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Humans and Animals in Russian Baroque Homiletics

The sermons as a genre and phenomenon of the liturgy hadn't been known for a long time in the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian culture. Instead of this genre we had Slovo (Word) with which priests addressed to the faithful of the Russian Church. Also during the liturgy there were Ustavniye chteniya (Canon readings). But after having come from Kyiv (from Kyiv-Mohyla Collegian (KMC)) to Moscow the learned monks gave the church people access to the sermons with their skill of composing. By this route the genre became known. Simeon, who had already finished his education at KMC was invited to Moscow by Tsar Alexey Michailovich from Polotsk. He is an author of two voluminous collections of sermons, namely «Obed dushevnyi» ("Spiritual dinner") (compiled in 1675; includes 109 Sermons following the order of the liturgical year) and «Vecherya duchevnaya» ("Spiritual supper") (compiled in 1676; includes 78 Sermons for the feasts of the Lord, the Mother of God and especially venerated saints, to which 29 homilies are added). Both collections were published by Simeon's pupil, Silvestre Medvedev, 1681 and 1683 respectively. In addition, numerous other works of Simeon can be considered as belonging to the genre of sermon. It is, for example, encyclopedic collection of verses «Vertograd mnogotsvetnyi» ("Many-flowered garden").

Both «Vertograd» and the collections of Sermons are equally addressed to man as God's creature, not as an object of contemplation, but as an object of moral edification and enlightening. A man becomes an integral part of the Baroque rhetorical universe where the preacher handily uses his art granted to him by God. Both in the Sermons collections and in the «Vertograd» themes and subjects belonging to the dogmatic and moral theology are intertwined; as a prose text in one case, as verses in the other.

Verbal or pictorial representations of animals in Baroque literature and visual art are closely connected with the universe of man. It is this connection which determines the role of animals in the Sermons and provides the author with the means of explication to the hearer of the principal postulates of moral theology in easily grasped spectacular visual forms, in conformity with the general tendency towards visualization of abstract concepts in Baroque art. The use of the images of animals for characterizing human beings is rooted in various traditions: ancient literary tradition going back to pre-Christian times; symbolism of animal in the Bible; medieval bestiaries; post-medieval literary tradition including encyclopedias and compendiums of emblems; and, finally, rhetorical laws and devices of Baroque art itself.

One might assume a number of presuppositions characterizing the treatment of this theme in Baroque sermons. 1). An animal is represented as an image-symbol, visualized by means of words and symbolizing positive or negative features of man whose behavior resembles the behavior of particular animals. These images-concepts of animals can be used for comparisons and based on them allegorical interpretations of a human being on the whole (e.g. a man as a sheep, a wolf, or a crocodile; to this category belong the Evangelists symbols, namely, the Lamb, the Lion, and the Eagle); or an animal can symbolize particular qualities, actions or abilities of a man.

2). An image-concept of an animal is used as a more universalistic moral metaphor belonging to a traditionally established correlation of any concrete "species of animals" («вид животного» - Simeon used the term "species" («вид») meaning by it this or that animal while discussing the ways of preservation of these "species" and the required conditions for their survival) to a vice or a virtue within a general framework of moral instruction.

3). In his Sermons Simeon focuses on those animals which are mentioned in the Bible; they function (among others) as a starting point for structuring literary devices aimed at comprehensibility in his task of instructing and enlightening his hearers.

4). Although it is a rather rare case, in the texts of the Sermons some characteristic features of animals occur, about which Simeon says that he borrowed this knowledge from the "naturalists" («естествословцев»). Thus the hearers can learn something about natural properties and habits of

animals. In general, I would like to underline that, while highlighting these four literary devices, I realize that they are mutually interdependent and interconnected.

In this my paper I aim at demonstrating that all these enumerated devices play a considerable role in the collection of Sermons of Simeon Polotsky, as well as in his verses collected under the common title «Vertograd mnogotsvetnyi», which can to some extent also be considered as poetic versions of sermons.