author of the treaties, he would quickly rise to fame comparable to that of Byzantine rulers. An important place in the great petition and the treaties is occupied by the model of ideal relations between the Tsar and the nobility. Ivan Peresvietov believed that these relations should be based on recognising the merits of an individual, not the family. By promoting talented people, the monarch would leave a good memory of himself and ensure gratitude of the whole country in the future.

Peresvietov was a supporter of a strong state with centralised power, able to control political and economic chaos, establish rights for its subjects, and ensure external and internal security³² – a 'state of terror'. Without cruel punishments, such as flaying alive, social justice could not be guaranteed. Ivan Peresvietov was the first Russian political writer to create a utopia consisting of fear and freedom, faith and truth. Peresvietov's utopia was based on the harmony of the above concepts. Each of them ensured the coherence of the state mechanism. As proposed by the thinker, the right to use violence (which he called 'terror') was vested in the tsar, while justice (or 'truth') was a more abstract notion. It was a synthesis of national tradition and religious tradition. The biblical Ten Commandments were the essence of the religious tradition. 'Truth' was what limited the Tsar's power. The introduced distinctions, which could be considered as an attempt to restrict the Tsar's power, were, in fact, the exact opposite. Due to the close links between the Orthodox Church and Ruthenian administration, Orthodox Church authorities created a rigid system regulating the ruler's activities. The role of the Russian ruler in the first half of the 16th century was significantly limited. The proposal

³⁰ *Сочинения Фёдора Ивановича Карпова*, pp. 433–451.

³¹ *Сочинения И. Пересветова*, p. 160.

³² G.L. Seidler, *Myśl polityczna czasów nowożytnych*, Kraków 1972, p. 142.

to separate the Church from the state demonstrates the desire of some elites to increase the authority of the Tsar. Peresvietov's treaties argued the primacy of 'justice' over 'faith'. 'God prefers not faith, but the truth'³³. The traditional model in which victory was a gift from God (to pious people) was replaced by a model of victory of the able. This evolution of the concept of *victoria* was not a novelty for Russian journalism. At the beginning of the 16th century, chroniclers began to deviate from the accepted pattern. After liberation from the Tartar yoke, defeat was no longer understood in Russia as a symbol of God's punishment, although it was Pieresvietov who declared a new era in Russian historiography. It was he who recognised the fall of the Byzantine Empire as a consequence of numerous political problems in the Empire³⁴. 'And now Greeks themselves, [...] because of their own lawlessness, because of their own laziness, [are under the rule of] the Turkish king [...]'³⁵. 'Because of their own laziness, [Greeks] have been enslaved by the Turkish king'³⁶. For God prefers righteous and able rulers over pious or passive ones.

In his deliberations, Ivan Peresvietov developed a concept of reforms aimed at strengthening the state institutions in Russia³⁷. They resembled the political changes carried out later by Ivan IV. This is why many historians believe that Peresvietov was fictitious. Some even postulate that his works were written by young Ivan the Terrible or by someone from the Tsar's closest circle. At any rate, questioning the authenticity of Ivan Peresvietov as a historical figure is not an aim of this article, although it should be mentioned that most historians do not question the existence of the thinker.

In his treaties and the great petition, Peresvietov mentioned the following reforms that should be carried out in the Tsardom of Russia: abolishing the procedure of *kormlenie* and, instead, financing the administration through reimbursement for the provided services from the state's treasury, a change in the court system (e.g. implementing the open court principle), clarification of the tax collection system and support for social mobility by the state (creating a class of the so-called *lud zluzhylogi*).

The main theme prevailing throughout Peresvietov's journalistic output is the future of Russia. The thinker believes that the Tsardom of Russia

³³ Сочинения Фёдора Ивановича Карпова, р. 446.

³⁴ Сочинения И. Пересветова, р. 161.

³⁵ Сочинения Фёдора Ивановича Карпова, р. 441.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ A. Podraza, *Iwan Peresvietow, rosyjski pisarz polityczny XVI w.: na marginesie nowej edycji pism i nowych badań nad poglądami Peresvietowa*, 'Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce' 1961, 6, pp. 203–225.

needs strong power centralised in the hands of the tsar. Ivan Peresvietov's thought reveals the 'ideological' assumptions of the 16th-century nobility. The tsar's strong position in the political system and expansion of the legal system had long been a dream of the new aristocracy. Owing to this correspondence between the two visions, Ivan Peresvietov can be recognised as a supporter and ideologist of absolute monarchy in the Tsardom of Russia.

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ANDREY KURBSKY AND IVAN THE TERRIBLE

The correspondence between Andrey Kurbsky and Ivan the Terrible is the most interesting thread, as it helps to study not only the political thought of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, but also to look at the political processes that took place at that time from a slightly different perspective. This correspondence is a unique example of epistolographic art not only on a Russian but also on a global scale. The exchange of letters between the disgraced boyar³⁸ and the Tsar lasted 13 years. It consists of five letters, three of which were written by Andrey Kurbsky; two are replies by Ivan IV.

It should be noted that there is a hypothesis that the texts are a counterfeit in part or even in whole³⁹. Still, most historians reject this assumption, as research has proved that Andrey Kurbsky and Ivan IV have indeed exchanged correspondence. On the other hand, the authenticity of the letters is debatable. It is possible that changes were made to the original texts of 16-century chronicles, the copies of which are currently available to researchers⁴⁰.

Kurbsky, who wrote a short letter to the Tsar after escaping to Lithuania in April 1564, was the initiator of the dispute. In his letter, the disgraced boyar accused and insulted Ivan the Terrible, calling him a Herod, a despot and a traitor of the Orthodox faith. Considering the uniqueness of the situation – the betrayal of Andrey Kurbsky and the letter revolving around the criticism of the autocrat⁴¹ (which nobody had dared to do before) – it

³⁸ The title of Andrey Kurbsky's father was the subject of academic debates for a long time. It was established in the 1980s as a result of an archival search. For more information, see: А.А. Зимин, *Формирование боярской аристократии в России во второй половине XV-первой трети XVI в.*, Москва 1988.

³⁹ For more information, see E.L. Keenan, *The Kurbskii-Groznyi Apocrypha: The Seventeenth-Century Genesis of the «Correspondence» Attributed to Prince A. M. Kurbskii and Tsar Ivan IV*, Cambridge 1971.

⁴⁰ A similar stand was taken by А.И. Филюшкин, *Андрей Курбский*, Москва 2010, pp. 157–158.

⁴¹ For more information, see: В.В. Калугин, *Андрей Курбский и Иван Грозный. Теоретические взгляды и литературная техника древнерусского писателя*, Москва 1998.

can be assumed that the Russian Tsar's response in June of the same year was a surprise even for Kurbsky. An analysis of the content of the first reply shows that Ivan IV considered correspondence with a former friend to be the best opportunity to report his own position to external observers. Some Russian historians even suppose that in the Tsar's opinion these observers could have included not only the Polish and Lithuanian elites, but also future generations. The first response by Ivan IV is very extensive. The letter is a several pages long manuscript. It contains quotations from the Bible and refers to proverbs and sayings. However, the content of this letter is not limited to scholastic wisdom. The Tsar insults Kurbsky with strong words. He calls him a 'dog' and threatens him and his family. This proves that the reply was written, at least in part, by the Tsar himself, and not by a clerk under a *prikaz*.

Interestingly, Ivan IV rarely addresses Andrey Kurbsky directly. Instead, he refers to the opinions of invisible observers and God. It is precisely this fact that allows us to assume that the Tsar's aim was not only a polemic with the traitor, but also a dialogue with external observers.

In the very same year, Kurbsky produced a short reply to the letter from Ivan the Terrible, but due to the ongoing Polish-Russian war (1577–1582) it could not be delivered to Russia. In 1577, after his journey to Livonia, the Tsar wrote to the former courtier for the second time. Another reply from the triumphant Tsar is likely to have been what encouraged the duke to write a third letter. Finally, in 1579, Ivan the Terrible received a response to his last letter with a copy of the second letter (from 1564).

Many researchers believe that the duke tried to create a work that was to be an answer to the extensive texts from the Tsar. It was meant to be a treatise, not just a regular letter. In the end, Kurbsky failed to write a longer piece, and in 1584 the exchange of letters between the two opponents was interrupted by the death of the Tsar.

In texts addressed to Ivan IV, Andrey Kurbsky appears as a defender of the existing privileges of the nobility and a supporter of estate monarchy. The vision of the disgraced boyar should be considered typical for a member of an old family. According to the letters, Kurbsky fiercely defended boyar privilege and accused the Tsar of going against tradition.

Kurbsky agrees that all power comes from God and belongs only to God. He claims that God and God's will are the foundation of every government⁴². Therefore, the main function of a true Christian ruler is to exercise the highest authority and judicial power in a just manner. Kurbsky considers inaction and sluggishness to be the greatest of the possible sins.

⁴² H. Kowalska, *op. cit.*, pp. 271–277.

He saw Ivan IV's bad qualities and wrongdoings as a sign of inaction and inability to rule the Tsardom.

Andrey Kurbsky emphasised that Ivan the Terrible was a poorly educated man who could not adapt his behaviour and remarks to the situation – in other words, an unpredictable and passionate person, who had no respect for others.. This had been caused, as Kurbsky claimed, by people who surrounded the Tsar in his youth, his role models and teachers. As a result, the adult Tsar turned out to be a stupid man, an 'ordinary fool' – as Andrey Kurbsky put it – incapable of fulfilling his role.

The former friend of Ivan IV painstakingly tried to convince the Tsar that Russia was bound to fall soon⁴³. He believed that the Russian state 'apparatus', as well as the whole country, was in ruins. Injustice and lawlessness reigned in Russia, and the Tsar would soon share the fate of Herod. In conclusion, it can be said that Andrey Kurbsky had a pessimistic outlook on the future of Russia.

While safe in Lithuania, the runaway threatened Ivan IV with heavenly punishment. Kurbski's letters argued that even the Tsar could not live forever. After his death, the ruler was to appear before the Heavenly Courts. Such a manner of writing was a novelty in the Grand Duchy of Moscow, since relations between God and the Tsar had always been perceived in a different way. No other thinkers had ever dared to discuss this matter from a similar perspective.

'Tsars and rulers who make strict laws [and] unenforceable ordinances should perish'⁴⁴ – this is how Kurbsky sees the duties of the Tsar and the responsibility of the authorities to the subjects. The knyaz's considerations are centred around the argument that the old order should be considered the best possible. Nevertheless, Kurbsky's views can be to an extent regarded as typical of a supporter of estate monarchy. According to Andrey Kurbsky, the best political model for Russia is limited monarchy. The letters are based on the concept of merging the tsar, the Russian government and the Zemsky Sobor into a single political system. This is the ideal for which the Russian Empire should strive and which would ensure the prosperity and development of the country.

Historians have been expressing conflicting opinions about Kurbsky. Periods in which he was considered a traitor and an 'ideologist of reactionists' alternated with times of more lenient attitudes. The knyaz has been hailed as the first Russian democrat. The aristocrat regained his good name in the 1990s, when threads indicating that Kurbsky favoured limited

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Переписка Ивана Грозного с Андреем Курбским*, Москва 1993, p. 102.

monarchy were discovered in his writings. The criticism of the Tsar's brutal policy were recognised as a manifestation of the above approach. The duke complained about Ivan's austerity, lack of justice and signs of despotism. Today, the Russian historiography is being increasingly dominated by the viewpoint recognising Kurbsky as a traitor of the nation and a reactionary. The underlying assumption is that his behaviour was motivated by his own interests.

It seems that the traditional perception of Kurbsky in terms of nation states is generally doomed to failure. The knyaz lived in the 16th century. He did not identify with any country – only with his family and the ruling dynasty. It is indisputable that Andrey Kurbsky took good care of his own interests, which in this case were in line with the needs of the aristocracy. The speed with which Ivan IV carried out reforms and the austerity of the Tsar, who sought to increase his own power, contributed to changes in the political life of the country. Kurbsky's epistolary work presents this issue from the perspective of a person who lived in the 16th-century Tsardom of Russia.

CONCLUSIONS

In Russian historiography, the 16th century is considered a period of rapid development of social journalism. Thinkers were no longer satisfied with asking where the unlimited power of the Tsar came from, a question characteristic for the period from the 10th to the 15th century, but reflected on the future of Russia and the nature of power. Fyodor Karpov, Ivan Peresvietov and Andrey Kurbsky were at the root of Russia's political thought, as they lived and created not in the Grand Duchy of Moscow, but in the Tsardom of Russia. What they all have in common is that they all pointed to the backward political system of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, and Fyodor Karpov was the creator of a mentality which later evolved into occidentalism.

A search for new forms of governance, new forms of statehood and a new administrative structure began in the 16th-century Moscow. At the same time, thinkers contemplated the concept of autocracy, known as *samoderzhaviye* in Russia. Throughout the Middle Ages, Orthodox dogmas dominated in Ruthenia and were the only basis of journalism. At the beginning of the 16th century, however, there were noticeable expressions of the desire to liberate political thought from the theological mindset. Publicists focused on the issue of social justice. The judicial system was the focus of attention.

The subject of reforms and changes became the main topic for the deliberations of 16th-century Russian publicists. Institutions of power, as well as the relations between the ruler and his subjects, the old and new nobility, the 'serving folk' and the aristocracy were all subjected to criticism. Publicists were searching for the source of the weakness and strength of the Tsardom of Russia. They tried to understand the reason for Russia's miserable international relations.

Reforms were identified as the best solution to the problems. The new nobility sought to continue the ongoing centralisation of power and the gradual concentration thereof in the hands of the tsar. The old aristocracy, on the other hand, did not oppose to changes, instead supported estate monarchy. An analysis of the work of publicists of that century proved that both outlooks on the future had something in common – they did not accept the prospect of despotism.

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STRESZCZENIE

Celem niniejszego artykułu było ukazanie głównych założeń myśli politycznej XVI-wiecznej Rosji. Przedmiotem analizy stały się materiały publicystyczne, które powstały w tymże wieku. Rozważania zawarte w artykule ujawniają główne koncepcje, autorami których byli Fiodor Karpow, Iwan Pereswiewow i Andriej Kurbski.

Słowa kluczowe: Historia myśli politycznej, Carstwo Rosyjskie, Wielkie Księstwo Moskiewskie, Iwan Pereswiewow, Fiodor Karpow, Andriej Kurbski

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stanisław Boridzenko – a graduate of the Jagiellonian University, PhD student at the Institute of History of the University of Szczecin, where he is currently writing a dissertation on the topic of portrayal of Polish-Russian relations in the educational literature of the Russian Empire. Research interests: the process of border shaping in Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War, historical narrative in East Slavic school textbooks about "Polish question", history of historiography of the Russian Empire. E-mail: esanius@gmail.com.