

Maria Grazia Bartolini

“Manlier than Many Men”. Images of Female Sanctity in Simeon Polockij’s Court Sermons*

Sermons, which became a central part of Russian religious life only in the second half of the seventeenth-century, are an important, albeit relatively neglected, source for the study of early modern Muscovite culture and ideology. As official court preacher and poet, Simeon Polockij played a central role in the legitimation of secular authority and in the shaping of “the moral and social values of his readers” (Eleonskaja 1990: 106). However, while Simeon’s poetic output has recently enjoyed a rediscovery, his prolific activity as a court preacher has still to be fully considered. This is certainly surprising if we consider that, whereas Simeon was happy to leave his poetry to the vagaries of manuscript transmission, he took great care in preparing his sermons for publication¹.

A representative of the Ukrainian Baroque tradition at the Muscovite court, Simeon wrote two books of homilies, *Obed duševnyj* (‘Spiritual Lunch’, 1681), a collection of Sunday sermons based on the scripture lessons adopted by the Orthodox Church for each Sunday, and *Večerja duševnaja* (‘Spiritual Supper’, 1683), which is based on texts for special feast-days².

A major distinction between this collection and earlier homiletic works published in Kiev by Lazar Baranovyč (*Truby sloves propovednyx na naročityja dni prazdnikov*, 1674) and Antonij Radyvylovsk’ij (*Ohorodok Marii Bohorodicy*, 1676) is that in the former homilies on women saints constitute a considerable portion of the total. Radyvylovsk’ij’s *Ohorodok* is notable in that it celebrates a single female saint, Barbara. In Baranovyč’s *Truby* the only female saints are Barbara and Paraskeva-Pjatkica, two figures who enjoyed wide popularity in

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¹ The basic, albeit outdated, biographies on Simeon are by Iereofej Tatarskij (1886) and L.N. Majkov (1889). Sazonova (2006) gives most of the literature on Simeon Polockij up to 2006. For the recent Simeon Polockij-renaissance, see Anthony Hppisley and Lidiia Sazonova’s critical editions of the *Vertograd mnogocvetnyj* and *Rifmologion* (Hppisley, Sazonova 1999, 2013). On Simeon’s homiletic works, see Popov 1886; Langsch 1940; Eleonskaja 1982; Korzo 1999; Kisileva 2013, especially pp. 125-216.

² The *Večerja duševnaja* was finished in 1676. Its printing began October 19, 1681 under the supervision of Simeon’s long-time friend and disciple Sil’vestr Medvedev, and was completed January 6, 1683, already after Simeon’s death in 1680 (Tatarskij 1886: 268).

Orthodox Christianity³, and Mary of Egypt, the name saint of Aleksej Mixailovič's first wife, Marija Il'inična Miloslavskaja (See TABLE I in the *Appendix*).

The *Večerja*, on the other hand, features an unusual balance, as it celebrates seventeen male saints and eleven women. These are Symeon Stylites the Younger; Sergius of Radonezh; John the Baptist; Andrew the Apostle; Gregory the Wonderworker; Nicholas the Wonderworker; Stephen the Protomartyr; Philipp Metropolitan of Moscow; Alexis Metropolitan of Moscow; Gregory of Nazianzus; John Chrysostom; Alexis man of God; Theodosius and Anthony of the Cave Monastery; Iona Metropolitan of Moscow; Theodore Stratelates; Peter and Paul; Vladimir the Baptizer of Rus⁴. The women saints in the collection are Martha, mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger; Theodora of Alexandria; Sophia and her three daughters Faith, Hope and Charity; Catherine of Alexandria; Tatiana of Rome; Mary, the wife of Saint Xenophon; Eudokia of Heliopolis; Irene of Macedonia; Theodosia of Tyre; Anna, Mary's mother; Natalia, the wife of the martyr Adrian.

The sheer numbers suggest that female saints may have served some political purpose. In fact, if we take a closer look at the women saints included in the collection, we see that they all celebrate the namesakes of Aleksej Mixailovič's second wife (Natal'ja Kirillovna Narajškina), daughters (Evdokija, Marfa, Sof'ja, Ekaterina, Marija, Feodosija, Natal'ja, Feodora) and sisters (Tat'jana, Irina, and Anna)⁵. These very correspondences (see Table I) are evoked in the epigrammatic cycle of poems *Elenxos*, which constituted the prologue to a lost collection of homilies on the tsar's family's name saints entitled *Slovesa poxvalnaja* (1675)⁶. In Simeon's intentions, the poems should serve as a mirror in which the members of the royal family would see the virtues of their name saints. It is plausible to assume that the homilies contained in the *Slovesa poxvalnaja* were included in the *Večerja*, which was completed a year later, in 1676, and which was conceived for a court audience⁷. Writing

³ Paraskeva of Iconium, a virgin martyr, developed a personality and functions of her own on Eastern Slavic soil, where she was especially venerated. Barbara was very popular in the middle ages. Her Greek legend (*Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* 213; hereafter BHG), written in the sixth or seventh century, was adapted into many medieval languages (ODB: 252).

⁴ Of these male saints, five are the name saints of Aleksej Mixailovič (Alexis man of God), Aleksej Alekseevič (Alexis Metropolitan of Moscow), Feodor Alekseevič (Theodore Stratelates), Ioann Alekseevič (John the Baptist), and Petr Alekseevič (Peter the Apostle).

⁵ Tsar Aleksej Mixailovič (reigned 1645-76) had eight daughters by his first wife Marija Il'inična Miloslavskaja (1624-1669). They were: Evdokija (1650-1712), Marfa (1652-1707), Anna (1655-59), Sof'ja (1657-1704), Ekaterina (1658-1718), Marija (1660-1723), Feodosija (1662-1713), and Evdokija (born and died 1669). By his second marriage to Natal'ja Kirillovna Naryškina (1651-1694), he had two daughters: Natal'ja (1673-1716), and Feodora (1674-78). By the time Simeon's homilies were presumably completed (1676), Aleksej Mixailovič had three living sisters: Irina (1627-1679), Anna (1630-1692), and Tat'jana (1636-1706).

⁶ See Tatarskij 1886: 134. The text of the *Elenxos* is published in Sazonova 2006: 755-758.

⁷ A handwritten note in the manuscript version of the homily on Saint Evdokia states that it has been recited ("*glagolax*") in one of the Kremlin churches (Eleonskaja 1982: 178). Other notes

about women thus has a straightforward context in the political situation of late seventeenth-century Muscovy, where the circumstance of the Romanov wives giving birth to numerous baby girls entailed a bigger role for female royal offspring⁸.

This article explores the way in which these homilies rewrite enduring images of female sanctity to suit the cultural needs and expectations of their royal audience. While it is certainly true that the selection of the saints was pre-determined – they were the name saints of the royal women – I will argue that Simeon deliberately reshapes certain details he finds in the Greek and Church Slavonic *vita*e of these saints to adapt them to his royal addressees and to provide them with inspirational spiritual role models and “a trusted authority of their own sex” (Newman 1987: 153). As we shall see, these models broadly fall within three categories: the ‘virile woman’, the ‘spiritual mother’, and the ‘female proselytizer’. Here I will show what these three representations of female sanctity, which draw on the traditional hagiographic roles of virgin, mother, and wife, can tell us about the expectations and prescriptions placed upon Muscovite royal women in the late seventeenth century and how they fit in the cultural construction of femininity at the Muscovite court. Is Simeon just following a set of well-established hagiographic stereotypes, or is he inserting a new twist into the Muscovite discourse on female sanctity, one that is filtered through the Polish-Lithuanian (Western) medium?

This study draws widely on the scholarship on the religious symbolism associated with elite Muscovite women, especially on the works of Isolde Thyret (1994, 2001) and Gary Marker (2007). In particular, my conception of the socio-political implications of female sanctity in Simeon’s court sermons is based upon my acceptance of Thyret’s definition of royal Muscovite women as playing an important part in Muscovite political life as the tsar’s helpmates and spiritual intercessors. Relying on this, I also attempt to analyze court sermons as rhetorical texts and events playing a central role in legitimizing secular authority. This will help us understand the importance of religion in shaping political and intellectual developments and the complex relationship between homiletics and the society in which it was produced.

1. *Figures of Female Sanctity: Virgins, Mothers, and Wives*

The *Večerja* homilies offer various paradigms of female sanctity, but a number of patterns emerge that unite the female saints portrayed by Simeon. There are five distinct models of female sanctity: the repentant harlot (Eudokia), the transvestite nun (Theodora), the holy mother (Martha, Anna, Sophia), the saintly wife (Mary and Natalia), and the virgin martyr (Catherine, Tatiana, Theodosia, Irene). There are, of course, notable intersections

in the manuscript of the *Večerja* describing the occasion of certain sermons refer either to the tsar and court or to the Zaikonospasskij Monastery, where Simeon took up residence after his arrival in Moscow (Popov 1886: 10; Tatarskij 1886: 277).

⁸ On this particular point, see Hughes 1990; Zelensky 1992a, 1992b; Thyret 2001: 118 ff.

between these types and many of these women are a combination of mother, wife, virgin and martyr. Eudokia, a repentant prostitute, dies a martyr's death. Theodora of Alexandria enters a male monastery to atone for her extra-marital liaison and then stepmothers a prostitute's child. Anna, Mary's mother, and Mary, Xenophon's wife, are both dedicated spouses and loving mothers. Sophia is the mother of three daughters, whose beatings and torture by pagan authorities she actually witnessed, and a chaste widow, two circumstances that place her halfway between 'virgin', 'mother', and 'martyr'.

Most of these female saints belong to the early Christian period, when the new Church struggled for recognition and when women saints, mainly virgin martyrs, were in fact quite numerous. The most popular female saints of the Byzantine era were indeed those of the first seven centuries: martyrs (Catherine, Barbara), transvestite nuns (Theodora of Alexandria, Euphrosyne of Alexandria) and repentant harlots (Mary of Egypt). Here royal women are associated with the most popular female saints of the Byzantine era – virgin martyrs, repentant harlots, and women disguised as monks – a choice that testifies to the strong neo-Byzantine undercurrents of Muscovite orthodoxy in the second half of the seventeenth century⁹.

Further, the demarcation of three types of femininity – virgin, mother, widow – suggests an indebtedness to the Patristic tradition of sacred biography dedicated to women. The early church Fathers established a three-fold hierarchy of spiritual perfection – virgins, chaste widows and married women – based on the degree of personal denial from sexual activity (Giannarelli 1980; Brown 1988). In book I of his treatise *Contra Iovinianum* Jerome represented the tripartite hierarchy of virgins, widows, and wives as three groups of harvesters who respectively reaped the “centesimus et sexagesimus et tricesimus fructus” (‘the hundred-, sixty-, and thirtyfold fruit’)¹⁰. The Greek Church Fathers, such as John Chrysostom (*On Virginity*, *Letter to a Young Widow* and *On Marriage*) and Gregory of Nyssa (*On Virginity*), expressed similar sentiments on categories of female sexuality.

Following the influential model articulated by Jerome, in the *Večerja* Simeon ascribes to each type a specific place in salvation: the progeny of the virgin, who occupies the highest position in the hierarchy, is valued hundred-fold, that of the widow sixty-fold and that of the married woman thirty-fold (Simeon Polockij 1683: *Мз recto*; *пѠ verso*)¹¹. In these homilies, the status of *virgo intacta* is thus the main prerequisite for sainthood, although, as we shall see, the saints' relationship with children receives equally positive treatment and he presents us with women in whom marriage and piety are intimately linked. Virginity, Simeon writes,

⁹ The issue of female sanctity in Byzantium has received considerable attention in recent years, following the pioneering article of Evelyne Patlagean (1976). For recent general survey of the topic, see Talbot 1996, 2001; James 1997; Constantinou 2005; Delierneux 2014.

¹⁰ *Patrologia Latina* 24, col. 213b-c (hereafter PL). Notice that Simeon possessed Jerome's *Opera omnia* printed in Cologne in 1585 (see Hippisley, Luk'janova 2005: 80).

¹¹ The idea that “marriage is honorable, but chastity is better in the eyes of the Almighty”, is also stressed by Simeon in the poem *Devstvo* (Hippisley, Sazonova 1999, 1: 301).

“replenish heaven with people”, but marriage fulfills the no less important task of “populating the earth” (“вселенную жителями исполняетъ”) (Simeon Polockij 1683: *ṙe recto*).

Interestingly enough, the corpus of sacred biographies contains very few mother saints. Some examples of holy mothers are scattered through the *Golden Legend* and the *Metaphrastic Menologion*, which include, for instance, the *vita* of Saint Sophia (Mulder-Bakker 1995: 9)¹². The model of sanctity within marriage is also an infrequent occurrence, although, beginning from the Reformation, for both Protestants and Catholics sanctity and motherhood became entwined and celibacy was no longer the exclusive path to holiness (Mulder-Bakker 1995: 11; Glasser 1981). There is thus reason to believe that the use of marriage and motherhood in relation to royal women reflects a positive evaluation of these institutions and, most pointedly, of their cultural and political value in the context of the Romanov court. In the following pages, we shall see how Simeon interprets – and rewrites – the eminently feminine roles of virgin, mother, and wife, adapting traditional patristic notions of the differences between the sexes to the needs of his audience.

2. *Twixt Femininity and Masculinity: Virgin Martyrs and Cross-Dressing Saints*

The female saints most venerated in the middle ages were overwhelmingly virgins, with special preference for martyrs¹³. Their stories provided examples of agency and strength of will that could appeal to audiences of the lay female elite and in the *Večerja* virgin martyr legends (Catherine, Tatiana, Irene, Theodosia) constitute a good portion of the total. Saint Theodosia is a seventeen-year-old girl who deliberately seeks to be executed to enter the “purple army” (“багряновидный полкъ”) of martyrs to Christianity (Simeon Polockij 1683: *ṙke verso*)¹⁴. Forced to make a sacrifice to Apollo, Tatiana destroys part of the temple with her prayers¹⁵. Irene, the daughter of Lycinius, king of Macedonia, resurrects her pagan father. Reborn in body and spirit, Lycinius converts to Christianity along with the inhabitants of Macedonia while Irene is executed by the new pagan governor of the city, but only after converting as many as fifty thousand men (“вбратишася ко гѣду патицесать тысячъ душъ”)¹⁶.

¹² On hagiographic representations of motherhood, see also Atkinson 1991.

¹³ The importance of virginity in late antique and medieval Christian thought is well recognized. For further studies on the representation of virginity in hagiography, see Elm 1994; Winstead 1997; Wogan-Browne 2001; Salih 2001, especially pp. 42-106; Constantinou 2012a; Constantinou 2015a.

¹⁴ The martyrdom of Theodosia is recounted by the Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea in the *Passio a Eusebio* (ВНГ 1775). The Slavonic translation of her *vita* is included in the *Uspenskij Sbornik* (Knjazevskaja et al. 1971: 248-253).

¹⁵ The Greek legend of Tatiana (ВНГ 1699; cf. *Acta Sanctorum Ianuarii*, I, 1643: 720-721) is dated to the seventh century. See Halkin 1973: 11. Her Slavonic *vita* is included in the January volume of Makarij’s *Velikija čet’i minei* (VČM Ja: coll. 813-814).

¹⁶ Simeon Polockij 1683: *ṙsi recto*. The *Life of Irene* (ВНГ 953-954; *Acta Sanctorum Mai*, II, 1680: 4-5) is dated to the sixth century. See Wirth 1882: 116-148. Her Slavonic *vita* is included in the *Uspenskij Sbornik* (Knjazevskaja et al. 1971: 135-160).

Catherine of Alexandria, probably the better known of Simeon's virgin martyrs, rebukes emperor Maxentius for his cruelty against Christians ("не устранился страшнаго мучителя Маѣнтіа"), wins a debate against fifty pagan philosophers ("пѣтдесать философвъ израднейшихъ"), converts the emperor's wife along with two hundred men of the guard and then dies a martyr's death¹⁷. In presenting the reader with saintly heroines who embody remarkable self-control and volition, these homilies exhibit a characteristic oscillation between the masculinization of women saints – through an emphasis on athletic imagery and masculine virtues – and the celebration of their devotion to a divine bridegroom. On the one hand, these women are often praised as brides of Christ, a metaphor which, while being typical of all virgin martyrs' narratives, could suit Aleksej Mixailovič's daughters and sisters, who, as is probably well known, "were purposely not married in order to prevent the establishment of conflicting political alliances at court" (Kollmann 1987: 124)¹⁸. On the other, Simeon resorts to the enduring hagiographic *topos* of the *foemina virilis*, or *virago*, emphasizing the importance, for a female saint, of overcoming her natural weakness by demonstrating the virility of her soul¹⁹. The virgin's ambiguous positioning between heterosexual economy and transcendence of her own sex is particularly evident in the case of Catherine of Alexandria, who is portrayed as both *foemina virilis* ("стажа и великодушіе мужское") and *sponsa Christi*, a bride betrothed to the "handsomest bridegroom of all": "обручи себе жениху Христови, иже есть краснейшъ паче всехъ сыновъ человеческихъ" (Simeon Polockij 1683: рѣ *recto*). Similarly, Saint Theodosia is both "manlier than many men" ("не дѣвскимъ срѣдцемъ но многихъ мужей мужественнѣ") and one of the "wise virgins" ("мудрыя дѣвы") waiting for Christ the bridegroom (Simeon Polockij 1683: ткѧ *recto*)²⁰. A reversal of gender expectations is also central to the homily on Saint Tatiana of Rome, who is praised for her man-like courage ("мужественнаа дѣва") while having her hair cut in preparation for her beheading. By cutting her hair, she deprives herself of a primary sign of female beauty, in a reversal of Paul's words in 1 Cor 11:14 "if a woman hath long hair, it is a glory to her", but she still retains her value as "Christ's bride" (Simeon Polockij 1683: рѣ *verso*).

Celebrated as virgins, a condition that in Patristic thought traditionally enabled women to rise above the weakness of their sex, these women are nonetheless seen as fulfilling the feminine role of wife. These examples thus testify to an oscillation between the early Christian idea of the virgin as *virago* and the late medieval 'feminization' of virginity, when

¹⁷ The *Passion* of Saint Catherine is published in Viteau 1897. For an overview of St Catherine and her cult in both Eastern and Western Churches, see Marker 2007: 29-55 and Walsh 2007: 7-62.

¹⁸ See also Hughes 1990: 104.

¹⁹ For the *topos* of the *foemina virilis*, see Delierneux 2014: 380; Giannarelli 1980: 18-25; Castelli 1991. As Alexander Kazhdan (1990: 131) points out, "the gist of the hagiographical message is that [...] the hero has to forget, in his or her claim to holiness, what sex he or she was given".

²⁰ For a description of the six daughters of Aleksej Mixailovič as the wise virgins who wait for Christ the bridegroom ("чаютъ жениха Христа") see also Simeon's poem *Blagoprivetstvovanie* (Sazonova 2006: 405-406).

ecclesiastical writers were less eager to congratulate virgins for becoming "like men" and "placed more emphasis on virginity as the choice of the bride who has opted for the best groom of all" (Wogan-Browne 1994: 166).

Related to the masculine model of sainthood, whereby women have to overcome their natural sex, and yet proposing an ambiguous model of strictly feminine behavior, is also the life of Saint Theodora of Alexandria in the *Slovo v den' prepodobnyja matere našeja Feodory, jaže v Aleksandrii*²¹. Theodora is part of a group of twelve female saints that constitute the popular category of transvestite nuns, or cross-dressers, women disguised as monks and living as hermits in male monastic communities²². In Simeon's account, which draws on the short *vita* in the *Prolog*, Theodora is a married woman who, after committing adultery because of her feeble will ("вкратце реку: не злобою, но немощію"), rises from her sinful condition ("воста") and struggles to regenerate her life by living as monk in a male monastery. In shaping the story of Theodora as a parable of contrition, Simeon is following the Byzantine hagiographic tradition of describing both adulterers and prostitutes as 'harlots' (πόρνη), two categories of women that make up the ranks of 'holy penitents'²³. Characteristically, the masculine mask is what helps Theodora transcend her sinful female sexuality ("оути поль свой женскій и мужь быти притвориса"), so that dressing into a different person ("ѡтвергши рубище ветхого человека въ новагѡ вблечеса") entails "a drama of personal transformation" (Constas 1996: 4) that is primarily spiritual.

After living for seven years as Theodoros in a male monastery, she is falsely accused of impregnating a prostitute and forced out of the monastery²⁴. Ejected by her former com-

²¹ The *Life of Theodora* (ВНГ 1727-1730; *Patrologia Graeca* 115, 665-89; hereafter PG) was written in the mid-fifth or sixth century. See Wessely 1889: 25-44. Her Slavonic *vita* is included in the September volume of Makarii's *Velikija čet'i minei* (VČM S: col. 632).

²² E. Patlagean (1976: 600-602) lists twelve *vitae* of female transvestite saints, composed between the fifth and the early seventh century: Anastasia Patrikia, Anna/Euphemia, Apolinaria/Dorotheos, Athanasia (wife of Andronikos), Eugenia/Eugenios, Euphrosyne/Smaragdus, Hilaria/Hilarion, Mary/Marinos, Mary Matrona/Babylas, Pelagia/Pelagios, Theodora/Theodoros. Despite their formal condemnation in the Council of Gangra (340), cross-dressers and their *Lives* enjoyed immense popularity throughout the medieval world, in both east and west. Mary/Marinos (ВНГ 1163), who dressed as a man to follow her father into a male monastery, is mentioned by Simeon in the last part of the homily on Theodora ("Марія, яже Маринъ нареکشиса") and in the *Vertograd Mnogocvetnyj* ("Deva-inok, oklevetannaja bludom"). In his *Mesjaceslov*, Simeon mentions another popular cross-dressing saint, Euphrosyne of Alexandria (ВНГ 625), who clothed herself as a man ("поль свой женскій утаила") and under the name of Smaragdus gained admittance into a monastery of men near Alexandria (Simeon Polockij 1680: в). For a brief history of scholarship on cross-dressed heroines in religious literature, see Talbot 1996: 3-4; Davis 2002.

²³ See also his description of the story of Theodora as an experience of moral lapse and repentance in the *Mesjaceslov*: "Θεοδωρα падшаа, слезами восташе" (Simeon Polockij 1680: s) and the *kontakion* in the Slavonic office for the saint ("путь покаяния показавши").

²⁴ Here Simeon departs from Metaphrastes (PG 115, col. 677d), who talks about a local "girl" ("νεῆνις"), and follows the short Slavonic *vita* in the *Prolog*, where Theodora/Theodoros is framed

munity, she rears the child in poverty while retaining her male persona, acting – Simeon observes, not without a certain finesse – as the child’s father “по мнѣнію” and his mother “воспитаніемъ” (Simeon Polockij 1683: *л̣а verso*). The truth of her gender is not discovered until death, when her body is being prepared for burial. Having understood that she should be cleared of all the past accusations, the monks are surprised that God put “such fortitude into the weak vessel of the female sex” (“толику крѣпость в немошномъ сосудѣ женска пола”, *ivi*: *л̣в recto*).

A contradictory and enigmatic figure, Theodora is troped as a “female man of God” (in Palladius’ famous words)²⁵, but she also remains a woman in the mind of Simeon, who calls her a “mother” (“мати”) throughout the homily, although her motherhood is merely vicarious and not biological. Although punished for the sin of a man, she nonetheless conforms to the model of the female outcast, who is forced to raise the fruit of a sinful relationship alone²⁶. On the other hand, a blurring of gender boundaries informs her experience as a parent, which is said to combine motherly and fatherly features, a subtle psychological annotation that is notably absent from the Byzantine and Slavonic *vitae* of the saint. Most importantly, while female sexuality is seen as an obstacle to salvation, and Theodora atones for her sexual sin by putting on a male robe, motherhood – an experience that is inherently and unmistakably feminine – is an integral part of her regeneration path.

In this and in the virgin martyr homilies, the stories of ‘manly’ Christian women are thus balanced with references to what are believed to be quintessentially feminine activities such as marriage and motherhood. While adhering to a definite set of hagiographic stereotypes, this tension between masculinization and feminization illustrates a concern over appropriate roles for women. On the one hand, Simeon tailors his narrative to the needs of an audience of mainly unmarried women, even going as far as to offer intimacy with God as an elusive escape from the social control vested in marriage and childbearing. Tatiana, Theodosia and Catherine are all sexually harassed by their pagan torturers (a recurring *topos* of virgin martyr tales), but they staunchly preserve their bodies intact for the “handsomest bridegroom of all”. On the other hand, corporeal beauty, the saint’s desirability and, therefore, her potential inclusion in the ‘marriage market’ play a part that has no equivalent in the stories of male martyrs and that duly follows the conventions of female hagiography. In presenting the saint’s relationship with God in terms of a ‘conventional’ relationship between woman and man (Christ the bridegroom), the institution of marriage, far from being erased, is indeed given additional meanings and legitimacy.

Bridal imagery in texts conceived for a lay audience may also be a sign of the conceptualization of ‘secular’ virginity – that is, for female subjects other than nuns – as a provisional state, as a stage in the female life cycle of virgin, wife, and widow. In fact, as noted

by a “prostitute” (“блудница”). Notice that he may also be conflating the story of Theodora and that of Mary/Marinos, who was falsely accused by a prostitute (“*Deva-inok, oklevetannaja bludom*”).

²⁵ “Н ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ” (*Historia Lausiaca*, 9, PG 34, col. 1028).

²⁶ On the transvestite saint behaving as an “unwed mother”, see Hotchkiss 1996: 26.

by Karen-Anne Winstead (1997: 13), many late medieval texts addressed to the laity used the virgin martyr's special relationship with Christ to "model earthly marriages". The same paradox is at work in the story of Theodora, who even as a boy in disguise performs the very feminine task of raising a child. The child is not her own, though, and this allows the homily to keep its focus on sexual restraint as essential to holiness.

Arguably, the model for all these saints – the "ideogram for one's soul", in Peter Brown's definition (Brown 1983: 20) – is the Marian prototype of the 'spiritual bride-mother'. However, this hagiographic ideal does not lend itself to univocal readings and, as we shall see below, it displays a richness of interpretations and a coexistence of contradictory messages that signals a fundamental ambivalence toward the place of conventional womanhood.

3. *The Many Faces of Motherhood: Mother Saints, Spiritual Mothers and "Maternal Martyrs"*

In Theodora and the virgin martyrs' stories, 'bride' and 'mother' are powerful symbols of spiritual experience, but Simeon's homilies grant holiness also to those women who enacted these roles in the flesh. These are Martha, mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger, Mary, Xenophon's wife, Anna, Mary's mother, and Sophia. Despite their unifying theme, the homilies that have holy mothers as their subjects are far from homogeneous in their renderings of motherhood.

Some of them emphasize loving, harmonious relationships among members of the family and the importance of raising children properly, so that they obey and worship God. In the *Slovo v den' sviatyja Marfy, matere sviatago Simeona Stolpnika*, the crucial role of Martha as a conduit of holiness is summed up in the thematic clue of the homily: "Hast thou children? instruct them, and bow down their neck from their childhood" (Sir 7:25)²⁷. Martha is the mirror of her son's virtues; Symeon's unique qualities are the proof that his mother was exceptional. No mention is made of Martha's own actions as a saint: she is indeed sanctified due to her exemplary motherhood, which is paralleled to that of the Virgin Mary. Following the Marian model, the female body, normally the source of sin, here becomes the source of salvation, for it nurtured a holy man.

The homily on the Dormition of Saint Anna, *Slovo v den' uspenija sviatyja Anny*, equally builds on the idea of Anna as the source of an important generative line, a theme especially prominent in Greek and Byzantine writings on the saint (Nixon 2004: 12). In a characteristic blend of Orthodox and Catholic influences, the Holy Family is conceived as a matriarchal kinship consisting of mother (Mary), infant (Jesus) and maternal grandmother (Anna), who is hailed as the "heir" ("наследница") to her divine grandson's ("божественный внукъ") celestial heritage ("небесное наследіе", Simeon Polockij 1683: *ŷei verso*). In fact, the image of Anna next to her daughter and an enthroned Christ repre-

²⁷ The *Life of Saint Martha* (ВНГ 1174; *Acta Sanctorum Mai*, v, 1685: 403-31) was composed in the sixth century. See van den Ven 1970.

sents a powerful dynastic variation on the popular Western iconographic motif known as *Anna Selbdritt*, which shows Saint Anne sitting with Mary and a baby Jesus on her laps (see Nixon 2004: 18ff.). This genealogy from mother to daughter to Christ is not made clear in Mt 1:1-17, the gospel read on the Feast of the Birth of the Virgin and relating Christ's predecessors. However, the Roman Church demanded a royal lineage for Mary through her mother, and many Catholic preachers known to Simeon, such as the Jesuit Matthias Faber, reaffirmed this argument²⁸.

In his praise of Anna and Martha, Simeon is also following the Patristic *topos* of the matrilinear transmission of sanctity, which gained in popularity from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, becoming a well-established hagiographic stereotype. Humanists showed a widespread interest in child raising and in the relationship between parents and children: in the West, the renewal of interest in children's education and family issues had an impact on the flourishing of the cult of two holy mothers, Saint Anna and Saint Monica, Augustine's mother (see Atkinson 1985).

In this respect, Simeon shares the humanist belief that people could be 'taught to be good' and his holy mothers become the embodiment of the 'optima mater' of Patristic tradition and a powerful symbol of the value of education, a topic that is specifically concerned with the responsibilities of the tsaritsa in the upbringing and instruction of her children²⁹. The homily on Saint Martha opens with the idea that "good parents generate good children" and that habit and instruction ("ученіе") are as important as nature ("естество") (Simeon Polockij 1683: а̅ verso). In the homily on Sophia and her three daughters, *Slovo v den' sviatyja mučenicj Sofii, i čad eja, Very, Nadeždy i Liubve*, Sophia, whose name is correctly interpreted as Wisdom ("премудрость"), passed her intellectual qualities on to her three daughters, for "the root can be recognized by the branches" ("каковъ корень, таковы и вѣтвы вбращутса") (*ivi: ѱ recto*).

In the *Slovo* on "Father Xenophon and his wife Mary", which opens with the same biblical quotation as the homily on Saint Martha ("hast thou children?"), Xenophon and Mary are pious Christians and rich citizens of Byzantium who lose their children, Arcadius and John, during a sea voyage, after they decide to send them to Beirut for their education³⁰. Again, the homily's prologue praises education as more effective than nature in the upbringing of good children (Simeon Polockij 1683: с̅ла recto).

²⁸ See his homily on the feast of Saint Anne, *In Festo S. Annae* (Faber 1646: 246-274). Faber's *Concionum Opus Tripartitum* (Köln 1646) was among the books possessed by Simeon (Hippisley, Luk'janova 2005: 63).

²⁹ For an analysis of the theme of parental education in Simeon Polockij, see Kiseleva 2013: 207.

³⁰ The Byzantine *Life of Xenophon* (ВНГ 1878-1897; PG 114, 1014-1044; *Acta Sanctorum, Ianuarii*, II, 1643: 723-730) was composed between 540 and 555. See Bouhlol 1996: 163-164 and Alwis 2011: 135. Mary, Xenophon's wife, was Marija Alekseevna's name saint, as a note from January 26 (the feast day of Xenophon and Mary) in the *Dvorcovye razrjady* makes clear: "182 году [1674 – МГВ], Генваря въ 26 день, на именина Государыня Царевны и Великіе Княжны Маріи Алексѣвны [...]" (DR3: col. 919).

As seen above, the value of education – and of mothers as a conduit of children’s education – is also a prominent feature of Simeon’s retelling of the story of Theodora. While both the Byzantine and Slavonic *vitae* value Theodora’s vicarious motherhood as merely another bodily humiliation in her path to salvation, Simeon’s emphasis is on her positive parental role towards the prostitute’s child. In particular, where the hagiographic narrative describes Theodora as ‘feeding’ the child (“εγοже питаше”; “τὸ νεογενὲς ἀποτρέφουσα”)³¹, the preacher remarks that she “educated him” (“родительски воспиташе”), acting as her mother “воспитаниємъ” (*ivi: ља verso*). Here and elsewhere, Simeon draws extensively on Matthias Faber’s homily on the Nativity of Mary (*In Festo Nativitatis B.V.M.*), a text that equally stresses the modelling role of parents – and most notably of mothers – in the spiritual education of their children. “Malorum parentum communiter malos esse filios uti bonorum bonos”; “[...] tametsi rarius, ut bonorum parentum mali sint filii, et malorum boni”; “matris institutionem plus plerumque posse in filios quam patris” (Faber 1646: 322-323).

However, some of these homilies also highlight the complex and ambiguous relationship between motherhood and holiness³². In the homily on Sophia and her three daughters, Sophia watches her daughters’ torture, encouraging their martyrdom³³. While enumerating the torments that Sophia impassively witnessed inflicted upon her daughters (“не имѣаше рыдати”), Simeon notices that she “surpassed her own nature” (“Софіа выше естества укрѣпися”) and that “love for God can overcome maternal love”: “любовь материню, любви бжїа превдольваше” (*ivi: иї verso*). Sophia’s closest biblical precedent, Simeon reminds us, is Solomonia, the mother of the Maccabees, who, after watching six sons tortured before her very eyes, exhorted the seventh to suffer martyrdom and finally died herself³⁴.

Writing about Mary separating from her sons John and Arcadius to send them to study in Beirut, Simeon equally emphasizes her sorrow and “manly” forbearance in the renunciation of her children (“ѡпустила ихъ въ морскую пучину”). Like Sophia, she transcended the constraints of motherly (and female) nature: “Ѡ жена мужественная! Ѡ родительнице, женского пола превосходящаа, крепость и разумъ” (*ivi: ѡмв recto*).

While being influenced by the hagiographic *topos* of the ‘manly woman’, this narrative pattern harks back to late antique and medieval representations of holy mothers, where

³¹ See Metaphrastes’ *Life of Theodora* (PG 115, 680c).

³² On the ambivalent opinions of the Church Fathers regarding biological motherhood, see Tibbets Schulenburg 1998: 211 ff. and Dunn 2016: 71-97.

³³ According to the legend, the four noble women were arrested by the soldiers of the emperor Adrian. Faith, the older sister, was beheaded, followed by her younger sisters Hope and Charity. Sophia died three days after burying her daughters. Their Greek *Passio* (BHG 1637-1639; PG 115, 497-513) was written in the sixth century (see Halkin 1973: 180). Their Slavonic *vita* is included in the September volume of Makarii’s *Velikija čet’i minei* (VČM S: coll. 1228-1229).

³⁴ Both the Eastern and Western churches commemorated the Maccabees on 1 August. A Christian cult emerged in late fourth-century Antioch and in Cyprian and Origen’s writings the seven brothers became paradigmatic figures for Christian martyrdom. Their Christian *vita* was included in the August volume of Makarii’s *Velikija čet’i minei*. See Iosif 1892, II: 395.

the theme of the renunciation of children indeed plays a crucial role. Mary and Sophia fit into the paradigm of the “maternal martyr” as Barbara Newman describes it in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*: “the maternal martyr is a woman whose holiness is enhanced by her willingness to abandon her children, or, in extreme cases, consent to their deaths, as the Virgin did to Christ” (Newman 1995: 77). Paula and Melania, wealthy Roman matrons and Jerome’s spiritual *protégées*, left property and children to pursue their holy vocation, overcoming – Jerome writes – “love for [their] children by [their] love for God”³⁵. In the thirteenth century, Elizabeth of Thuringia, according to the *vita* of Caesarius of Heisterbach, deserted her three children as proof of her love of God (*ibid.*). There are also Byzantine examples of women who deserted their children to follow a monastic life, such as Matrona of Perge, who entrusted her only daughter to a pious woman and, dressed as a man, took refuge from her abusive husband in the male monastery of Bassianos³⁶.

The “maternal martyr” paradigm that is characteristic of Paula, Melania, Elizabeth, and Matrona functions as evidence of the woman’s triumph over her own sex and as proof of her willingness to follow Christ, two elements that are also central to Sophia and Mary’s narratives. Perhaps most importantly, in Simeon’s homilies separation from one’s children is an exclusively female prerogative and cannot be explained as merely an instance of the common hagiographic trope of the man who leaves family, possessions and marriage to follow Christ. The latter does appear in Simeon’s portrayals of male sainthood, especially in the homily on Alexis man of God, Aleksej Mixailovič’s name saint, who left family, possessions and wife to follow Christ, but notably *no children* (Simeon Polockij 1683: сѣпа-сѣпи). A saint like Alexis is praised for his relentless desire to leave society and, therefore, for controlling such ‘masculine’ impulses as the thirst for wealth and social power³⁷.

By contrast, Simeon’s allusions to Mary and Sophia’s man-like bravery in overcoming a traditionally ‘feminine’ feeling such as “maternal love” are too numerous and gender-specific in comparison with his sources for them not to be deliberate additions, ones that are clearly reminiscent of Jerome’s idea that “love for children can be overcome by love for God”. Makarij’s *Life of Sophia* succinctly reports Sophia’s “tears” on her daughters’ tomb; the *Prolog* describes the three girls’ martyrdom as the exclusive responsibility of the wicked pagan authorities and mentions their mother only in passing³⁸. None of them, however, attributes any *active* role to Sophia. Further, in the Byzantine and Slavonic *vitae* of Xenophon and Mary, the decision to send John and Arcadius to Beirut comes exclusively from

³⁵ “Amorem filiorum majore in Deum amore contemnens”; Jerome, *Letter 108* (PL 22, col. 881).

³⁶ *The Life of St Matrona of Perge* (ВНГ 1221-1222; *Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, III, 1910: 790-813) was written no earlier than the second half of the sixth century. See *Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, III, 1910: 786 ff.

³⁷ For a discussion of Saint Alexis in the context of Byzantine familial relations, see Constantinou 2012b.

³⁸ “Мати же ихъ Софѣя погреб’ши своя дети, а падши на гробѣхъ ихъ со слезами, и помольшися, предасть духъ свои Господеви” (всѣм s: col. 1229); “Сихъ же мати Соѣѣа за три дни гробу ихъ присѣдаши, дѣшу свою гдѣви придаде” (*Prolog* 1642: ѡи).

Xenophon ("Ξενοφонт послаже оба сына своа в Вирить") while Mary behaves as the feeble and emotional component of the couple.

For Pascal Bouhlol (1996: 164), the *Life of Xenophon and Mary* is a "fable sur la ξενιτεία", which means an absolute renunciation of possessions, body, and soul, for, after losing their children, the couple give all their riches to the poor and retire to a monastery in Jerusalem. Characteristically, Simeon explores the theme of ξενιτεία almost exclusively in terms of mother-children relationship, commenting extensively on Mary's painful and yet successful obliteration of her maternal attachment to John and Arcadius ("естественную любовь забывши")³⁹, in a language that is, again, resonant with Jerome's admiration for Paula's 'ethic of children renunciation' and consequent victory over the "laws of nature" ("jura naturae")⁴⁰. On the other hand, unlike Sophia, or such "maternal martyrs" as Paula and Melania, Mary relinquishes her children to enhance their education. Simeon thus skillfully adapts the hagiographic *topos* of the heroic mother renouncing her children to target the secular needs and expectations of his lay and royal audience, while further stressing the crucial link between 'motherhood' and 'education'.

Seamlessly connected to the theme of the "maternal martyr" is a strong emphasis on the spiritual dimension of motherhood. In most homilies, biological motherhood is de-emphasized, while the ability to transmit the Grace of God through physical conception is replaced by the spiritual role of education. We have already seen that Theodora's vicarious motherhood becomes an integral part of her path to salvation. Similarly, Sophia is clearly less concerned with her own role as the children's biological mother than with their spiritual upbringing. Her last words to her daughters – that teaching them the moral values of Christian life is more powerful a bond than experiencing the physical pain of the throes of childbirth – stress the superiority of "spiritual" over "biological" motherhood: "помните... якъ азъ вы не точію съ болезнію по плоти родихъ, но и страху вы божію...научила есмь" (Simeon Polockij 1683: иѣ *verso*). In contrast, attention to the body of the holy mother – to the 'materiality' of motherhood – plays an important role in the homily on Mary and Xenophon ("впусти мати свѣтъ очію си, утробу свою, кровь свою, радость свою"), but only to emphasize Mary's successful severance of this physical bond.

In order to understand the extent of Simeon's innovation, here it may be useful to compare his rendition of Sophia's motherhood with the same passage in Dimitrij Rostovskij's *Life of Sophia* (1689), that is, with a text from another Kiev-educated intellectual who was drawing on a similar set of hagiographic sources. In Dimitrij's account, Sophia speaks of her physical ties to her daughters with tenderness and affection ("о дщери моа добрыа, поманите моа болезни яже въ рожденіи вашемъ имѣла"), a narrative choice which, while following Metaphrastes' story more closely, also testifies to a different set of values regarding biological motherhood (Rostovskij 1764: нѣ *verso*). In fact, Metaphrastes clearly states that Sophia is mother "according to the flesh" ("κατὰ σάρκα") and according

³⁹ Simeon Polockij 1683: сѣмв *recto*.

⁴⁰ Jerome, *Letter 108* (PL 22, col. 881).

to the spirit, for she educated (“*παίδεια*”) her daughters, but he avoids establishing any hierarchy of spirit and flesh (PG 115: col. 500d). By contrast, Simeon departs from the Byzantine *vita* to follow the version in Piotr Skarga’s *Żywot S. Zophiey wdowy*, a text that subtly reshapes the boundaries of physical and spiritual motherhood: “*Pomnicie [...] was ne tylko wedleciata z boleścią urodzila, ale też was boiażni Bożey [...] nauczyła*” (Skarga 1605: 751)⁴¹.

Of particular relevance to our discussion of the limits and ambiguities of biological motherhood are also those cases in which virginity becomes a ‘generator of life’ and virgin martyrs are represented as ‘spiritual mothers’. In the homily on Saint Catherine, the virgin Catherine, who converts the emperor’s wife and the captain of his guard along with two hundred soldiers, is praised for giving birth to “spiritual offspring” (“*чистаа дѣва Екатерина сватаа роди бгу духовныа чада сїа*”) through the example of her life and her words of exhortation and teaching (Simeon Polockij 1683: *při verso*)⁴². In the *Slovo* on Saint Irene of Macedonia, the virgin martyr Irene resurrects her dead father Lycinius, who then converts to the Christian faith. Irene thus becomes “a spiritual parent to her physical parents”: “*бысть родительница духовная плотскима родителима своима*” (*ivi: тѣи verso*). Inherent in the spiritualization of motherhood is indeed the renegotiation of family ties according to a hierarchy of sanctity. Further, Irene acting as a spiritual parent to her own father is another instance of spiritual sublimation of childbearing: while dying a martyr *and* a virgin she still managed to perform maternal duties, although of a spiritual kind. Following the tradition of Christian monasticism, virginity, spiritual teaching and spiritual motherhood are thus inextricably linked. However, we should not make the mistake of reading the replacement of biological motherhood within the strict boundaries of Christian ascetic doctrines that disparaged it as a consequence of lust (Atkinson 1991: 99). The *topos* that saintly motherhood demands the renunciation of its physical counterpart here also serves the needs of the contemporary situation at court. First, it should be seen as a symptom of the fact that, by the time Simeon was writing his homilies, the position of the Tsar’s daughters and sisters was by no means dependent on their reproductive abilities. Second, if these homilies were designed as appropriate models of behavior for the Romanov royal women, then the image of physical motherhood was indeed less suitable for the unmarried sisters and daughters of Aleksej Mixailovič. Insistence on spiritual motherhood, even for those women who, like Sophia, were also biological mothers, would compensate the stipulation that royal daughters were not allowed to marry.

There seems to be a common pattern uniting Simeon’s treatment of motherhood and that of marriage in his virgin martyr homilies. De-emphasizing the biological aspects of both institutions is a fitting way to stress their centrality to the political and ideological system of seventeenth-century Muscovy, while trying to come to grips with their non-avail-

⁴¹ Skarga’s *Lives* were among the hagiographic works present in Simeon’s personal library. See Hippisley Luk’janova 2005: 131.

⁴² See also “*поидоша блаженнаа чада пред блаженною мѣрю*” (Simeon Polockij 1683: *při recto*).

ability to part of the royal female audience. The homily on Sophia passing on her spiritual qualities to her three daughters Faith, Hope and Charity, builds on the customary myth of royal women functioning as "vessels of the Divine" (Thyret 1994: 493) while choosing a saint whose kinship bears clearly allegorical features. Likewise, the image of the virgins Catherine and Irene acting as mothers to numerous spiritual offspring gives a larger meaning to the *topos* of the "royal mother" (Thyret 2001: 16). It is also telling that in this collection Saint Anna does not function in her traditional capacity as an intercessor in childbearing, but she represents the cult of the family, one where the matriarchal element is more prominent than the patriarchal, a circumstance that also provides a window on the flexibility of her cult among royal women and ecclesiastic writers⁴³.

Such rhetorical negotiations were not unknown at the Muscovite court. As evidenced by Thyret (1994: 487), in the *Tale of Solomonija's Tonsure*, which appears in the chronicle of the Pafnut'ev Borovskij Monastery and the Synodal copy of the *Tipografskaja* chronicle, both composed in the 1540s at metropolitan Daniil's court, the infertility of Solomonija Saburova, first wife of Vasilij III, is compensated by the claim that she had been chosen for "spiritual motherhood". Simeon inserts himself in this tradition, providing his audience with a tentative compromise between the ascetic emphasis on the preeminence of virginity as essential to salvation and the notion of mothers, both biological and spiritual, as the 'locus' of their children's holiness – a compromise that is clearly shaped by the figure of Christ's mother. However, as shown by some of his sources (the Jesuits Faber and Skarga), the models he is drawing on are not native Muscovite Russian, and what we witness here is the skillful convergence of two distinct traditions.

4. *Marriage and the Female Saint as "Domestic Proselytizer"*

Simeon's mother saints share a number of common characteristics with the category of holy wives, one of which is their prominent position within their respective family groups. Two homilies in the collection celebrate married saints – Xenophon and Mary and Adrian and Natalia – and while Simeon's predictable emphasis is on their harmonious relationship and reciprocal love, these texts portray holy wives as bearing a degree of self-consciousness that is unmatched in their male companions. In the Slavonic *Prolog* Mary is a pale background character, a mere appendix to Xenophon's narrative ("Женофонт и честная супруга егw Марія") without any agency of her own. In Lazar Baranovyč's *Żywoty świętych* (1670), a hagiographic source well known to Simeon, Mary is laconically identified as "Xenophon's wife" and bereft of a name of her own ("*Xenophon swiety z żoną i z synami*")⁴⁴. By contrast, Simeon transforms her into the real protagonist of the homily and the only addressee of the final peroration, which, as seen above, tropes her as a "female man

⁴³ On the veneration of Saint Anne among the *tsaritsy* for her capacity to bless the womb of royal women, see Thyret 2001: 30 ff.

⁴⁴ Baranovyč 1670: 334. Baranovyč's *Żywoty świętych* was among the works possessed by Simeon (Hippisley, Luk'janova 2005: 26).

of God”, as a “tough mother” (“крепкосерднаа”) who overcomes her “natural love” for her children (“естественную любовь забывши”).

The wife, and, in general, the female saint’s role of channeling moral strength to the male members of her family is also particularly evident in the story of Adrian and Natalia, Natal’ja Naryškina’s name saint. In the homily, which draws on the Slavonic *vita*⁴⁵, Adrian is a pagan soldier who dwells in Nicomedia during the reign of the Emperor Maximian and converts to Christianity after his wife Natalia ignites love for Christ into his ‘heart of darkness’ (“мрачень бѣ душею... хладень же сердцемъ”) (Simeon Polockij 1683: фг *recto*). When he is arrested, Natalia runs to the prison and he exhorts her to return on the day of the tribunal to witness his execution. On the appointed day, he unexpectedly goes home to his wife, who assumes that he has renegaded Christ and harshly reproaches him. Reassured that he just came to say goodbye, she fortifies him for the trial ahead. In order to attend trial Natalia then disguises herself as a man (“преухитри коварника”) and persuades other women to do so (“єа образомъ прочіа жены тоже сотвориша”) (*ivi*: фс *verso*).

Natalia is a key player in the story, coming along as a wise (“ѿ мудрости горніа, а не земныа”), smart and resourceful woman: she is responsible for Adrian’s conversion, takes the initiative of dressing as a boy, and goes even further in rejecting the sexual advances of a pagan suitor. Natalia’s strength of character casts Adrian into a background role, which is further illustrated by the thematic clue of the homily, a quotation from St Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (“for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by his wife”, 1 Cor 7:14). Moreover, while in the Byzantine and Slavonic *vitae* Adrian converts to Christianity after talking to a group of prisoners that he dispatches to execution, here Natalia becomes the real ‘agent of salvation’ for her “unbelieving husband”. Natalia’s role as spiritual intercessor emerges with unmistakable strength during the final conversation with her husband, when Adrian talks to her as to an “intercessor” (“млтвенницѣ и ходатайцѣ ко гду”) and the woman who “brought him to God” (“мужа твоего приобрела еси бгу”), an expression that highlights her Marian function as an intermediary between God and men.

In stressing Natalia’s remarkable perseverance and crucial role in urging Adrian to renounce paganism, the homily builds on the prototype of “domestic proselytization” (Tibbets Schulenburg 1998: 180). The latter can be traced back to the early Christian era, when a number of prominent women embraced the new faith and dedicated themselves to converting their husbands and children. The empress-saint Helena, who is credited for her

⁴⁵ The Greek *Life* of Adrian and Natalia (ВНГ 27-29; *Acta Sanctorum Septembris*, III, 1750: 218-230) was translated into Church Slavonic in the eleventh century. In the sixteenth century, it was included in the August volume of Makarii’s *Velikija čet’i minei*. See Iosif 1892, II: 436-437. A church to Saint Adrian and Natalia was consecrated near Moscow in 1672, to honor the marriage of Aleksej Mixailovič to Natal’ja Naryškina. Identification between Natal’ja Naryškina and Saint Natalia is further confirmed by the short versified *vita* of Adrian and Natalia (*Žitie vkratce stixotvornoju metroju svjatyx mučenik Adriana i supružnicy ego Natalii*) donated by Karion Istomin to a then widowed Natal’ja in 1688 (Sazonova 2006: 78).

primary role in the conversion of her son Constantine, is one of the most famous examples in this tradition. Helena was cited as a prototype and an exemplum for many other newly converted queens and noblewomen, including Kyivan princess Ol’ga. She also was a model for Muscovite royal women from Elena Glinskaja to Marija Il’inična (Thyret 2001: 66-70; 85)⁴⁶. Revealingly, the beginning of the homily on Natalia mentions Helena, making a distinction between those women who brought their men to perdition (Eve, Bathsheba, and Dalila) and those who won recognition for their early espousal of the Christian faith and their roles in “sanctifying” the men in their families. These are Helena, Constantine’s mother; Ol’ga, grandmother of Vladimir, the Baptizer of Rus’; Irene of Macedonia, and Catherine of Alexandria (Simeon Polockij 1683: фВ *recto*).

Proselytization – of both a domestic and ‘public’ kind – is indeed central to the homilies on Catherine, who converted the emperor’s wife and two hundred soldiers, and Irene, Irina Mixailovna’s name saint, who won her “unbelieving” father over to the new faith⁴⁷. Here Irene’s story seems to find a direct reflection in the functions and actions of her royal *tezoimenitaja*. We know from the tsar’s personal correspondence that Aleksej Mixailovič used to seek the advice of his elder sister Irina and shared information concerning political matters with her⁴⁸. Simeon’s typically Baroque play with Irene’s etymology – peace – (“Ирино, буди намъ по имени мирнаа, примири миръ сей”) may also hint to the function of the royal sister as protector of the peace, or “peace-weaver”, a role that was viewed as a special female responsibility in Western early medieval society (Tibbets Schulenburg 1998: 74; Nichols, Thomas Shank 1987)⁴⁹.

A pattern of “domestic proselytization” is also evident in two homilies that are apparently unrelated to the Romanov women, those on Saint Vladimir and on the Holy Maccabean Martyrs and their mother Solomonia who, as seen in our discussion of Sophia, encouraged her seven sons to undergo torture and death. In the former, Simeon praises Vladimir’s wife, Anna, for being the “believing wife sanctifying the unbelieving husband” (Simeon Polockij 1683: тчи *recto*). The use of the same Pauline quotation found in the homily on Natalia and Adrian clearly points to the similarities between the two women, while highlighting the role of Natalia as a ‘dynastic’ saint.

A common feature uniting Simeon’s female proselytizers is indeed their royal status: Helena, Ol’ga, Anna, Irene and Catherine equally descend from a powerful line. A royal subtext is also at work in the *Slovo* on the Holy Maccabean Martyrs, where Simeon observes that the martyriized brothers adumbrate the tsar and the “torments” that come along

⁴⁶ Note that Aleksej Mixailovič was often eulogized as a second Constantine in contemporary court poetry. See Hippisley 1985: 18.

⁴⁷ See also Simeon’s description of Irene as a “proselytizer” in the *Mesjaceslov* “Ирина тмы темъ ко Христу обратила” (Simeon Polockij 1680: гї).

⁴⁸ See Paul of Aleppo 1836: 123, 126; quoted in Thyret 2001: 134.

⁴⁹ Notice that Irina’s etymology as “*mirnaja*” (peaceful) is already present in Pamvo Berynda’s *Leksikon* (Berynda 1627: вї), which was one of Simeon’s sources.

with the responsibilities of political power: “якъ великихъ людей, велицы суть крста” (Simeon Polockij 1683; *ѣки recto*)⁵⁰. Seen in this perspective, Solomonia’s behavior vis-à-vis her sons is another powerful reminder of the instrumental role of royal women in encouraging and guiding their male family members. If, as Simeon points out, political responsibility is the royal man’s “cross”, then royal women were expected to share that cross in a way that is less peripheral to their men’s lives than we are inclined to think.

A close reading of these homilies thus suggests that women saints, regardless of their married or unmarried condition, act as an ‘agent of redemption’ for the men who hear them, a circumstance that seems to call attention to the traditionally supportive role of Muscovite royal women vis-à-vis their male kinsfolk and to their function as defenders of the Orthodox faith⁵¹. In this respect, emphasis on women’s role as ‘proselytizers’ may also hint to the fact that in the seventeenth century, the tsarevny were not in principle unmarriageable, “but it was deemed essential that the spouse convert to Orthodoxy” (Hughes 1990: 18)⁵².

Significantly, strong and reciprocal support in following the Christian faith, Adrian’s initial resistance notwithstanding, characterizes all the holy couples that Simeon offers as an example, despite the fact that a frequent *topos* of female hagiography is familial interference in the holy woman’s spiritual career. Byzantine hagiography acknowledged a few women – Mary the Younger in the ninth century and Thomaïs of Lesbos in the tenth century – who achieved sanctity while being married to a man, but in these narratives husbands usually represent a major obstacle to their wives’ devotion, beating them, or trying to limit the extent of their charitable activity. As noticed by Constantinou (2014: 32), “the sanctity of the large majority of women commemorated in Byzantine hagiography is associated with a man who makes female holiness possible either as a torturer or as a spiritual father”. To a certain extent, familial interference in the female saint’s spiritual career also permeates the lives of such pious Russian laywomen as Ul’iana Lazareva⁵³.

By contrast, Simeon’s homilies on married saints seem to follow the developments of Western piety and hagiography, where the lives of married women saints became much more common in the late middle ages than they had been during apostolic and early medieval times (Glasser 1981: 27). Most importantly, they reflect a broader ideological structure in which the proper place for a royal woman was at the side of her husband, who, in turn, did not constitute an independent persona from his wife. As evidenced by Thyret (2001: 176),

⁵⁰ In the homily *De Maccabeorum laudem* (PG 35, col. 913), Gregory of Nazianzus states that the seven brothers lived “in accordance with the cross” (“κατὰ τον Σταυρόν”) an argument that deeply informs Simeon’s text.

⁵¹ On Romanov women as the tsar’s helpmates, see Thyret 2001: 8off.

⁵² On the other hand, before the seventeenth century political marriages to foreign princes were a common phenomenon. Elena Ivanovna, daughter of Ivan III, married Grand Prince Alexander of Lithuania, who did not have to convert from Catholicism (*ibid.*).

⁵³ The *Life* of Ul’iana is published in Kalistrat Osor’in 1988. For recent literature on the subject of female lay piety in Muscovite Russia, see Thyret 2003.

"medieval Russia never separated the person of its ruler from that of his wife. Queenship as a category distinct from kingship was not acceptable". However, even as he seeks to link the partners of a marriage in one indissoluble persona, Simeon is also clear in reminding his audience that the tsar and his wife have distinct roles determined to a large degree by their gender. During their final conversation, Natalia talks to Adrian as to "her head" ("яко главѣ си"), referring to the Pauline notion that wives should submit to their spouses ("the husband is the head")⁵⁴. In the end, Adrian conquers the martyr's crown and a privileged relationship with God, while her function remains that of a brave, if obstinate, intercessor.

5. *The Female Saint Twixt the Private and Public Spheres*

It should now be clear that Simeon's homilies bring the female saints of Byzantine and early Christian times back into life with subtle shifts of emphasis that adjust their behaviors to contemporary expectations. What is remarkable here is that, in spite of the Christian tradition that used the female as a sign for all that is weak and carnal, he shows us women who command a remarkable number of strengths and talents. This is by no means Simeon's innovation, for it is in fact an element of Byzantine female hagiography, but it is certainly his own choice to resort to this tradition to present his female models in a favorable light. They are brave; they influence their families to lead more pious lives (Natalia, Irene); they preach to emperors and philosophers (Catherine); defy pagan authorities (Irene, Natalia) and face their children's torture and death (Sophia, Mary). These are 'good women': as wives and mothers, they epitomize societal – and court – expectations. Theodora herself pursues, albeit not always successfully, full integration within the male monastic community that she enters.

On the other hand, while socially obedient, they are not shown to be weak, subservient, or lustful. Those who do have a record of lustfulness, such as Theodora, are treated with unusual equanimity, especially if we compare these homilies to Simeon's misogynist tirade in the *Slovo 27 po sošestvii Sviatago Duxa*, contained in the *Obed duševnyj* (1681). In this Sunday homily, which was probably designed to be delivered in Moscow's main churches, Simeon resorts to a long list of proverbial antifeminist *topoi*, describing women as "silly (*sliakaja*) in their intellect" "sinful (*grešnaja*) in their spirit", "feeble" (*nemošćni*) in their flesh, and a "temptation" (*bludnaja*) to the virtuous (Simeon Polockij 1681: *ŷka recto*). By contrast, in the homilies celebrating the name saints of the Romanov women, stories like that of Theodora, Irene, and Natalia reverse the Adam and Eve paradigm, for these women are instrumental in other men's salvation.

In particular, Simeon's rendition of female sanctity proves that, as Susan Ashbrook Harvey points out, women represent the "reversal" that is at the center of Byzantine theology of salvation: they are "the weak made strong, the unworthy made worthy, the sensual made spiritual" (Ashbrook Harvey 1990: 45). The latter point plays an important part

⁵⁴ On man's role as "woman's head" in early Christianity, see Constantinou 2015b.

in the homily on Saint Catherine, who in Simeon's hands becomes the apparently frail "female David" who succeeds in defeating the Goliath of pagan philosophers. She is the "weak" woman whom God has chosen to shame strong men: "немощную естеством дѣвцу избра на побѣжденіе сильныхъ" (Simeon Polockij 1683: p̄ri verso).

By reversing gender expectations, these portrayals also defy any rigid private/public dichotomy that has been used to explain women's lower status within the Muscovite court⁵⁵. First, Simeon's narratives do not share the insistence on claustration that is typical of Latin medieval and Middle Byzantine *vitae* of female saints⁵⁶. None of his saints has passed most of her life in a monastic community or is permanently secluded behind the convent gates. In particular, Catherine, Irene and Natalia present the image of strong, intellectual ("премудраа") women who preach the Christian faith in public and convert the unbelievers. This seems to problematize the idea of the "nun-like tsarevny cloistered from public view" (Hughes 1990: 22).

The female saint, in other words, does not work within an institutional religious setting. She moves in a secular arena in which mothers, wives and maidens could find a saintly model that integrates traditional Christian virtues with more fitting attributes for their social identity: noble birth (Irene, Catherine), illustrious offspring (Martha, Anna), secular careers as wives and mothers (Natalia, Mary). In the case of Theodora of Alexandria, the *siuzhet* of entering a convent is nothing more than a narrative device, the real focus of the homily being physical and spiritual cross-dressing and, most importantly, Theodora's role as spiritual mother to the prostitute's child. The latter is performed outside the monastery, in a clearly 'public' space where the saint has to fight for her own and the child's survival. Martyrdom, which shapes the Christian experiences and determines the final destinies of Catherine, Irene, Tatiana and Theodosia, is also an eminently 'public' phenomenon and recent studies on female hagiography have stressed the "theatrical" nature of female martyr narratives (see Constantinou 2005).

When it comes to holy wives, neither Mary nor Natalia are praised as domestic *ancilla* saints or glorified for their exclusively private roles. By visiting her husband and the other Christian martyrs in prison (and disguising as a boy in order to circumvent the emperor's prohibitions), Natalia effectively emerges as a mediator between the private and the public sphere. Even homilies celebrating the virtues of motherhood do not seem to glorify the private role or cult of domesticity of these holy mothers, who are less praised for their domestic arts than for their ability to transcend earthly mother-child bonds. In this respect, Mary's decision to relinquish her sons and send them to Beirut should be considered as another instance of a woman saint mediating between the public and the domestic spheres.

⁵⁵ See Zabelin 1872: 294-295. For discussions of the topic of the *terem* see Claus 1959; McNally 1976; Kollman 1983; Pushkareva 1989, and Thyret (2001: 118-138), who devotes a whole chapter of her book to the fallacy of this concept.

⁵⁶ See Smith 1995, Talbot 2001: 6.

Commenting on the lives of late medieval religious women, Caroline Walker Bynum (1984) has noted that continuity with home and family rather than abrupt conversion shaped these women’s understanding of their lives. This pattern does not seem to apply to most of Simeon’s female saints, who are characteristically portrayed against a backdrop of a series of dramatic ruptures – repentance, violent separation from their offspring, death by martyrdom, cross-dressing. These stories clearly conform to late antique and early Christian hagiographic models, when marginal and individual experiences were indeed more numerous and attractive than forms of sanctity more integrated within societal order. Immersed as they are in the brave and perilous world of early Christianity, these women are also quite distant from the new model of feminine piety and devotion in the lay world that was created by the seventeenth-century *Lives* of Ul’jana Lazareva and Feodosija Morozova. It is significant, for instance, that none of Simeon’s female saints is shown performing household duties or handiwork, although the latter is a widespread *topos* of feminine hagiographies of lay saints. In showing ‘exceptional’ women, these stories do seem to foster that “aura of exclusivity” which, in Lindsey Hughes’ words (Hughes 1990: 19), surrounded the Romanov women and was later to help Sof’ja in her quest for power.

Here it may be useful to compare performances in courtly and non-courtly pulpits. In his homily on Adrian and Natalia – which ends with an invocation to tsaritsa Natal’ja Naryškina – Dimitrij Rostovskij praises Natalia for her spiritual martyrdom (“мученичество соверши духовными подвигами”), chaste widowhood following Adrian’s death and humble behavior (Rostovskij 1840: 194). Ideally addressing the lay provincial audience of Rostov, the text makes no mention of the strong spiritual bond that unites this couple, nor of Natalia’s strong-willed performance vis-à-vis her husband’s trial and martyrdom. Simeon’s ‘vocal’ holy-wife is turned into a silent and subservient *ancilla Domini*.

Nonetheless, the world of Simeon’s female saints is not the ‘public’ and ‘male’ world of politics and power and none of the saints in the collection carries any straightforward political associations. Although two Byzantine empresses bearing the names Irene and Theodora had been found worthy of joining the roster of saints and had been honored with a *vita*, his homilies on Saint Irene and Saint Theodora make no passing reference to those powerful namesakes⁵⁷. This omission is indeed telling, especially if we consider that Irina Godunova (1557-1603), Fedor Ivanovič’s wife, was portrayed alongside these very empresses, a choice that served the purpose of strengthening her dynastic legitimacy⁵⁸. Although poems to both Irene and Theodora appear in the *Vertograd mnogocvetnyj* (*Irina blagočestno zelo carstvovavše; Po Konstantine carstvo Feodora vzjala*), as part of a long cycle enumerating all the Byzantine rulers (*Carie Rima novago*)⁵⁹, it is reasonable to assume that these verses

⁵⁷ On the *Life of Empress Irene* (БHG 2205) see Halkin 1988. An English translation of the *Life of Empress Theodora* (БHG 1731) by Martha P. Vinson can be read in Talbot 1998: 361-382.

⁵⁸ Illustrations of Irene and Theodora’s deeds were placed on the walls of the Golden Palace of the *tsaritsy*. See Thyret (2001: 91ff.), who devotes a whole chapter to the analysis of this pictorial cycle.

⁵⁹ See Hippisley, Sazonova 1999, III: 347, 354.

were designed to function as an *exemplum* for the male members of the Romanov family. By contrast, Irina Mixailovna's subordinate status as royal sister is underlined by the comparison with a saint, Irene of Macedonia, who, while being of royal descent, is endowed with exclusively spiritual, not political, powers.

In a sense, it appears that the traditional Muscovite Orthodox female saintly types that we find up to the middle of the seventeenth century are much stronger than those Simeon proposes – a circumstance that may be explained with the fact that, unlike Irina Godunova, the tsarevny were not expected to rule on their own right. Bound to their roles as virgin, wives, and mothers, these female saints starkly differ from their male counterparts in the collection, who exemplify temporal (Vladimir) and ecclesiastical authority (John Chrysostom; the three Metropolitans of Moscow Philipp, Iona and Alexis). This reflects a historical reality: male saints were mainly recruited from the church hierarchy, while women, denied access to these institutions, could aspire to sainthood for their roles as virgins, nuns, and martyrs⁶⁰. These homilies thus seem to confirm Clarissa Atkinson's idea that for medieval and early modern women, "spiritual motherhood" was the only means of exerting a "symbolic leadership" within their communities (Atkinson 1991: 100).

In conclusion, Simeon's homilies on female saints are an instrument for describing the world as it was and *ought* to be, but they also provide royal women with multivalent messages and a certain flexibility of use. A female transvestite like Theodora conforms to androcentric models by assimilating maleness as the only instrument for salvation. However, Simeon does not portray her as unambiguously masculine: he both highlights the saint's masculine fortitude and underscores her femininity by portraying her as a mother. Reminding the audience of the Christian women's femininity and maternal qualities points to the pattern of the "royal mother" as a continuing influence for Muscovite political ideology. In fact, here we are dealing with 'dynastic saints', who served to provide divine legitimation and models of behavior to an earthly lineage, an aspect that is particularly evident in Simeon's portrayal of Saint Anna as a powerful "royal grandmother".

On the other hand, insisting on the preeminence of spiritual over biological motherhood, or telling the stories of mothers who overcame their maternal instincts, allowed Simeon to mediate between the old models and the concrete socio-political constraints of his time, that is, the reality of the Romanov daughters and sisters not being allowed to marry. A similar pattern dominates his portrayal of virgin martyrs as both virile women and Christ's brides.

In providing his royal addressees with "an authority of their own sex", Simeon is also less interested in following the models of female piety that circulated in Muscovite Russia at his time – those found in the Slavonic *Prolog* and even models developed in Muscovy, as the omission of the Byzantine empresses Irene and Theodora suggests. His Catholic-tinged representation of Anna as sitting on a throne with Mary and Jesus is another case in point,

⁶⁰ On the distinction between "masculine" ('public') and "feminine" ('private') models of sanctity, see Weinstein, Bell 1982: 225.

although Simeon skillfully adapts his Westernized portrayal of Mary’s mother to suit the needs of court rhetoric. His Anna enthroned replaces the humble domesticity of the *Anna Selbdritt* scene – a domesticity that would apply to many a family through the social spectrum – with the “aura of exclusivity” that is proper of a royal family.

This flexibility of use (a flexibility that represents a common feature of all saints’ stories) might have appealed to the subsequent generation of court writers, and symbols that were not inherently political in the late 1670s could be adapted to present images of female sovereignty in the years of the regency of Sof’ja (1682-1689). For instance, in the homily on Sophia, Sophia passing on her intellectual qualities to her three daughters can be seen as an anticipation of the panegyric motif of Sof’ja Alekseevna being pregnant with Divine Wisdom. Notice also that in this homily Sof’ja Alekseevna is associated with a widowed mother with three daughters and therefore portrayed as a woman with no notable male presence around her, with the obvious exception of the heavenly spouse. By the time these homilies appeared in print (1683), this could serve as an apt reminder of her guardian function over Ivan and Peter and as appropriate imagery for the new regime of an unmarried woman and two minor tsars.

Further, panegyric writings to Sof’ja – including those penned by Simeon’s disciple Sil’vestr Medvedev – largely employed the *topos* of the fragile and yet strong woman. In Karion Istomin’s *Knigi, želatel’no privetstvo mudrosti* (1683), which contains an image of Saint Sophia and her three daughters, Sof’ja Alekseevna is said to be acting “mužemudrenno” (“with man-like wisdom”). Karion Zaulonskij’s *Panegirikos...* (1686) describes her virginal condition as “mužskoe i vjašče mužeskogo” (“masculine and above masculinity”)⁶¹, a choice that, while clearly adapting the early Christian ‘paradox’ of the ‘manly woman’, may also testify to a direct dependence on Simeon’s homiletic portrayal of Sof’ja.

Finally, if we turn our attention to the afterlife of other female saints in the collection, we shall conclude that the role of ‘proselytizer’ envisioned for Saint Catherine is indeed crucial for a proper understanding of her growing importance as a royal and political saint during the second half of the seventeenth century. In Simeon’s homiletic works, she clearly embodies a ‘principle of authority’ – as spiritual mother and ‘public proselytizer’ – which, as Gary Marker (2007) has demonstrated, Peter’s times would recast in a way that is both more secular and faithful to their sources. Deeply rooted in the Christian ascetic tradition and yet cautiously rewriting it, Simeon’s treatment of female sanctity shows that mixture of ‘old and modern’ that was so characteristic of seventeenth-century Russia.

⁶¹ See Bogdanov 1994 and Brailovskij 1909.

Appendix

TABLE I
 BIRTHDAYS AND NAMEDAYS FOR SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY TSAREVNAS AND TSARITSAS⁶²
 (all dates according to old style)

| | Birthday | Nameday |
|--------------------------------|--------------|---|
| Irina Mixailovna | 22.IV.1627 | 5.V (Saint Irene of Macedonia) |
| Anna Mixailovna | 14.VII.1630 | 25.VII (Saint Anna) |
| Tat'jana Mixailovna | 5.I.1636 | 12.I (Saint Tatiana of Rome) |
| Evdokija Alekseevna | 18.II.1650 | 1.III (Saint Evdokia of Heliopolis) |
| Marfa Alekseevna | 26.VIII.1652 | 1.IX (Saint Martha) |
| Anna Alekseevna | 23.I.1655 | 3.II (Anna the Prophetess) |
| Sof'ja Alekseevna | 17.IX.1657 | 17.IX (Saint Sophia) |
| Ekaterina Alekseevna | 27.IX.1658 | 24.IX (Saint Catherine) |
| Marija Alekseevna | 18.I.1660 | 26.I (Saint Mary, the wife of Saint Xenophon) |
| Feodosija Alekseevna | 28.V.1662 | 29.V (Saint Theodosia of Tyre) |
| Evdokija Alekseevna | 26.II.1669 | 1.III (Saint Eudokia of Heliopolis) |
| Natal'ja Alekseevna | 22.VIII.1673 | 26.VIII (Saint Natalia) |
| Feodora Alekseevna | 4.IX.1674 | 11.IX (Saint Theodora of Alexandria) |
| Marija Il'inična Miloslavskaja | 1.IV.1624 | 1.IV (Saint Mary of Egypt) |
| Natal'ja Kirillovna Naryškina | 22.VIII.1651 | 26.VIII (Saint Natalia) |

Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| BHG: | <i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> , Bruxelles 1895. |
| DopDR3: | <i>Dopolnenija k tomu III-mu dvorcovyx razrjadov</i> , SPb. 1854. |
| DRI: | <i>Dvorcovye razrjady</i> , I, SPb. 1850. |
| DR2: | <i>Dvorcovye razrjady</i> , II, SPb. 1851. |
| DR3: | <i>Dvorcovye razrjady</i> , III, SPb. 1852. |
| DR4: | <i>Dvorcovye razrjady</i> , IV, SPb. 1855. |
| ODB: | A.P. Kazhdan (ed.), <i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , Oxford 1991. |
| PG: | <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> . |
| PL: | <i>Patrologia Latina</i> . |
| Prolog: | <i>Prolog</i> , Moskva 1642. |
| VČM Ja: | <i>Velikija čet'i minei. Janvar' Dni 6-11</i> , M. 1914. |
| VČM S: | <i>Velikija čet'i minei. Sentiabr' Dni 1-13</i> , SPb. 1868. |

⁶² SOURCES: DRI: col. 913; DR2: coll. 156-157; DR3: coll. 149, 325, 899, 919, 1617; DopDR3: coll. 26, 107, 145, 157, 211, 279, 327, 334, 337, 364; DR4: coll. 257, 275, 310, 320, 334, 335, 435, 453, 454, 536, 615.

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Abstract

Maria Grazia Bartolini

"Manlier than Many Men". Images of Female Sanctity in Simeon Polockij's Court Sermons

This article explores the intersection of gender, religion and politics in the construction of female sanctity in Simeon Polockij's court sermons, in particular in those contained in the *Večerija duševnaja* collection ('Spiritual Supper', 1683). My aim is to investigate the way in which Simeon re-writes enduring and dominant images of female sanctity to suit the cultural needs and expectations of his royal addressees, providing them with spiritual role models and a "trusted authority of their own sex". In doing this, I will attempt to understand what the women saints in these homilies can tell us about the cultural construction of femininity at the Muscovite court, and what they reveal about the expectations and prescriptions placed upon royal women in the late seventeenth century.

Keywords

Simeon Polockij; Homiletics; Female Sanctity.