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THE ROLE OF THE KYIVAN RUS' WRITING IN STRENGTHENING GREEK AND BYZANTINE UNDERSTANDING OF THE POLITICAL

In this article we will try to reconstruct the Kyivan Rus' concept of the political and show the role of the written language in strengthening of the understanding. We will attempt to prove the assumption that Kyivan Rus' used Greek and Byzantine or, in other words, Christianized Platonic and Aristotelian understanding of the political[1], which involved interpretation of the main political goal as the *good* and represented in the written heritage a special type of the Christian sanctity that was the most appropriate to the goal. It also manifested itself in the notion of *architectonic* nature of the political as the art of creating the hierarchical disposition, which was subordinated to a principle of Christian *justice*. In our opinion, in these aspects, the written heritage of Kyivan Rus' played a key role. It is the very

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[1] We distinguish between the terms *politics* and *the political*. *The political* is seen as an activity which has a stated goal, constitutes a principle of human coexistence and is aimed at creating more or less stable configurations of employment and profit distribution, in other words, as a construction of disposition of social and vocational practices, functions and rewards. However, *the political* is not *politics* in the strict sense of the word, at least in its Greek and Byzantine sense. The latter term meant public competition of different models of a polis order, personal involvement of citizens, which puts limitations on the political activity. Regarding the distinction between the concepts of *politics* and *the political* in the interpretations by C. Schmitt, M. Foucault, Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe, J.-L. Nancy, Ch. Mouffe, J. Rancière, A. Badiou, see: I. Viriasova, 'Politics and the Political: Correlation and the Question of the Unpolitical' (2011) Vol. 1. No 1 *Peninsula*. *Politics* and *the political* can be interpreted not only as complementary to each other, but as a pair of opposites, which was noticed by C. Schmitt. *Politics* in its liberal form, as the world of debates, compromises and coordination of perspectives, destroys the *political* which is based on the conflict described in terms of *friendship-enmity* (C. Schmitt, 'The Concept of the Political', trans. by George Schwab (Chicago 2007). The fate of *the political* as an area of no debates is covered by K. Palonen: K. Palonen, 'Politics or the Political? A Historical Perspective on a Contemporary Non-Debate (2007) 6 *European Political Science* 69–78. This fully pertains to Kyivan Rus', where as early as in the era of tribal alliances, there appeared a popular assembly *viče* – a kind of an institute of public discussion of political goals and decisions which remained till disunity of Kyivan Rus' and continued functioning in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for a long time.

written language that contributed to the introduction of concept of the political into the Kyivan Rus' intellectual and social practices and demonstrated its political existence.

Our task is complicated because Kyivan Rus' texts were written in the Old Slavonic language, where the semantic correlates of Greek terms *πολιτικά* or *πολιτεία* are absent. In Kyivan Rus' literary monuments, the term *πολιτεία* is often translated as *grady* (cities, czardom). In the written sources, the Greek hendiadys *βίος καὶ πολιτεία* is translated using only one word *zhytije* (life)[2]. In Greek-Slavonic dictionary, which V. Istrin added to his edition of Old Slavonic translation of *The Chronicle* by Georhe Hamartolos, the word *πολιτεία* was translated as *grady* (cities), *žyzn'*, *žytije* (life), *czarstvije* (czardom)[3]. The author of the Greek original of *The Life of Eutychius the Patriarch of Constantinople* accurately distinguishes between concepts of *βίος* and *πολιτεία*, but the Slavonic translator does not. For example, the expression "δύο γὰρ ὁδῶν καὶ πολιτειῶν ὁδῶν ἐν τῷ βιῷ" was translated as "*Dva bo puti sushcha mezhu žyz'ny i žytija sego*" ("Two ways are between life and living"). In the Old Slavonic language the terms *žyzn'* and *žytije* were close synonyms. The written language of Kyivan Rus' loses the Greek and Byzantine terminology. However, it does not mean that Rus' loses Greek and Byzantine meaning of the political.

The expression *βίος καὶ πολιτεία* was put into circulation by Athanasius of Alexandria[4]. It established a distinction between an anchoretic, "celestial" (heavenly) life of a saint (βίος) and a profane, "mundane" (earthly) living of an ordinary man (πολιτεία) who had to follow the saint's example. This distinction was surely based not only on *The Epistle to the Philippians* of the Apostle Paul[5], but it also mirrored one of the features of Greek and Byzantine, Platonic and Aristotelian understanding of the political, namely, a strong belief that politics purports to seek the *truth* as the *superlative good* (Aristot. Nic. Eth. 1094a). The aim of any activity in the state should be subordinated to it (Nic. Eth. 1094a). However, in a Christian interpretation *the good* is considered there as righteousness, "true life" for salvation.

Although, the expression *βίος καὶ πολιτεία* was lost in Kyivan Rus', ancient Slavonic texts showed a particular type of a Christian Saint known in Byzantium and Rus'. This Saint had an active political position in secular life and often participated in state affairs. In hagiographic texts of Kyivan Rus', especially in *The Kyiv-Pechersk Patericon*, such a type of the Saint was represented by the image of Theodosius the abbot of Kyiv-Pechersk monastery. He tended to intervene in

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[2] See, for example: *Успенский сборник XII–XIII вв.* (Москва 1971) 38.

[3] В. М. Истрин, *Книги временные и образные Георгия Мниха: Хроника Георгия Амартола в древнем славяно-русском переводе. Текст, исследование и словарь*, *Т. III: Греческо-славянский и славяно-греческий словари* (Ленинград 1930) 152.

[4] "Βίος καὶ πολίτεια τοῦ Ὁσίου Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀντωνίου" (PG 26, Col. 836).

[5] "ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχεῖ" (Phil. 3: 20).

political activities of princes, for example, he conflicted with Prince Sviatoslav (1027–1076), because, in his opinion, the Prince had come to the throne illegally. Theodosius also refused to come to a throne meal and forbade to mention Sviatoslav in Litany[6]. Thus, *The Kyiv-Pechersk Patericon* created an image of *βίος* – an anchoretic "life in truth"[7]. Other texts, such as *Роučenije* by Vladimir Monomakh put into practice the principles of *πολιτεία* – the life and work of "a devout layperson" who was actively involved in political life[8]. That is, the political had a purpose to organize the society order where the people would aspire to truth, salvation and strictly follow the righteous saints.

We can also see that in the Old Slavonic language sources the type of sanctity, which was considered as a sample of secular political life in Kyivan Rus', was based on obligatory mastering of the sacred skill of writing. The fact that *The Kyiv Pechersk patericon* frequently emphasizes this mastery in the image of the "political Saint" Theodosius[9] can be explained exactly this way. Bookishness or even simple literacy itself were signs pertaining to sanctity at that time, and the man who was called *pysets*, *pysčyj* (scribe) or *knyžcnyk*, *knygčy*, *knygčyja* (scholar) had a special sacred and political status in Kyivan Rus'.

Greek and Byzantine understanding of the political included not only the aim, but the idea of the political order as a disposition of activities. *Πόλις* in Platonic-Aristotelian understanding of the political was conceived as a link between people (κοινωνίαν). It was the *architectonics* (ἀρχιτεκρονική), disposition of arts (ἡ τέχνη), sciences (ἡ μέθοδος), activities (ἡ πρᾶξις) and intentions (ἡ πραίπεσις) (Aristot. Nic. Eth. 1094a). Given this, politics (πολιτικά,) was a "connecting art" that "invariably rejects the bad, so far as possible, taking only the materials which are good and fitting, out of which, whether they be like or unlike, it gathers all elements together and produces one form of value" (Plat. Stat. 308 c). Politics seemed to be highest among the sciences, the one "that ordains which of the sciences are to exist in states, and what branches of knowledge the different classes of the citizens are to learn, and up to what point" (Aristot. Nic. Eth. 1094a – 1094b)[10].

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[6] *Житіє преподобнаго отца нашего Феодосіа игумена Печерськаго манастрыря,* in: Д. І. Абрамович, *Києво-Печерський патерик. Репринтне видання* (К. 1991) 69.

[7] "Blessed is who hatred this world and this glory" – this way bishop Symon admonished Policarp (*Посланіе смиренного епископа Симона Владимерьскаго и Суждальскаго к Поликарпу, черноризцу Печерьскому,* in: Д. І. Абрамович, *Op. cit.*, 99).

[8] *Полное собрание русских летописей (ПСРЛ). Т. 1: Лаврентьевская летопись* (Москва 1997) 242.

[9] *Житіє преподобнаго отца нашего Феодосіа игумена Печерськаго манастрыря* in: Д. І. Абрамович, *Op. cit.*, 23.

[10] Quoted from the translation of Plato by Harold N. Fowler (*Plato in 12 Volumes,* Vol. 12, Cambridge 1921) and translation of Aristotle by H. Rackham (*Aristotle in 23 Volumes,* Vol. 19, Cambridge 1934).

In fact, this understanding of the political as the order or the disposition was preserved in Byzantium and Kyivan Rus', but in the Christian interpretation it was transformed into *hierarchy* (ἱεραρχία) – a concept that came into the political use and literature of the Byzantine Empire. As the basis of the political, it implied a hierarchical distribution of wealth or status, just retribution of God and punishment for crimes according to a person's political status. The hierarchy was modelled as a reflection of "the heavenly order" where each person had their own political position (τάξις). *On the Celestial Hierarchy* by Pseudo-Dionisius the Areopagite was the main medieval work which investigated the hierarchy. Rus' got acquainted with the translation only in 1371, but the hierarchical conception of the state body had existed long before that and it had fully corresponded to Platonic-Aristotelian understanding of the political. It strangely combined a Byzantine model of political hierarchy with pre-Christian understanding of Rus' Land as the body where the prince was the head, land – the torso, inhabitants – legs, etc. It constituted the hierarchy by itself because it presented higher and lower strata in the state, less important and very important "parts of the body". A patrimonial principle, which was considered the foundation of the Kyivan Rus' political hierarchy by V. Pashuto for a good reason, was an essential foundation of this disposition[11]. The texts contain a lot of sentences and lexemes where the Prince is called "Father", his younger brothers are called "sons", members of the Prince's armed forces are "brothers" or Prince's "sons". It makes their translation difficult if we understand these terms word for word and do not adhere to the position of a "symbolic family"[12].

The idea of Christianly reinterpreted *justice* was a construction principle of this disposition in Kyivan Rus'. In political philosophy of Plato, it is commonly known to have been considered a backbone virtue uniting all the others (Plat. Rep. 4). Writing language, once again, played a key role here, because justice and hierarchy were introduced in Platonic-Aristotelian understanding of politics through speech and writing – signs which separate *ζῷον πολιτικόν* from the rest of the existing world. The famous phrase of the Aristotle's *Politics* "ἐπειδὴ πᾶσαν πόλιν ὁπῶμεν κοινωνίαν" ("Every state is as we see a sort of partnership" (Pol. 1.1252) included an ambiguous word *κοινωνίαν* which can be translated as *connection, tie, relation, community, partnership* as well as *communication*, which is not of less importance. It emphasized a linguistic aspect of polis and a close attachment of the existence to

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[11] В. Т. Пашуто, *Внешняя политика Древней Руси* (Москва 1968) 474.

[12] See for example: *ПСРЛ., Т. 2: Ипатьевская летопись* (Москва 1998) 417. Numerous stereotype expressions where members of armed force are called "brothers" are found in "*Слово о полку Игореве*" (The Tale of Igor's Campaign) (*Словарь-справочник "Слова о полку Игореве".* Вып. 1 (Москва – Ленингард 1965) 15).

speech and writing[13]. As opposed to the inarticulate *voice*[14] (φωνὴ) of animals that seems to show emotions of sorrow or joy, *logos* (λόγος) is the articulated speech of the human, which embodies thinking "designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore, also the right and the wrong" and thus to constitute the political dimension of human existence, transform a man into a "political animal" because it "makes a household and a city-state" (Aristot. Pol. 1.1253a).

Within the Greek teleological, architectonic and dialogic understanding of politics and the political which made justice a fundamental principle, only writing and speech can support the political. Writing fixed the fair architectonic disposition as laws of a *polis* engraved on the tables of commandments at the *agora*; owing to speech, the disposition is discussed at the same agora. Consequently, since antiquity, speech and writing have been not only complementary elements, where politics and the political are represented in different proportions, but they have also been competing practices.

J. Derrida's argument about displacement of writing to the periphery of culture, which was based on Platonic-Aristotelian interpretation of writing, is partially true[15]. In medieval society, including Kyivan Rus', the political actively opposed politics and the architectonic hierarchy was more important than its dialogical approval. So, writing restored its political rights and gained a much higher status. Only writing could replace the direct participatory power by representation that was necessary within large state formations similar to Byzantium or Kyivan Rus'. Only this could establish and secure the medieval hierarchy.

Surely, a gift of eloquence (often denoted in Kyivan Rus' texts by the term *slovesnost'*) was interpreted as charisma and an essential human feature in contrast to animals. However, the analysis of this word usage in some phrase patterns

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[13] In fact, Hobbes "natural" or "non-political" human condition does not exist for Aristotle as the one who exists outside the political is either morally worthless (φαῦλός ἐστιν) or a superman (κρείττων ἢ ἄνθρωπος), an animal (θηρίον), or a deity (θεός). The very gift of eloquence as an ability to express the advantageous (συμφέρον) and the harmful (βλαβερόν), the right (δίκαιον) and the wrong (ἄδικον) (Pol. 1.1253a) constitutes the political. A gift of eloquence is also necessary for making a social agreement. "It is interesting enough that the very possibility of such an agreement requires the use of language, which means that the natural state is not asocial", I. VIRIASOVA admits (I. VIRIASOVA, *Op. cit.*). However, "Hobbes seems to suggest that the state of nature is both a-social and a-political" (*Ibid.*).

[14] *The Voice* in the terminology of Aristotle's *Politics* and Derrida's "*Of Grammatology*" certainly has a different meaning. According to Aristotle, it is a natural property of animals to express the joy and the sorrow and "to indicate those sensations to one another" (Pol. 1.1253a). According to Derrida, *voice* is an orientation of Western culture on priority of articulated speech, not writing (J. DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London 1997) 4.

[15] We are bearing in mind the thesis by Socrates (in attribution of Plato) that writing "harms memory". Writing is artificial and impersonal, but speech is natural and living (Plat. Phaedus 274b – 278e). Aristotle interpreted writing as the "signs of signs" in relation to speech that is the "signs of soul" (Aristot. On Interpret. 16a).

such as "verbal herd" or "verbal sheep" (λογικὰ πρόβατα), reveals a paternalistic tincture of the political. *Slovesnost'* means here rather spirituality as a feature of God-likeness and salvation than "speech" or "eloquence"[16]. The power of princes or bishops, who were called "shepherds of verbal sheep of Christ" in the *Sermon on Law and Grace*[17] by Rus' Metropolitan Ilarion, was based on other principles than a publicly discussed agreement. *Slovesnost'* of the human "herd" does not mean here the right to a political vote. On the one hand, in mythical codes, the image of sheep was associated with language and interpretation[18]; on the other hand, it was a prototype of humility, obedience and *silent* sacrifice (Exod. 53: 7). It is the silence that was often a main virtue. Although speech is able to distinguish between the right and the wrong, actually, it is amorphous and fragile. Thus, the Byzantine and Kyivan Rus' traditions seemed to presuppose that only writing was able to fix the political hierarchy and sanctify it in theory, ideology and law. Live and changing speech, which expresses freedom and can be distorted and reinterpreted, was replaced by an indestructible, rigid system of writing. Consequently, writing became the main condition of establishment, fixation, preservation and passing along the hierarchical disposition to future generations as well as a tool for selection of political artefacts for eternity. Undoubtedly, in Kyivan Rus', the main texts for establishing the hierarchical order comprised legal documents, which included a corpus of translated texts (Greek *Nomocanons*, *Procheiron*, *Ecloga* by Leo III the Isaurian, *Novels* by Justinian etc.) and the original collection *Pravda Ruskaja(Russian Justice)*. A certain set of unwritten laws is likely to have existed as an oral tradition in Rus' in the 8th – 9th century. However, in the era of state development, namely in the 10th century, when oral speech could not ensure the stability of the political disposition, the laws were written. The code reflected the statuses of all political layers in the political hierarchy of Kyivan Rus': princes, boyards, merchants, servants and even slaves. Consequently, to this day *Pravda Ruskaja* remains a main source for the study of stratification and a political structure of Kyivan Rus' society. Besides, according to the articles of *Pravda Ruskaja*, princely and church ordinances, different fines were imposed for the same offense on people with different political status[19].

In terms of chronicles, writing had to preserve political information for the posterity. It approached writing to an important political attribute – a claim to

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[16] Sometimes a gift of eloquence is expressed as the word *rečivost'*, but not *slovesnost'*. See, for example Old Slavonic translation of *Apostle* (A. Kałužniack, *Actus epistolaeque apostolorum palaeoslovenice ad fidem codicis christinopolitani saeculo XII°scripri* (Vindobonae 1896) 44.

[17] Иларион. *Слово о законе и благодати* (Москва 1994) 78.

[18] Hermes in Greek mythology not only interprets the signs that gods send to people, but also takes care of shepherds, and sometimes is depicted like Christ with the lamb in the arms (Hermes-Kriophoros).

[19] See: *Руська Правда: Тексти на основі 7 списків та 5 редакцій* (К. 1935) 5–6.

eternity. By means of a narrative chronicle, princes tried to perpetuate the power and political order, to affirm the power inheritance and their own political rightness forever. In any case, elements of copying, changing and editing Kyivan Rus' written monuments were in no way an expression of freedom, they showed nothing but another attribute of writing – an ability to be perfected for political purposes. Rus' chronicler Nestor is considered to have rehashed the early Kyivan chronicle by Joan in order to remove its political acuteness, namely its criticism of the Rusian princes and conflict between the Kyiv-Pechersk Monastery and Prince Sviatopolk II (1050–1113). When anti-prince mood appeared again, this time in Novgorod, chroniclers replaced Nestor's text in *Sophia Chronicle* by the anti-prince *Primary Chronicle*. In 1116, abbot Sylvester also edited final paragraphs of Nestor's chronicle to please Vladimir Monomakh and his political activity. M. Pryselkov argued that Sylvester expunged Nestor's stories about the relationship between the secular and ecclesiastical authority in consideration of the political situation [20].

The hierarchical disposition established the contour of a political practice. Basically, we can argue that a political practice was a chain of actions for strengthening the hierarchical disposition. Narrative writing often not only reflected the sequence of politicians' actions, but it also shared a common functional basis with political activities which F. Ankersmit named *political representation*[21]. A political representation had two levels. At the first level it implied the need for political activity and writing to select a real or fictitious event material. At the second one it had to explain one or another political action or describe facts. A political project or a politicians' success often depended on the representation of actions and not on the actions themselves. A political action was not only selected as the "optimum" of a great number of possible actions, but it usually had to be represented and transformed into an "event". It had to be interpreted in a standpoint remote enough from the real intent and consequences of the political action (politicians' defeats were often represented as their victories and losses as their achievements). For example, Monomakh, who felt that his tale about his campaign against Prince Yaroslavez Sviatopolkovich did not fit into either the composition of *Poučenije* or proclaimed by him the idea of princes' brotherly love, had to explain that the campaign had been caused by Yaropolk's "malice"[22]. According to F. Ankersmit[23], in a representation, as an attempt to present reality somehow, politics and history meet and unite. Due to this meeting, politics often uses writing (first chronicles) for its representations. As D. Likhachev wrote, "They are the chronicles that the Russian government uses to claim with no hesitation the right to rule over the old

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[20] М. Д. Приселков, *История русского летописания, XI–XV вв.* (Санкт-Петербург 1996) 42.
[21] F. R. Ankersmit, *Political Representation* (Stanford 2002) 2.
[22] *ПСРЛ*, т. 1, 250.
[23] F. R. Ankersmit, *Op. cit.*

ancestral lands of Moscow princes – Kyiv, Smolensk, Polotsk, Chernihiv. Based on the chronicles Moscow pursues the policy of integration. Chronicles serve as historical evidence in Russian princes' disputes about the great principality to khans. Prince Yury Dmitrovich argued his rights to the Moscow principality by «chroniclers and old lists…». During the advance on Novgorod in 1471, Ivan III had in his impedimenta chronicles and people who could «interpret» Rus' chronicles, i.e. those ones who knew the content perfectly"[24]. However, as it follows from all those examples, narrative writing (chronicle) was not a mirror image of the past, but only its representation. This representation was based on certain intellectual procedures or an author's preconception. A historical or political fact could become full-fledged one only if it was represented in some way. An event of the past gradually "was increasing" its historical significance from the moment when it happened to the moment when it was discovered, articulated in some of discourses and interpreted from different political positions. Similarly, a political action increases its "politicalness" in the process of its representation, interpretation and discussion. An act of representation is a bridge between words and reality. Due to the representation, history always tends to be politicized (transformed into "political history)" and politics actively implicates history.

Summarizing all the above, in Greek and Byzantine, Platonic-Aristotelian understanding of the political, which is seen in spiritual legacy of Kyivan Rus', writing played an important role. That is why to it, this understanding was introduced in Kyivan Rus' social practices and testified to its political existence. Clearly, these findings make no pretence as to completeness, it is merely an attempt to offer a new topic for discussion.

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[24] Д. С. Лихачев, *Русские летописи и их культурно-историческое значение* (Москва – Ленинград 1947) 9.