

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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Ivan Peresvetov

Ivan Semenovich Peresvetov, Ivashko son of Semen
Peresvietov, Iwan or John Pereswetoff

DATE OF BIRTH Early 16th century
PLACE OF BIRTH Probably Lithuanian Rus'
DATE OF DEATH Probably 1550s or 1560s
PLACE OF DEATH Probably Muscovite Rus'

BIOGRAPHY

Ivan Peresvetov is the name of a presumed 16th-century author of political essays in Muscovite Rus' (Early Modern Russia). According to his own writings, Peresvetov came from Western Rus' (East Slavic territory controlled by Lithuania). After serving various eastern European rulers in a military capacity, he migrated to Moscow in the late 1530s. Despite his foreign origin, Peresvetov is often regarded as a voice of the lesser (service) nobility in Muscovy. His writings are remarkable for (*inter alia*) expressing approbation of the Ottoman Turkish Empire.

Owing to the fact that virtually the only sources on Peresvetov's life are his own writings, scholars have raised a number of issues concerning the reliability of the biographical data about him and works attributed to him. A large secondary literature (see below for salient examples) has repeatedly revisited such questions as: whether Peresvetov existed as a real person or was merely a pseudonym; whether the texts attributed to him genuinely date from the first half of the 16th century or were written later (the earliest extant manuscripts date from the 1620s); and where he fitted in the world of ideas of 16th- and 17th-century Rus' and Europe. Scholarly opinion has swung convincingly to the side of belief in Peresvetov's existence and authorship in the first half of the 16th century, though many specific questions remain unanswered. The following summary represents a synthesis of the somewhat inconsistent autobiographical remarks in his writings; it should be remembered that no independent confirmation (or contradiction) can currently be offered for this account.

Peresvetov was probably born in the first decade of the 16th century to a clan of Russian Orthodox nobles living in Lithuanian Rus'. He claimed that his family name derived from the hero-monk St Aleksandr Presvet,

said to have fought in single combat against the Mongol-Tatar champion Temir-Murza (Chelubei) at Kulikovo Field (1380). By the late 1520s, Peresvetov was a professional soldier in the service of King John (János) I Zápolya of Hungary, together with 300 other nobles owing allegiance to the Polish-Lithuanian crown. After three years, Peresvetov moved to the service of Ferdinand I of Habsburg, now as part of a battalion of 500 Polish-Lithuanian nobles and again for a period of three years. Peresvetov was careful to stress that he had served in these positions with the full knowledge and approval of his own sovereign, the Polish king Zygmunt/Sigismund I Stary.

According to his 'Greater petition' (*Bol'shaia chelobitnaia*), but not mentioned in his 'Lesser petition' (*Malaia chelobitnaia*), Peresvetov subsequently served for five months under Peter (Petru) IV Rareș, Voivode of Moldavia (r. 1527-38, 1541-46). This short stay apparently inspired him: he was to place virtually his entire argumentation in the 'Greater petition' into the mouth of his former lord, Peter (see below; this incident has even earned him a place in Romanian drama: I. Zamfirescu (ed.), *O antologie a dramei istorice românești. Perioada contemporană*, Bucharest, 1986, pp. 448-49). In the late 1530s, Peresvetov arrived in Moscow, possibly after spending a year or two in Poland-Lithuania. He brought with him what he called a 'Macedonian' design for hussar shields. Receiving a commission to manufacture these shields for the Russian military, Peresvetov worked for a short time under the supervision of the boyar Mikhail Iur'evich Zakhar'in. However, Zakhar'in soon died, leaving Peresvetov without a protector. According to his story, he suffered in relative poverty for the next 11 years. Having also brought with him collections of wise sayings accumulated over the course of his travels, he tried to become a kind of philosophy tutor at the Muscovite court. However, his attempts to transmit his writings to the young Tsar Ivan IV (1530-84) went amiss. Peresvetov believed that the boyars who held power during Ivan's minority hindered his every step, not wanting the tsar to come under the influence of ideas inimical to their own interests.

In about 1549, Peresvetov submitted his 'Lesser' and 'Greater' petitions to the tsar. His other surviving works also seem to date from approximately this period. They include: *Skazanie o knigakh* ('The tale about books'), *Skazanie o Magmete-saltane* ('The tale of Sultan Mehmed'), two *Predskazaniia filosofov i doktorov* ('Predictions of philosophers and doctors'), *Skazanie o tsare Konstantine* ('The tale of Emperor Constantine'), and some other partial works and re-workings of earlier tales. His writings share the general feature, highly unusual for Orthodox Christian

Russia, of excoriating the regime of the last Christian Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI Dragaš Palaeologus, and extolling the Muslim sultans who took over Constantinople. Peresvetov drew these conclusions on the basis of his view that a good ruler enforces justice/truth (*pravda*) with terror (*groza*), conscientiously rewarding his military men, while a bad ruler allows the nobility to take control, leading to corruption, laziness, greed, slavery, and ultimately the destruction of the state. Some of Peresvetov's proposals for government were so similar to the actions of Ivan IV (known as *Groznyi*, the 'Terrible' or 'Awe-inspiring') in the 1550s and 1560s that early investigators believed they had been written retrospectively. The question of whether and how much Peresvetov influenced Ivan remains controversial, though the survival of his writings in multiple copies suggests that they met with some approval. Later Russian literature, such as *Povest' o dvukh posol'stvakh* ('The tale of two embassies') and *Skazanie o Petre vovode Volosskom* ('The tale of Voivode Peter of Wallachia'), drew considerably from his works. Peresvetov's texts incidentally contain some Polonisms, a circumstance arguably supporting their authenticity. On the other hand, the author's fluency in Muscovite Russian may suggest a Russian author or editor.

Peresvetov's ultimate fate is not known. An enigmatic mention of his name in connection with a lost document probably dating from the 1550s or 1560s may indicate that he was implicated in a trial. Some have speculated that he was accused of heresy, as he may have had connections to schools of thought that fell out of favour in Muscovy and were repressed. Several scholars have noted similarities between the works of Peresvetov and his contemporary Fedor Ivanovich Karpov, who drew from Aristotle and was similarly concerned with justice/truth (*pravda*) as a chief element of good government (see D.M. Bulanin, art., 'Karpov Fedor Ivanovich', *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi. 2.1 [vtoraiia polovina XIV-XVI v., A-K]*, Leningrad, 1988, 459-61). Noting additional connections to various 'heretics' such as Matvei Bashkin, Zimin has proposed that Peresvetov belonged to an 'incomplete' and 'limited' humanist school of thought in Early Modern Russia, which slowly started to escape the dominance of ecclesiastical ideology (Zimin, *I.S. Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki*, pp. 404-5; Klibanov, 'Les mouvements hérétiques', pp. 682-83). Richard Pipes writes: 'Peresvetov was the earliest political writer in Russia to address the question of governmental forms in a thoroughly secular manner, on the basis of historical observation and without reference to the Scriptures' (*Russian conservatism and its critics*, p. 43). Although this statement is somewhat exaggerated (Peresvetov did

cite scripture to support his arguments, and his historical argumentation was not always factual), Pipes' evaluation summarises a common and mostly correct view of this important 16th-century author.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

Primary sources on the life of Ivan Peresvetov consist almost exclusively of the works attributed to him, which have been preserved in 17th-century manuscripts. A description of the royal archive compiled c. 1562-75 mentions a document concerning Ivan Peresvetov (which has not survived). For the texts and lists of their manuscripts, see:

- A.A. Zimin and D.S. Likhachev (eds), *Sochineniia I. Peresvetova*, Moscow, 1956
 A.A. Zimin, *I.S. Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki. Ocherki po istorii russkoï obshchestvenno-politicheskoi mysli serediny XVI veka*, Moscow, 1958

Secondary

Hundreds of works make mention of Ivan Peresvetov and his compositions. Salient and representative studies include:

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 F. Martelli, *Lo zar e il suo doppio. Simbologie e metafore dell'ideologia monarchica nella Russia ivaniana*, Bologna, 2011, pp. 29, 46-9
 S.M. Narozhniaia, 'Sochineniia I.S. Peresvetova. Lingvostilisticheskie sredstva sozdaniia publitsistichnosti', *Nauchnye vedomosti Belgorodskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Gumanitarnye nauki* 9 (2011) 242-57
 T. Riha, *Readings in Russian civilization*, Chicago, 2009, vol. 1, pp. 98-103, 116 (other editions exist but may have different content and page numbers)
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 R. Pipes, *Russian conservatism and its critics. A study in political culture*, New Haven CT, 2007, pp. 42-3
 I. de Madariaga, *Ivan the Terrible*, New Haven CT, 2006, pp. 88-90
 O.É. Leïst (ed.), *Istoriia politicheskikh i pravovykh ucheniï*, Moscow, 2006, pp. 158-62 (multiple editions and printings exist but may have different content and page numbers)
 S. Schneck, 'Political thinking in Moscow in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Peresvetov, Križanić and the grammatisation of knowledge', *Cahiers du monde russe* 46 (2005) 327-35

- S.K. Novikov, 'Politicheskie i pravovye vzgliady I.S. Peresvetova i ikh realizatsiia v gosudarstvenno-pravovom stroitel'stve vo vtoroi polovine XVI-XVII vv.', Moscow, 2005 (Diss. Russian Academy of Sciences)
- M.A. Batunskii, *Rossiiia i islam*, Moscow, 2003, vol. 1
- D. Al' [= D.N. Al'shits], *Pisatel' Ivan Peresvetov i tsar' Ivan Groznyĭ. U istokov izvechnoi' diskussii – kak obustroit' Rossiuu*, St Petersburg, 2002
- I.V. Zaĭtsev, "Vol'naia gramota" turetskogo sultana "nekoemu rusinu", *Tiurkologicheskiĭ sbornik / Turcologica* [13] (2002) 229-44 (repub. *Rusin* 24 (2011) 152-63)
- A.V. Karavashkin, *Russkaia srednevekovaia publitsistika. Ivan Peresvetov, Ivan Groznyĭ, Andreĭ Kurbskiĭ*, Moscow, 2000
- I.S. Luĕ'e, art. 'Skazanie o Petre, voevode Volosskom', in *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*. 3.3 (XVII v., P-S), St Petersburg, 1998, 428-9
- A.L. Iurganov and I.N. Danilevskii, "Pravda" i "vera" russkogo srednevekov'ia', *Odiseĭ. Chelovek v istorii* (1997) 144-70
- G. Hosking, *People and empire, 1552-1917*, Cambridge MA, 1997, pp. 47-56
- A.L. Iurganov, 'Idei I.S. Peresvetova v kontekste mirovoi istorii i kul'tury', *Voprosy istorii* 2 (1996) 15-27
- A.L. Iurganov, 'Ideal Ivashki Peresvetova', *Znanie – sila* 96 (1996) 80-9
- A. Dvorkin, *Ivan the Terrible as a religious type. A study of the background, genesis and development of the theocratic idea of the first Russian tsar and his attempts to establish 'free autocracy' in Russia*, Erlangen, 1992, pp. 40-54
- I.S. Luĕ'e, art. 'Peresvetov Ivan Semenovich', in *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*. 2.2 (vtoraia polovina XIV-XVI v., L-Ia), Leningrad, 1989, 178-82
- M.D. Kagan, art. 'Povest' o dvukh posol'stvakh', in *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*. 2.2 (vtoraia polovina XIV-XVI v., L-Ia), Leningrad, 1989, 234-6
- D.S. Likhachev (ed.), *A history of Russian literature. 11th-17th centuries*, Moscow, 1989 (includes section on Peresvetov)
- D.S. Likhachev, 'Ėpokha reshitel'nogo pod"ema obshchestvennogo znacheniiia literatury', *Pamiatniki literatury Drevnei Rusi*, Moscow, 1984, vol. 6, 5-19 (repub. *Biblioteka literatury Drevnei Rusi*, St Petersburg, 2000, vol. 9, 5-19)
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- M. Cherniavsky, 'Ivan the Terrible as Renaissance prince', *Slavic Review* 27 (1968) 195-211, pp. 202-9 (Polish translation: 'Iwan Groźny jako książę renesansu', trans. Mirosław Filipowicz, *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej [w Lublinie]* 5 (2007) 97-113, pp. 104-11)
- J.M. Letiche and A.I. Pashkov (eds), *A history of Russian economic thought. Ninth through eighteenth centuries*, Berkeley, 1964, pp. 128-35
- A. Danti, 'Ivan Peresvetov. Osservazioni e proposte', *Ricerche Slavistiche* 12 (1964) 3-64
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- V. Giterman, *Storia della Russia. Dalle origini alla vigilia dell'invasione napoleonica*, Florence, 1963, pp. 161-7 (other editions exist but may have different content and page numbers)
- A. Klibanov, 'Les mouvements hérétiques en Russie du XIII^e au XVI^e siècle', *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 3 (1962) 673-84
- A. Podraza, 'Iwan Pereswiewow, rosyjski pisarz polityczny XVI wieku. Na marginesie nowej edycji pism i nowych badań nad poglądami Pereswiewowa', *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 6 (1961) 203-25
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- G. Stökl, 'Das Echo von Renaissance und Reformation im Moskauer Rußland', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, n.f., 7 (1959) 413-30
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- A.L. Sakketti and I.F. Sal'nikov, 'O vzgliadakh I. Peresvetova', *Voprosy istorii* 1 (1957) 117-24
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- I.A. Iavorskii, 'K voprosu ob Ivashke Peresvetove, publitsiste XVI v.', *Chteniia v Istoricheskoi obshchestve Nestora letopistsa* 20 (1907) 59-86
- D.N. Egorov, 'Ideia "turetskoï reformatsii" v XVI v.', *Russkaia mysl'* 28 (1907) §13, 1-14

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Skazanie o Magmete-saltane, 'The tale of Sultan Mehmed [II]'

DATE About 1547-49

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Old Russian

DESCRIPTION

Skazanie o Magmete-saltane is one of Ivan Peresvetov's most remarkable works, both in general terms and specifically with respect to Christian-Muslim relations. The text explicitly sets out to analyse a Muslim ruler from a Christian perspective. On the basis of internal evidence and comparison with the author's other works, the time of writing can be estimated as the late 1540s (provided that one accepts Peresvetov's historicity; see the biography of the author above). Based on comments by Rzhiga, much scholarly literature assigns the tale to 1547. However, Zimin argues that the date of composition should be put at 1549. (For a discussion of the main issues involved in dating the text, see Zimin, *I.S. Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki*, pp. 266-72. In the opinion of the present author, attempts to define the precise date of composition are somewhat speculative.)

In its current form, the 'Tale of Sultan Mehmed' consists of approximately 3,400 words. Rzhiga based the first published edition of this text on a manuscript (Pogodin 1611) in which the tale occupied 21 pages; his printed version covered seven pages. However, it is worth noting that the original form of Peresvetov's tales, including the way they were divided, may have been different. As an example, consider that in the same manuscript the 'Tale of Sultan Mehmed' follows directly after the 'Tale of Emperor Constantine', which closes with the following words: 'And after a short time Sultan Mehmed, the Turkish emperor, came up by land and by sea to Constantinople with a great force'. Then begins Peresvetov's account of Sultan Mehmed, which has been demarcated as a separate tale but obviously flows together with, makes reference to, and indeed

builds upon the previous text. The ‘Tale of Emperor Constantine’ itself begins with the word ‘And’, and follows part of a tale about the capital Constantinople. It is therefore uncertain whether the titles and divisions by which we now know Peresvetov’s works belonged to his original conception or were inserted by manuscript copyists and editors, together with other modifications.

Like most of Peresvetov’s writing, the ‘Tale of Sultan Mehmed’ is at once historical, contemporary, political, religious, polemical, popular, recursive, direct, complex, and original. Although it appears on the surface to be a story or essay about the Ottoman Turkish ruler Mehmed II (the Conqueror, 1432–81), the main message of the work actually seems to pertain to Christian societies. This first becomes evident in a harsh critique of the Christian Byzantine Empire in its final years and the contrast Peresvetov draws between that ‘unjust’ polity and the ‘justice’ manifest under Mehmed. Despite the author’s effort to demonstrate the historical actuality of these illustrations, it soon becomes evident that his hyperbolic depictions serve a primarily polemical purpose. By means of an exaggerated and idealized opposition, Peresvetov attempts to prove his vision of good government. The conquest of 1453 and other historical references are merely the means of demonstrating how a good ruler should govern, i.e. of presenting a political theory. The main purpose of the work finally becomes apparent in its final passages, as Peresvetov addresses himself to Tsar Ivan IV of Muscovy and advises him to adopt the ‘just’ form of rule described in the text.

Peresvetov’s experience of service under two Ottoman vassals, John (János) I Zápolya of Hungary and Peter (Petru) IV Rareș of Moldavia, gave him the opportunity to acquire some familiarity with Ottoman practices. Despite or perhaps because of this, his depiction of the ideal ruler (‘Sultan Mehmed’) appears to be a conflation of Mehmed II (r. 1444–6, 1451–81) with Süleyman I (the Magnificent or Lawgiver, r. 1520–66). Similarly, Peresvetov’s version of the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI Palaeologus, may be a composite figure representing the failure to execute ‘justice’. The themes discussed in this text are common to Peresvetov’s whole oeuvre, but are here presented in an especially bold and striking manner. His ‘Greater Petition’, for example, presents a modified and much more ‘Christianized’ version of much of the same content.

The ‘Tale’ is a multi-layered work that can be analysed from a number of different perspectives. At root it seems to be concerned (despite appearances) primarily with social and political issues in 16th-century Muscovite Russia, and these aspects of the text have garnered the most

attention in historiography. For instance, Zimin devoted nearly 70 pages of his seminal work on Peresvetov to an analysis of the author's 'socio-political views'. This analysis is further subdivided into sections on Peresvetov's social, military, legal, financial, administrative, and foreign policy programmes and proposed reforms, with reference to contemporary Muscovite actuality (Zimin, *I.S. Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki*, pp. 339-405). Ostensibly, however, the 'Tale' seeks to explain the causes of 1453 – why the great Byzantine Christian Empire fell to the Muslim Turks – and to compare and contrast the Byzantine and Ottoman rulers. It also implicitly takes up the cause of all Christendom, considering what will be of most benefit to Christians everywhere – and indeed to the whole world. Christian-Muslim relations are thus obviously central to the text.

The 'Tale' begins: 'The Turkish emperor (*tsar*) Sultan Mehmed was himself a wise philosopher by reason of his own Turkish books; and he [also] read Greek books, and wrote [them] out word for word in Turkish, and thus great wisdom was added to the emperor.' After this striking introduction, the text immediately has Sultan Mehmed speak to his advisors (sayyids, pashas, mullahs, and hafizes, all of whom are collectively termed 'philosophers') about the last reigning Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI. Mehmed's description is suspiciously unlike a biography of the latter, and suspiciously like a depiction of the early reign of Tsar Ivan IV. The Christian emperor is said to have been an awesomely powerful warrior and conqueror who ascended the throne at the age of three when his father died; the magnates who had power during his minority were corrupt and greedy, enriching themselves 'by the tears and the blood of the human race'; evil and injustice ruled while the tsar was young, but the blood and the tears of the oppressed cried out to God in heaven. When the tsar grew up, he began to understand more and wanted to make changes, but the lying, traitorous magnates perceived that they would lose their wealth and power if the tsar began to rule in his own right, and so they used the 'deceptions of the devil' against the good tsar. God had to punish such sin, which led to the destruction of the state. This opening section ends with the sultan asking his 'wise philosophers' to be sure to help him guard against any lies, deception, or injustice that could bring down God's wrath on the Ottomans in the same way.

The 'Tale' continues by recounting one of Mehmed's first orders after conquering Constantinople. Instead of assigning territories to the magnates or great lords and allowing each to dispense justice in his own domain, with the concomitant temptation to bribery and corruption, the sultan appointed paid officials and charged them repeatedly

with judging honestly and correctly. Peresvetov's most constant motif makes an appearance here: God loves justice (*pravda*) and hates injustice (*nepravda*), so you (the sultan tells his officials) must hold to justice and not give in to any injustice. The officials are described as the sultan's faithful pashas, qadis, shubashes, and amins. The positive nature of Peresvetov's portrayal of Mehmed may be understood from the words he puts into the sultan's mouth: 'My beloved brothers, faithful ones, judge rightly, and [in this way] render to God heartfelt joy.'

However, the sultan did not merely instruct his officials and send them out. After some time, Peresvetov tells us, he tested his judges by having bribes offered to them. Those who proved corrupt Mehmed did not bother to charge with crimes; he simply gave orders for them to be flayed alive. Peresvetov insists that it is 'impossible to establish justice in a realm without such terror' (*bez takovyya grozy ne mochno v tsarstvo pravdy vvesti*). Since justice is what pleases God, it must be introduced at all costs and without any favouritism shown to anyone. A tsar who tries to rule without terror is like one riding a horse without a bridle: 'It is impossible for a tsar to hold an empire without terror' (*Ne mochno bez grozy tsarstvo tsariu derzhati*). Peresvetov has Sultan Mehmed explain that Constantine XI failed in this task of establishing justice by terror. Although his great lords took oaths 'according to their Christian faith', they broke those oaths, betrayed their ruler, perverted justice, and fell into heresy. All this angered God; the clear implication again is that this is what engendered the conquest of 1453.

Mehmed takes a lesson from the experience of Constantine, and fiercely and terribly executes justice. He 'tests' the oaths of his servants by lethal games of chance and trials by ordeal. A sword would be hung over the neck of a litigant, or arrows set up and aimed directly at his heart and throat, while a spiritual leader read out a religious text. For Greeks (Christians), the text consisted of a tenfold repetition of the 'evangelical teachings', apparently the Decalogue; for Turks (Muslims), mullahs would read an equivalent Islamic text. If the cleric finished his entire recitation without the arrows or sword being released and killing the man, the latter was considered justified. For other disputes, the two adversaries would be locked naked in a dungeon in which a single razor had been hidden. Whichever found it was considered to be in the right, won the case, and had the option of either killing his opponent or letting him go free. 'Thus God's judgment was accomplished', comments Peresvetov.

The ‘Tale’ explains that Mehmed gleaned this ‘wisdom’ from ‘Greek books’, studying how the Byzantines should have lived according to their own writings. The sultan pleased God greatly by establishing justice and rooting out falsehood. Peresvetov’s main catchphrases are here repeated and attributed to the sultan: ‘God loves justice above all’ (*Bog liubit pravdu lutchi vsego; Bog liubit silniee vsego pravdu*); it is impossible for a tsar to rule (justly) without terror; the wrath of God burned with unquenchable force against Constantine, his lords, and the whole Greek Empire due to their lack of justice (*pravda*). Mehmed is careful to keep close watch on his own lords and officials to ensure that they do not lead him and his empire into similar disaster. He places under threat those charged with administering justice, eliminates fees that can easily turn into bribes and extortion, and gives clear instructions about how to carry out justice. Soldiers are judged separately and with great strictness, capital punishment being the primary or perhaps the only penalty for wrongdoing. The great wisdom and justice of the sultan brings heartfelt joy to himself and to his army.

Peresvetov next turns his attention to tax collection and the means of maintaining the army. The Turkish sultan is said to be so wise and just that God blesses him with an ‘unending’ treasury. Using similar means to those described above, he rigorously fights against any possibility of embezzlement in the chain of collection. This enables him fully to support and equip a standing army. Mehmed extols the virtues of ‘service’ to his soldiers and charges them never to let their weapons out of their hands. In this way, he avers, they act on earth just as the angels do in heaven – never putting down their weapons for a moment, but standing on guard to preserve ‘the human race [that comes] from Adam’. The sultan’s army, greatly encouraged and strengthened by these words, responds by expressing another of Peresvetov’s key motifs: ‘God loves the army’ (*Bog liubit voinstvo*). The soldiers understand that they are fulfilling the will of God on earth; and if any of them die in battle, their sins will be washed clean by their own shed blood. Meanwhile, any cowards not ready to die in the ‘game of death’ (war against the enemy) should be executed immediately. The sultan is also wise enough to keep 40,000 well-trained and well-paid janissaries continually about himself to help guard against the ‘sin’ of rebellion. Peresvetov explains that, by preserving himself, the ‘tsar’ actually preserves his whole land and empire. In sum: ‘Wise is the tsar who makes the heart of his army glad’ with proper pay and strict order.

According to Peresvetov, Mehmed abolished slavery in his empire and laid down this law for all generations to come. Servants were to be engaged of their own free will and only for set periods of time: seven years (almost the same as in the biblical Torah; cf. Exodus 21:2; Deuteronomy 15:12; Jeremiah 34:13-14) or a maximum of nine years. Any master who did not release his servant after this contractual period was to be put to death. Mehmed burned the books of slavery and supported his policy by referring to the biblical story of Exodus, when God punished the Egyptian Pharaoh for enslaving the people of Israel. Rather than enslaving each other, the sultan's people must recognise that 'One God is over us [all], and we are his slaves.' An enslaved people, we learn, does not fight bravely; that is part of what doomed Constantine's Byzantine Empire. Peresvetov stresses that the Turkish sultan learned all of this wisdom by copying 'Christian books' – the principles are those that a Christian ruler should also follow.

Peresvetov's egalitarianism went further even than opposition to slavery. He reported that Sultan Mehmed promoted all brave and wise men in his empire, without favouritism or any regard for lineage. To high and low alike he proclaimed his policy of impartial promotion with the words, 'Brothers, we are all children of Adam!' This greatly motivated all his soldiers, who knew they had the opportunity for advancement if they stood firm and fought bravely against the enemy in battle. As examples of this meritocracy, Peresvetov cites 'the Arvanidic pasha' (Gedik Ahmed Pasha) and 'the Karamani pasha' (Karamani Mehmed Pasha). Peresvetov's sultan clearly uses the carrot and stick approach: the constant threat of terrible punishment invariably accompanies these incentives of great reward.

As might be expected, justice within the army is strict and swift. Peresvetov describes the military organisation (commanders of tens, hundreds, and thousands) and how they ensure discipline among the troops. All spoils are to be gathered to the tent of the great pasha and distributed according to set payments already established by the sultan. Thievery, drunkenness, banditry, and other crimes are punished harshly, execution again being the preferred sentence. We learn again that God was enraged against Emperor Constantine because he did the opposite. The great Byzantine nobles were corrupt, unjust, oppressive, and murderous: 'whoever among them was rich was also guilty' (*kto byl u nikh bogat, tot i vinovat*; cf. James 2:6)! Sultan Mehmed, who has learned from Christian books, asks why anyone would dare to so anger God merely for the sake of earthly wealth. They acquire gold, but also earn divine wrath and vengeance, which may be carried out to the ninth generation (again

a concept similar to Torah; cf. Exodus 20:5; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 23:3). Wealthy oppressors do not benefit even themselves: rather, for comparatively little benefit, they 'lose the way to the heavenly kingdom' (*put' tsarstva nebesnago poteriali*; cf. Proverbs 10:2; Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25, 12:20).

Peresvetov's Muslim sultan now turns into an apologist for Christianity, arguing that those who spread it are praiseworthy and (if they are killed) become glorious martyrs honoured in heaven. Constantine should have stood firm for justice and the Christian faith (*vera* or *viera*), which is unmatched in God's eyes among all the religions. In fact, according to the 'Tale', Sultan Mehmed had a deep desire to convert to Christianity. Peresvetov did not simply fabricate this surprising assertion for reasons of literary or ideological convenience; it resembles the contemporary reports of Hekim Yakub Pasha (Jacopo of Gaeta), an influential Jew at the court of Mehmed II (see, e.g. E. Kohen, *History of the Turkish Jews and Sephardim. Memories of a past Golden Age*, Lanham MD, 2007, p. 19).

The wrath of God having fallen on the Byzantines for their injustice and reckless parody of the Christian faith, all hope and pride among Greek Christians now turns toward 'the pious Russian tsar'. In a phrase that appears to have become a key conception of the Muscovite state in the 16th-17th centuries, Peresvetov remarks: 'There is no other free Christian empire of the Greek [i.e. Eastern Orthodox] law' (*inogo tsarstva volnogo khristiiian'skogo i zakonu grecheskago niet*). Moreover, Ivan IV himself is the answer to Catholic anti-Orthodox polemics. In disputations with Greek Orthodox Christians, Catholics denigrate their opponents by comparing them to Jews, who were punished by God with the destruction of their polity and subjection to foreign domination. God similarly destroyed Byzantium on account of the injustice and pride of its elite. However, Greek Christians answer this charge proudly: 'We do have a free empire and a free tsar, the pious sovereign and grand prince Ivan Vasil'evich' of all Rus.' The power of the Muscovite state and the presence of miracle-working saints are adduced as signs of divine choice and blessing. Hearing this, the Catholics capitulate and admit the truth or justice (*pravda*) of what the Orthodox say. The final postulates of the 'Tale' read as follows: 'Would that to this true Christian faith (*viera*) [could be added] also Turkish justice (*pravda*), so that angels would converse with them [the Greek Orthodox]. And [would] that to that Turkish justice (*pravda*) [could be added] also Christian faith (*viera*), so that angels would converse with them [the Ottoman Muslims]'.

This final double aphorism expresses Peresvetov's notion of the ideal state: one in which both justice (executed with terror or awe) and Orthodox Christianity exist conjointly. The Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI failed dreadfully: though he was Orthodox, his regime was unjust. As justice is the most important virtue to God, in Peresvetov's understanding, Sultan Mehmed ranks far higher: though he was Muslim, his regime was just. Now, however, Ivan IV has the historic opportunity to combine these two great elements and forge a truly ideal empire. Peresvetov's *principum specula*, though expressed in a rather complex form, is quite clear and straightforward in its essential content.

SIGNIFICANCE

The 'Tale of Sultan Mehmed' is highly significant and exceptional in the context of Muscovite Russian literature for a number of reasons. As a foreigner who had lived previously in Poland-Lithuania, Hungary, the Habsburg Empire, and south-eastern Europe, Peresvetov introduced many ideas that were unusual and even shocking to 16th-century Muscovy. The 'Tale' departs strongly from society's standard and accepted forms for describing Muslims. In virtually all Muscovite Russian texts from the 14th to the 17th centuries, Muslims are called by derogatory terms such as *besurmane* (also *basurmane*, *besermene*, etc.) or *agariane* (*agariene*, Hagarites) and described as evil infidels hateful to the Christian God. Peresvetov avoids this terminology altogether, and his 'Tale' portrays Ottoman Muslims in a much more favourable light than Greek (Byzantine) Christians. This seems almost incredible in comparison to the rest of Muscovite Russian literature, all the more so because Byzantium was generally venerated as the holy source of the one true faith. Peresvetov bases his historical and moral evaluations on a prioritization that must have seemed inverted or even incomprehensible to many Muscovites: for him, justice/truth (*pravda*, conceived in a rather biblical sense as 'what is right' generally) is by far the most important in God's eyes, and even faith (*vera*) occupies a distant second place. By contrast, most Muscovite Russian literature holds up the Orthodox Christian faith itself as the be all and end all of justice (and every other good); what is true or just, according to that understanding, is simply what accords with Eastern or Greek Orthodox Christianity. Peresvetov, perhaps, does not completely reject this conception – he claims that Sultan Mehmed gained his most important wisdom from Greek Christian books – but he certainly challenges it on a deep level by presenting the Muslims as just and the Orthodox Christians as unjust. The 'Tale' intentionally smashes through any

facile equation of 'Orthodox' with 'good' and 'Muslim' with 'bad' – the very mindset expressed throughout virtually all other Muscovite Russian literature.

Presuming that his autobiographical sketches were accurate or roughly so, Peresvetov lived in societies in east-central and south-eastern Europe that tolerated multiple religions, including his own. Poland-Lithuania and territories under Ottoman domination were multi-confessional and multi-linguistic, allowing for a wide range of practices (despite the simultaneous presence of prejudice and discrimination). By comparison, Muscovy at this time was relatively less diverse and less tolerant. Tsar Ivan IV himself banned Jews from entering his empire; Poland-Lithuania, with its 'Latins, Lutherans, and Yids', and the Muslim Tatars to the south and east of Muscovy, were seen as the quintessential evil enemies. Peresvetov stands out markedly in the Muscovite context by evaluating people's moral standing and worth almost without regard to religion at all. Though many of his ideas about how to govern may have been accepted and implemented by Ivan, it is almost ridiculously easy to see how he might also have been accused of heresy in a society that looked askance at even the slightest deviation from religious norms.

Peresvetov's God is far more ecumenical and universal than was common anywhere in Europe in the 16th century; and so are his people. As the author's Sultan Mehmed proclaims: there is one God over everyone; and anyone (from any religion) can please or displease him by acting in accordance with either justice/truth or injustice/lies. In Peresvetov's 'Tale', valiant Muslims have their sins cleansed and enter paradise, while corrupt Christians lose their salvation and are excluded from heaven. In this life, too, God blesses just Muslims and curses unjust Christians. Rich and poor are also inverted: the greatest magnates are always the guiltiest and most liable to sin. They must be watched, and their power broken. Meanwhile, the poor who suffer are not 'Russians' or 'Greeks' or even 'Christians' – they are members of the 'human race'. Peresvetov goes out of his way to stress the commonality of Muslims with Christians, portraying both as descendants of Adam responsible before God for the same fundamental obligations. He places biblical examples in the mouth of the Muslim sultan, again suggesting a common heritage.

Having a Muslim sultan – ostensibly the greatest enemy of the Christian faith, in the Muscovite mindset – teach Orthodox Christians about the Bible and the ways of God was a brilliant (if dangerous) stroke. Peresvetov's entire 'Tale' represents a kind of *a fortiori* argument: If the *Muslim*

sultan rules according to justice and pleases God, how much more should *Christian* rulers do the same? Peresvetov softens the blow for his Christian audience somewhat by having Mehmed almost become a Christian at the end of the story. Nonetheless, his presentation would probably have seemed strikingly offensive to traditionalists. Perhaps most incomprehensibly from the usual Muscovite perspective, the ‘Tale’ contains not a single trace of anti-Muslim bias. The sultan is presented as an ideal ruler from whom Christians can learn much; if he were to become an Orthodox Christian himself, he would be absolutely perfect. The terror/awe (*groza*) with which he rules is regarded as a highly positive characteristic: Mehmed ruthlessly destroys the unjust and corrupt among his subjects, but favours and rewards those who are just, true, and brave. All these unusual features of Peresvetov’s writing tend to support his own reality as a historical individual. It seems much less likely that a native author would have attributed the ‘good’ teachings to a Muslim, while denigrating Byzantine Christians and otherwise blatantly transgressing many common norms and prejudices of his own society.

Peresvetov thus appears as a semi-Machiavellian thinker in early modern Muscovy. Like Machiavelli, he separates the methods of good government from religion. Though Orthodox Christianity (for Peresvetov) is a better choice than Islam, his Muslim Sultan Mehmed is a far better ruler than his Orthodox Christian Emperor Constantine. Also like Machiavelli, Peresvetov stresses the importance of ruling through terror, fear, and harsh punishments (Blane, however, argues that ‘there is no *necessary* connection between cruelty and *groza* in the writings of Ivan Peresvetov’ in spite of the very cruel examples he uses; A. Blane, *The religious world of Russian culture*, The Hague, 1975, p. 105, emphasis added). Unlike Machiavelli, however, Peresvetov does not abandon a vision of morality defined by God in describing how to rule in the proper way. His prescription is directed toward ‘justice’ – what is right and true – and his rulers are rewarded and punished by God with reference to their performance vis-à-vis this standard. One God rules over all. Might does not make right; nor can the mightiest hope to get away with their crimes.

It is not at all impossible that Peresvetov was acquainted with Machiavellian ideas. *The Prince* dates from about 1513 and was first published (in Italian) in 1532. However, as early as 1523 a Latin work entitled *De regnandi peritia* was published in Naples; it is regarded as a (modified or distorted) plagiarism of Machiavelli’s *Prince* accomplished by Agostino Nifo (see P. Cosentino, ‘Un plagio del *Principe*: Il *De regnandi peritia* di

Agostino Nifo', in R. Gigliucci (ed.), *Furto e plagio nella letteratura del classicismo*, Rome, 1998, pp. 139-60). As a result, quasi-Machiavellian ideas were available to a Latin readership; speculatively, this may have enabled them to become popular in Poland. The first Latin edition of Machiavelli's *Prince* itself (as opposed to the 1523 plagiarism) dates from 1560 and was dedicated to a Polish noble (see V. Lepri, 'Machiavelli in Polonia', *Conferenze* 129 (2014) 1-10, p. 2; and other works by the same author). Though this evidence is later than Peresvetov's time of writing, and significantly later than his time in Poland-Lithuania, it may still carry relevance for earlier decades. Apparently, for some time the kinds of ideas espoused by Machiavelli and directly or indirectly attributable to him had been gaining ground among the Polish-Lithuanian nobility, from which Peresvetov himself also hailed. (On these themes, see also A. Dvorkin, *Ivan the Terrible*, pp. 48-9; H.B. Segel, *Renaissance culture in Poland. The rise of humanism, 1470-1543*, Ithaca NY, 1989.)

The originality of the 'Tale of Sultan Mehmed' may be readily appreciated by comparing this text to an earlier Old Russian tale or set of tales about the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Commonly attributed to Nestor Iskander, *Povesti o vziatii Konstantinopolia turkami v 1453 g.* existed in many versions by the early 16th century. Peresvetov was familiar with at least one redaction, which he used in his works. These tales enjoyed great popularity and exerted a very strong influence on subsequent Muscovite literature (see O.V. Tvorogov, art., 'Povesti o vziatii Konstantinopolia turkami v 1453 g.', *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi. 2.2 (vtoraia polovina XIV-XVI v., L-Ia)*, Leningrad, 1989, 195-7; M.N. Speranskii, 'Povesti i skazaniia o vziatii Tsar'grada turkami (1453) v russkoï pis'mennosti XVI-XVII vekov', 2 parts, *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoï literatury* 10 (1954) 136-65; 12 (1956) 188-225). In contrast to Peresvetov's writings, the tales attributed to Iskander follow a much more typical pattern for Muscovite Russian literature. Mehmed II is termed 'godless' (*bezbozhnyi*), 'cursed' (*okaannyi*), 'lawless' (*bezzakonnyi*), 'immoral' (*zlonravnyi*), and 'of evil faith' (*zlovrnyi*). All this was absolutely typical for Rus' literature – but the contrast to Peresvetov's 'Tale' could not be starker. Moreover, the earlier texts explained the fall of Constantinople in entirely religious terms. Vague Byzantine 'sins' and impiety indeed brought about God's punishment, which had already for centuries represented essentially the sole explanation for disasters in Rus' literature. However, the nature of the failure to be Orthodox enough remained imprecise; certainly nothing like Peresvetov's quite practical exposition of universally definable

injustices and falsehoods, and their logical effects, figured into these tales. (For the text of one version of Iskander's tale, see 'Povest' o vziatii Tsar'grada turkami v 1453 godu', *Pamiatniki literatury Drevnei Rusi*, Moscow, 1982, vol. 5, pp. 216-67, 602-7.)

Peresvetov quite possibly also knew the anti-Islamic tracts of Maximus the Greek (c. 1475-1556; see the entry in this volume), who was like himself an immigrant to Moscow. However, again Peresvetov's 'Tale' is completely different in character from works such as these, as it contains absolutely no anti-Islamic polemic. (On anti-Islamic polemical literature in Muscovite Russia, see P. Bushkovitch, 'Orthodoxy and Islam in Russia, 988-1725', *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 76 (2010) 117-44.) Many scholars point to *Skazanie o Drakule* ('The tale of Drakula'), usually attributed to Fedor Vasil'evich Kuritsyn (d. beginning of 16th century), as a possible source for Peresvetov's notions about the role of 'terror' in ruling justly. Though there may have been some influence, Peresvetov's ideas on this score are much more developed and unambiguous than those evident in that story. It is worth noting, as a sign of the general environment in Muscovy at this time, that the authors Maximus and Kuritsyn were themselves both accused of heresy. As Maximus came to discover, Greek learning was not always accepted in Moscow, despite the adulation constantly expressed with regard to the 'parent' Christian civilization. In actual fact, even the 'Greek books' and 'philosophy' about which Peresvetov wrote could be viewed with considerable suspicion (see I. Gruber, 'Lexical daring: Muscovite Russian experimentation with Greek language as a reflection of underlying civilizational rivalry', in O. Alexandropoulou and P. Sophoulis (eds), *The Slavs and the Greek world (Slavoi kai ellēnikos kosmos)*, Athens, 2014, 129-45).

Peresvetov's perspective on Christian-Muslim relations, as expressed in the 'Tale of Sultan Mehmed', is thus quite unique in its historico-literary context. Even the late 17th-century *Skifskaia istoriia* ('Scythian history') by Andrei Ivanovich Lyzlov still expressed a much more traditional Rus' perspective on Islam and Muslims. Lyzlov's tale employs the same religiously laden, anti-Muslim language as that of Iskander approximately two centuries earlier (and many other authors throughout Rus' history). Attempts have been made to have Peresvetov fit smoothly within the context of 16th-century Muscovite Russian religious culture. However, it is surely evident that Peresvetov's 'Tale' represented the introduction of a very different way of thinking about Muslims into early modern Orthodox Christian Russia. Given that Russians maintain great interest in their

national history and historical literature, this atypical text may still have some relevance and influence today.

MANUSCRIPTS

The 'Tale' exists in a number of 17th-century MSS. For lists of these and discussion, see:

- Rzhiga, 'Peresvetov, publitsist XVI v.', pp. 57-8
- Zimin and Likhachev, *Sochineniia I. Peresvetova*
- Zimin, *I.S. Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki*, pp. 243-51

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

- N.V. Sinitsyna and V.S. Pribytkov (eds), *Vse narody edino sut'. Istoriia otechestva v romanakh, povestiakh, dokumentakh – vek XV-XVI*, Moscow, 1987, pp. 629-41 (modern Russian trans. by S.A. Eliseev)
- Basile, *Scritti politici di Ivan Semënovic Peresvetov* (Italian trans.)
- Vernadsky, *A source book for Russian history*, vol. 1, pp. 162-4 (brief excerpts in English trans.)
- J. Fennell and D. Obolensky (eds), *A historical Russian reader. A selection of texts from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries*, Oxford, 1969, pp. 126-35, 198-200 (Russian text with English annotations)
- Zimin and Likhachev, *Sochineniia I. Peresvetova*
- S.P. Obnorskii and S.G. Barkhudarov (eds), *Khrestomatiia po istorii russkogo iazyka*, Moscow, 1938, vol. 1, 170-3 (excerpts; multiple editions)
- N.K. Gudziï (ed.), *Khrestomatiia po drevneï russkoï literature XI-XVII vv.*, Moscow, 1935, pp. 189-94 (this work exists in multiple editions)
- Rzhiga, 'Peresvetov, publitsist XVI v.', pp. 71-8

STUDIES

- Hundreds of works make mention of Peresvetov's 'Tale of Sultan Mehmed'. Salient and representative studies are listed below. For additional bibliography, see Zimin, *I.S. Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki*, pp. 458-78; Erusalimskii, 'Publitsist i tsentralizovannoe gosudarstvo', pp. 100-28.
- Mikhaïlova and Mikhailov, 'Vera i pravda v tekstakh Ivana Peresvetova'
 - Martelli, *Lo zar e il suo doppio*, pp. 29, 46-9
 - Narozhniaia, 'Sochineniia I.S. Peresvetova'
 - Riha, *Readings in Russian civilization*, vol. 1, pp. 98-103, 116 (other editions may have different content and page numbers)
 - Al'shits, *Ot legend k faktam*, pp. 223-71
 - Pipes, *Russian conservatism*, pp. 42-3
 - De Madariaga, *Ivan the Terrible*, pp. 88-90

- Leïst, *Istoriia politicheskikh i pravovykh ucheniï*, pp. 158-62 (other editions may have different content and page numbers)
- Schneck, 'Political thinking in Moscow'
- Novikov, 'Politicheskii i pravovye vzgliady I.S. Peresvetova'
- Batunskii, *Rossia i islam*, vol. 1 (comparative perspective)
- Al', *Pisatel' Ivan Peresvetov*
- Karavashkin, *Russkaia srednevekovaia publitsistika*
- Lur'e, 'Skazanie o Petre, voevode Volosskom'
- Iurganov and Danilevskii, "'Pravda" i "vera"'
- P.M. Austin, *The exotic prisoner in Russian romanticism*, New York, 1997, p. 25
- Hosking, *People and empire*, pp. 47-56
- Iurganov, 'Idei I.S. Peresvetova'
- Iurganov, 'Ideal Ivashki Peresvetova'
- Dvorkin, *Ivan the Terrible*, pp. 40-54
- Lur'e, 'Peresvetov Ivan Semenovich'
- Kagan, 'Povest' o dvukh posol'stvakh'
- Likhachev, *A history of Russian literature* (section on Peresvetov)
- Likhachev, 'Épokha'
- Cazacu, 'Aux sources de l'autocratie Russe'
- Brown, 'Early Modern Russian bureaucracy', vol. 2, pp. 627-35
- Pelenski, *Russia and Kazan*
- Billington, *The icon and the axe*, p. 67
- Cherniavsky, 'Ivan the Terrible'
- Letiche and Pashkov, *A history of Russian economic thought*, pp. 128-35
- Danti, 'Ivan Peresvetov'
- Backus, 'Muscovite legal thought'
- Giterman, *Storia della Russia*, pp. 161-7 (other editions may have different content and page numbers)
- Klibanov, 'Les mouvements hérétiques'
- Zimin, 'K izucheniiu vzgliadov I.S. Peresvetova'
- Stökl, 'Das Echo von Renaissance'
- Zimin, *I.S. Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki*
- Sakketti and Sal'nikov, 'O vzgliadakh I. Peresvetova'
- Zimin and Likhachev, *Sochineniia I. Peresvetova* (standard critical edition of texts with commentary)
- Sakketti, 'Politicheskaia programma I.S. Peresvetova'
- Budovnits, *Russkaia publitsistika*, pp. 208-19
- Bezviconi, *Călători ruși în Moldova și Muntenia*, pp. 20-6

Philipp, 'Ivan Peresvetov und seine Schriften' (entire issue)
 Rzhiga, 'Peresvetov i zapadnaia kul'turno-istoricheskaiia sreda'
 Rzhiga, 'Peresvetov, publitsist XVI v.'
 Iavorskii, 'K voprosu ob Ivashke Peresvetove'
 Egorov, 'Ideia "turetskoï reformatsii"'

Bol'shaia chelobitnaia, 'Greater petition'
Vtoraia chelobitnaia; Pervaia chelobitnaia

DATE About 1549

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Old Russian

DESCRIPTION

Two petitions to Tsar Ivan IV of Muscovy (r. 1533-84) bearing the name 'Ivashko son of Semen Peresvietov' have survived. As one of them is significantly longer than the other, it is customary in historiography to refer to them as the 'Big' and 'Small', or 'Greater' and 'Lesser' petitions. (The alternatives, 'First' and 'Second' petitions, are better avoided, as they sometimes refer to the order of appearance in manuscripts and sometimes to the order of presentation to the tsar.) Both petitions state that they were written 11 years after the author arrived in Muscovy. On the basis of internal evidence and comparison with other texts, they can be roughly dated to 1548-50. Most scholars accept that they were delivered to the tsar in 1549, the 'Lesser' before the 'Greater'. (For a discussion of the main issues involved in dating the petitions, see Zimin, *I.S. Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki*, pp. 266-70.) Their authenticity has been challenged but is now commonly accepted (see the biography above).

Peresvetov's apparently earlier 'Lesser' petition is concerned primarily with his own plight, and includes significant autobiographical data. The 'Greater' petition is a kind of political tractate as well as a repeated personal plea. It consists of approximately 4,300 words. The most recent edition, by Kagan-Tarkovskaia, covers ten printed pages and is based on a manuscript (BAN 33.7.11) in which the text is spread across 54 pages. The 'Greater petition' is unusual in that virtually the entire discourse is placed in the mouth of Peter (Petru) IV Rareș of Moldavia (r. 1527-38, 1541-6), whom Peresvetov for some reason terms 'the voivode of Wallachia', and the text is peppered with indications of this attribution: 'And so said Petr, voivode of Wallachia. . . Thus says Petr, voivode of Wallachia. . . So also says Petr, voivode of Wallachia. . . Petr, voivode of Wallachia, says with

great tears...'. According to Peresvetov's account in this text, but oddly absent from the 'Lesser petition', he himself had served under Peter for five months prior to immigrating to Muscovy. It is not entirely clear why Peresvetov chose to speak through Peter in the 'Greater petition', but it may be in response to a perceived need to appeal to a foreign Orthodox Christian authority. Given the nature of Peresvetov's argumentation, a Byzantine source would not have been suitable (for reasons explained below).

The 'Greater petition' repeats many of the themes in Peresvetov's other major work, the 'Tale of Sultan Mehmed'. However, the message seems to have been 'softened' and made more palatable for a Russian Orthodox Christian audience. Moreover, the author addresses himself throughout to Tsar Ivan, making this text explicitly about the Muscovite rather than the Byzantine or Ottoman Turkish Empire. In addition, he urges the conquest and conversion of neighbouring Muslim states. Due to the lateness of the manuscripts, which date from some 80 years after the presumed time of composition, the question of whether these elements formed part of Peresvetov's original conception remains very much open. These aspects of the 'Petition' differ notably from the perspective expressed in the 'Tale', despite the obvious commonality of basic content. Textual incongruities do suggest that the petition attributed to Peresvetov was at least modified and supplemented, if not systematically reworked, in the process of transmission.

The 'Petition' seems more rambling than the 'Tale', but highlights many of the same motifs (using a somewhat different approach) and may in fact be just as consciously structured. Near the opening of the 'Petition', the Christian Voivode Peter (rather than the Muslim Sultan Mehmed) explains that justice/truth (*pravda*) is what gives joy to the heart of God and great wisdom to the ruler. Throughout the text, it is Peter who gives instruction about Byzantine and Ottoman government and shares advice about how Ivan should rule. The overall framing is provided by Peresvetov's declaration that he has brought with him to Moscow several collections of wise sayings from the various countries where he has sojourned. He attributes the sayings to 'Greek philosophers', 'Latin doctors', and Peter of Moldavia. The tone in the 'Petition' is quite different from that of the 'Tale': Peter describes how the Greeks (i.e. Byzantines) failed to stand firmly against the 'infidels', and as a result many are now compelled to convert to Islam. He speaks of the crying and mourning of parents as their seven-year-old children are taken from them to serve the sultan – a reference to the *devşirme* that would certainly engender

sympathy among an Orthodox Christian audience. In the 'Tale', by contrast, the janissary troops thus 'recruited' were held up as an example of the sultan's great wisdom.

The 'Petition' is also much more clearly an attempt to curry favour with Tsar Ivan and/or to promote his image. As in his two short 'Predictions of philosophers and doctors', Peresvetov informs Ivan of the great esteem in which he is reportedly held among 'wise people' abroad. Foreign philosophers and doctors have been greatly impressed with heavenly omens and other signs of Ivan's divine calling, and this is why they wanted him to have their wise sayings, to write them out 'in gold', and eventually to pass them on to his successors. Peresvetov writes that he arrived with these sayings 11 years ago from Lithuania, wanting to serve the tsar, much as his own claimed ancestors (Peresvet and Oслиabia) served the tsar's forebears. He reports that the philosophers and doctors predict great glory for Ivan, similar to that of Caesar Augustus or Alexander the Great. They have heard of his great wisdom, and of how he brings God great joy by establishing justice (*pravda*) throughout his realm. In brief, Ivan is a matchlessly 'terrible' or 'awesome' (*groznyi*) and wise sovereign.

Peresvetov then cleverly transitions to his own story by saying that both Augustus and Alexander rewarded humble warriors who came to them with military inventions. Similarly, Peresvetov himself has come bearing the design for a special shield. However, (as recounted in the author's biography) his protector has died and he has been left without attachment and in an uncertain situation. In addition to his attempts to manufacture military equipment, Peresvetov has also given the tsar books of wisdom but has apparently received nothing for his pains and heard nothing in response. He asks the tsar to return these valuable books if they do not please him.

Next, the author mentions his service in Suceava under Voivode Peter. According to Peresvetov, Peter speaks every day about Ivan's empire and its key role in strengthening Christendom. He prays for Ivan and Muscovy, that they will be protected from the infidel and from heresies. These most dangerous 'heresies' seem to consist of offences familiar to readers of the 'Tale of Sultan Mehmed': corruption and greed on the part of magnates who 'enrich themselves by the tears and blood of the Christian race' (note the shift from 'the human race' of the 'Tale'), and widespread violation of sworn oaths. Not surprisingly for readers of the 'Tale', Peter now lauds Mehmed (*Makhmet-sultan*) for establishing justice and wisdom in his empire. He gives a brief précis of some of the points

expounded in the ‘Tale’. Notably, however, he calls Mehmed an ‘infidel’ (*neviernyi*), although describing him as acting in a manner pleasing to God and in accordance with scripture (in establishing a justice system that renders ‘to each according to his deeds’, Romans 2:6).

As if not wanting to stray far from the main point, Peresvetov has Peter immediately return to the topic of Ivan himself and the prophecies about his great wisdom and justice. He further reveals that the Russian magnates are false to God and the tsar, as they are lazy, corrupt, greedy, and unwilling to fight unwaveringly for the Christian faith (*viera*). As in the ‘Tale of Sultan Mehmed’, the reader learns that the rich are by the nature of their circumstances simply not motivated to fight. The author then applies the ‘wisdom’ explained in the ‘Tale’ to Muscovite Russia, proposing specific methods for collecting revenue and supporting the army, as well as maintaining discipline and executing justice. ‘Peter’ wants Ivan to maintain a standing army of 20,000 elite soldiers to resist the Crimean Tatars. He claims that ‘these 20,000 will be better than 100,000’ troops collected in the usual manner.

Peter picks up on another theme of the ‘Tale’ and other works attributed to Peresvetov: the unjust situation in the final years of the Byzantine Empire under Constantine XI Palaeologus, and how it led to capitulation to the Ottoman Turks. Here in the ‘Petition’, however, stress is placed on the pitiable fate of the Byzantine Christians, who live as slaves of the sultan and have to pay heavy *obrok*, and whose great nobles must even work in trade. Weeping, Peter speaks of Russian Christianity and Tsar Ivan as providing the only hope for Christians suffering ‘from the violence of the Turkish foreigner-emperor’. He longs to know if justice (*pravda*) exists in that Orthodox land. A Muscovite in his service, Vaska (Vas’ko, Vasilii) Mertsalov, reveals when questioned that Russia does indeed have the ‘good Christian faith’ and ‘great ecclesiastical beauty’ – but justice is lacking. Peter dejectedly responds: ‘If there is no justice, then there is nothing at all’ (*Koli pravdy niet, ino to i vsego nietu*).

Unlike Peresvetov’s ‘Tale’, the discourse now suggests that true *pravda* may not exist apart from the true faith. ‘Christ is the true *pravda*’, Voivode Peter remarks: ‘Great is the Christian God.’ Mixed into the same passage are refrains familiar from the ‘Tale’: justice is what gladdens the heart of God; ‘nothing is stronger than justice in the divine Scriptures’; God favours and does not destroy any regime that practises justice. However, these phrases have been given a different hue by the admixture of specifically Christian content. Peter prays that God will preserve the Russian tsardom so that Orthodox Christians will not be left – like Jews

and Armenians – without an independent state of their own. He goes further, expressing wonder that the ‘strong and pious’ Russian tsar continues to tolerate ‘his worst enemy’, the Kazan khanate (Ivan IV will conquer Kazan in 1552 after a series of wars lasting a decade and a half). Via a confused history of Ottoman-Byzantine relations, the text’s ‘Peter’ then inverts completely the presentation in Peresvetov’s ‘Tale’: here Sultan Mehmed ‘of bandit stock’ is said to have killed the ‘pious’ Emperor Constantine and destroyed the ecclesiastical beauty of Constantinople. This reads more like a lament than a celebration of God’s preference for justice.

The recursive remainder of the ‘Petition’ is similarly a curious admixture of the ideas and programme expressed in the ‘Tale’ on the one hand, and on the other the much more Christian slant put into the mouth of Peter. The main cause of the collapse of the Byzantine Empire is repeated: the corruption and ‘heresy’ of the great lords, who enrich themselves by oppressing the ‘Christian’ (again not ‘human’) race. According to Peter, such people should be burned with fire (as befits heretics). Moreover, the military should be paid and maintained well; this is of the utmost importance. When the lords and tax collectors grow rich, the warriors grow poor, injuring the state. Yet a tsar cannot exist without his military, which should be like the host of heaven: never resting, but always protecting and fighting for the ‘Christian’ (again not ‘human’) race. Soldiers should be promoted in accordance with their deeds; slavery should be abolished. The Byzantine Empire was destroyed because of pride and slavery, just as the Jews were scattered after they failed to recognize Christ.

Interestingly, Mehmed II is again held up as a positive example, as in Peresvetov’s ‘Tale’, but more briefly and with qualifications. The sultan is said to have pleased God by asking for his help in establishing justice and by instituting justice in his own realm. As in the ‘Tale’, references to ‘Adam’ in the speech of Mehmed himself suggest a common heritage. The text informs us that one God is over the whole world, and he loves justice (*pravda*) even more than faith (*vera*). However, the ‘Petition’ is careful to mention that the Muslim sultan was a ‘foreigner’ and ‘not a Christian’. He could please God by introducing justice, but (in this account) his justice was not complete without Christ.

Peter advises that Kazan should be conquered by paying warriors well and sending them against the Muslim khanate to burn, kill, and enslave. This strategy will also bring about divine assistance, he says. Moreover, the conquered Muslims should be converted to Christianity to make the

conquest secure (*Ashche vozmet ikh, da krestit, to i kriepko budet*). Peter professes amazement that such a fruitful land, which his informants compare to paradise, has not yet been conquered and annexed by Ivan. He recommends doing this immediately (a proposal probably intended to please Ivan).

The petition ends on a personal note. Peresvetov again recounts how he has served under Voivode Peter and acquired many wise sayings, including the much-repeated predictions of glory for Ivan attributed to ‘philosophers and doctors’. The author has now brought these edifying texts, as well as military technology, as a service to the Muscovite tsar. Hoping for favour from Ivan, Peresvetov asks in closing: ‘O sovereign, how does my humble service, that of your slave, please you’ (*Kak tebie, gosudariu, poliubitsia sluzhbishko moe kholopa tvoego*)?

SIGNIFICANCE

In the form in which it has survived, Peresvetov’s ‘Greater petition’ is not a consistent text. It appears to be a rewriting of the ‘Tale of Sultan Mehmed’ with significant modifications designed to appeal to a Russian Orthodox Christian readership. How many of these modifications were introduced by Peresvetov himself, and how many should be attributed to other editors and censors, is simply not known. However, the ‘Petition’ feels very much like an attempted synthesis of the ‘Tale’ – a strikingly exceptional treatment of the Muslim theme in the context of Muscovite Rus’ literature – with a much more traditional Russian Christian approach. This compromise is not entirely successful; textual ‘seams’ and inconsistencies seem rather evident. Mehmed is alternately esteemed and disliked; slavery is alternately condemned and advocated (and the author even refers to himself as a ‘slave’ of the tsar). The repeated substitution of ‘Christian’ for ‘human’ completely transforms the entire worldview expressed in the text from universalist to particularist. Sultan Mehmed has some good qualities but is carefully termed a ‘foreigner’ (‘Other’). Yet at the same time, remnants of the universalist thinking remain: references to ‘one God over all’ and to Adam, the father of the human race. Justice is regarded as superior to faith; but actually true justice consists in having the right faith. Muslims can please God as Muslims; but they should be forcefully converted to Christianity. And so forth.

Hence, although the ‘Greater petition’ is perhaps Peresvetov’s most-cited work, it should be attributed to him only with caution and with significant qualifications. The text manifests strong evidence of alterations carried out under pressures exerted by traditional Muscovite society. It

may be that Peresvetov himself accomplished this revision, replacing Muslim 'Mehmed' with Orthodox Christian 'Peter' as his main narrator and instructor. This in itself would already make the text much less cutting and offensive to Christian sensitivities. Peresvetov may also have decided that Peter should advocate (Orthodox) Christianity and not only justice/truth (*pravda*), should bewail the conquest of 1453 and the plight of Christians under Ottoman rule, and should promote the conquest of Tatar regimes. However, the possibility that another author/editor carried out major revisions of Peresvetov's original text, or perhaps even forged it by using the 'Lesser petition' and the 'Tale of Sultan Mehmed' as sources, should not be excluded. The content of Peresvetov's text should also be compared to the *Kazanskaia istoriia* ('Kazan chronicle'; see the entry in this volume) of the 1560s, which treats some similar themes.

The main significance of the 'Greater petition' with respect to Christian-Muslim relations consists precisely in this fusion of the traditional, pro-Orthodox and anti-Muslim ideas of Muscovite society with the much more universalist and apparently unbiased perspective of the 'Tale'. In addition, the 'Petition' is more explicitly concerned with the problems of Muscovite Russian society, rather than ostensibly being a tale about the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. The text of the 'Petition' makes it clear that the Turkish sultan has justice/truth (*pravda*) but not faith (*vera*); Muscovy has faith but is missing justice. In the 'Tale', it was the Greeks who were lacking *pravda*, and the reference to Russia was more muted and indirect. However, despite all the differences between the two texts, Peresvetov's principal ideological vision remains the same: to combine *pravda* and *vera* within a single empire.

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