

**“If riches increase, set not your heart upon them”:
The Vow of Nonpossession versus Real Monastic Practices
(a case study of the 17th century Muscovy)**

As the title of my presentation states I am going to briefly look into a real case of monastic practice that has to do with economy and money issues in the context of the 17th-century Moscow. Through this short case I hope to highlight interrelation between a vow of non-possession and real monastic practice of acquiring, accumulating, and bequeathing money and goods.

With the vow of non-possession being an essential concept in Russian monasticism, real monastic practices of the 17th-century Muscovy, as we can perceive relying on preserved documents, demonstrated a certain degree of negligence of the vow. Large monasteries acted as corporations that produced goods and traded them to cover living expenses. Though in theory a monetary profit was not the goal, certain monasteries would often not only trade, but lend out money, sometimes even on interest. In receipts and payments books of Russian monasteries of the 16th - 17th centuries we find numerous debt documents from which we learn that monasteries as corporations and even single monks (primarily Father Superiors, treasurers, cellarers) lent money to people living around and thus earned money.

Though common and perceived as OK for large monastic corporations, such behaviour was not common for single monks. However, by the 2nd half of the 17th century Russian church underwent a number of changes of various scale and impact. The body of principal Church actors also was also beginning to change slowly. As in previous epochs, regular clergy was constituted principally by large monastic communities or corporations, but new actors such as relatively independent monks began to appear.

At thy time Russian culture and society experiences a great influence of European tradition in many spheres of life: in court life and etiquette, in literature and art in general, in social field, and even in in religious sphere. The phenomenon of independent monks only formally affiliated with this or that Moscow monastery was apart of those changes. As a rule, these monks were natives of the South-Western regions of Russia, got educated in Poland or in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, took their vows in Ukrainian or Belarusian monasteries and then moved to Moscow in search for better life or due to war or social instability in homeland. They would enjoy greater mobility and freedom in their activities than a common monk would – they were employed at the Tzar's court, interacted with boyars and church leaders, actively participated in education and printing activities.

One of the most known monks of the type was the first Muscovy court poet and preacher Simeon of Polotsk. Simeon was a unique figure for 17th century Muscovy in many respects. His social status is far from being common – being a hieromonk or monk-priest, he was a teacher of

royal children, had his own (in a certain sense of course) typography, printed books without patriarch license, communicated closely with boyars. His financial situation is fascinating since he had personal money, and he earned his living rather than live by means provided by his monastery.

Unfortunately, only few documents concerning the material side of Simeon's life survived till our days. Still, we have at our disposal Simeon's last will or testament – a unique document, providing an glimpse at his finances and every-day life. Simeon's testament, examined together with some of his letters and some court records allows to reconstruct some highly important aspects of Simeon's economic life.

Thus, we have at our disposal a testament of Simeon, his ten letters to the Tzar with requests for money and food allowance, and two records of presents Simeon got from the Tzar. I'll focus on the testament since it's, as I think, the most interesting source, and will draw on other sources when necessary. So, the testament. There are 2 known copies of the document, all three belong to roughly the same time period (at the slide).

Executive part of the document is very extensive, it takes more than half of the text. This fact is already strange in the context of Russian testaments of clergy. This fact can be treated as a literary representation of Simeon's strange, from the point of view of Russian feudal society of the time, social status. First and most of all, he has possessions and money to bequeath. In their last will Russian monks wrote mainly about their small (or not so small) debts: money they owed to somebody and money people owed them; money that would be collected in such a way were supposed to be spent on funeral ceremony. In their turn Russian church hierarchs in their wills addressed quite different issues: their testaments included spiritual instructions to all the Christians and sometimes – some information of political or administrative character. Money matters were usually just mentioned, with the reference to some other documents, or catalogues, which co-existed with testaments.

The last will of Simeon looks like neither of just mentioned types. It has a theological and a bit biographic introduction and clearly structured executive part dealing with money bequeathed to funeral matters (funeral ceremony, charity), etiquette money to monasteries, money to family and friends, and personal belongings possessed to various parties. The testament is concluded with a damnation to those who would dare not to obey Simeon's last will. On the slide I'll show these parts with translation in English.

The total amount of money Simeon bequeathed is quite large for a monk-priest: there are 700 hundred roubles in silver, 600 of Polish zloty and some silver coins, presumably tpolers. This amount seems to be great for the one who didn't have any prominent position in monastery hierarchy. Simeon never was a Father Superior or treasurer or anything of the kind. Fathers Superiors of Ukrainian and Belarusian monasteries usually bequeathed a lot of money, in Polish

zloty, to church construction and so on. Regular monks of those monasteries also had more personal money and belongings than their colleagues from Muscovy. Simeon's financial situation in general, the way he treats money and the way he bequeathes them show that he followed the tradition of monastic living that was usual in South-Western regions of Russian and that probably had Polish or European origins.

The question that arises is how Simeon could have saved such amount of money? Being a monk and a poet, Simeon didn't have any fixed and formal position or rank at the Tzar's court. Still he received money allowance from the Tzar and sometimes – money presents from Tzar and boyars for his service. As one of the Simeon's letters states, his daily allowance was 15 kopeks per day thus making 54 roubles per year. This allowance roughly equals to that of a lower court ranks. It was quite OK since food was given to Simeon from Tzar's court as well.

According to his testament, Simeon allocated only about 555 roubles, the rest, in case it would be left, was to go to his nephew. I have said “about” since it's impossible to count precisely. Some articles of the testaments are impossible to calculate (and this is quite strange for a document) – for example, Simeon says to give his servants (also not a common thing for a monk to have servants) 1 rouble more than usual, but we know not the amount of servants nor their usual pay.

Also Simeon says that he had a bag of money used for current expenditures. He states that he took 40 roubles from it – why not to state how much was left?! Again, there is no information of how much money there was initially in the bag and how they should be spent. A curious detail is that this bag should have been quite heavy since 40 roubles alone would make about a kilogram 200 grams.

Now a bit about the currency of Simeon's savings. Roubles were to go on funeral ceremony and expenditures; to Moscow monasteries and to Simeon's family and friends: his spiritual Father, his nephew and his mother, archimandrite and Simeon's disciple.

Polish zloty is an interesting topic. In Russia at the 2nd half of the 17th century they were used as a source of precious metals or as riches or treasure. We don't know if they could be exchanged into roubles, but I suppose that they could. Why? Well, Simeon says he has 600 zloty. But if you count all the articles you'll get a sum of 765 zloty. Thus, I would assume that the silver roubles left were meant to be exchanged into zloty, or the amount could be given in roubles, but it isn't very likely since zloty were administered to Ukraine and Belarus monasteries and to people living in these regions.

Simeon's testament allows to suppose that he lent money on interest. As a support for this claim there are two curious articles in the testament. First of all, Simeon had money of a Philipp Tarasow – Simeon acted as a bank safe keeping Phillip's money safely, as the text puts it. In addition, Simeon administered his executors to give away all money deposits he had free of charge.

Besides money Simeon also had personal belongings to bequeath: he had a large library, some household items, and even a horse with a coach. Household things and horses and coaches usually belonged to a monastery as a community, a monk could not possess them. Even patriarch Ioakim in his last will named only clothes and money among his personal items.

Simeon had so many things that even a cellar was needed. In one of his letters to the Tzar Simeon asked to give him a cellar in the city to keep his belongings safe from the fire. Simeon had several fur coats and many copper and tin dishes, two thin Persian carpets and church ware which he had probably brought with him from Polotsk.

Simeon's library deserves a special attention – he was a lucky owner of numerous books in Polish, Latin, Church Slavonic, German, English, and some other languages. All the books were bequeathed to monasteries – Latin books were to go to Kijev, Russian and Polish – to Polotsk monastery. His own books, printed in his personal typography, Simeon gave to the Moscow monastery where he lived. All the writings – it's difficult to say what Simeon meant by writings – probably manuscripts and drafts – were to go to Simeon's disciple Silvestr. Silvestr was appointed by Simeon to be in charge of the library. However, he didn't do what he was supposed to, so that all Simeon's library stayed in Moscow. Large part of it is now preserved in two Moscow depositories.

Thus, Simeon's testament shows Simeon's unique position both at the Tzar's court and at the Church hierarchy. He earned and accumulated money, currency of his savings shows his close connections to his colleagues in Ukraine and Belarus. All his financial practices in general demonstrate the decreasing role of ascetic vow of non-possession in Orthodox monastic community and the emergence of new social groups and actors within the body of the Church.