

THE MIRACLE AND ITS PLACE IN HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE 17TH-18TH CENTURIES

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1. Historians of Russian literature have for some time been concerned with a key problem of its national culture — how to define the relationship between literary developments of the 17th century and the new literature which replaced them in the 18th century. Was it a complete replacement of literary systems? Or was there between them a certain continuity, and if so, how was it manifested? So far, these questions have not been satisfactorily answered.

What might explain the apparent stalemate in solving this problem? After all, there has never been a dearth of comparative studies on this subject. Yet the majority of such studies share a basic weak area: they make the unspoken and unfounded assumption that one can classify and juxtapose 17th century literary phenomena with literary facts and processes of the 18th century by relying on specific categories and concepts derived from research in literary developments of the 18th and subsequent centuries. Inadvertently, a bias is formed in approaching the material at hand when the 17th century is analyzed from the point of view of an 18th century outlook and its decidedly new system of literary relationships, new in the Russian culture of that time. The literary material of the preceding era does not withstand such juxtaposition well. Such approach in itself, by using categories extraneous to the century, dictates preconceived judgments despite a researcher's belief that he is guided by objectivity and the historical method¹.

Is it possible to arrive at a different method for a comparative analysis of these epochs?

A more productive juxtaposition might be achieved if we were to make use of one of the categories of Russian national consciousness which is constantly present and would not require additional substantiation. Such

¹ D.S. LICHACHEV, *Poëtika drevnerusskoj literatury* (Poetics of Old Russian Literature), 3rd ed. enl., Moscow, 1979, pp. 14-19.

categories, or constants, enable us to demonstrate simultaneously the continuity as well as the originality of the two different yet chronologically contiguous literary epochs².

2. One of the most constant traits in Russian as well as any other medieval European consciousness is the belief in the miracle, in miracles and in the miraculous³. When we speak of Russian national consciousness of the 15th-17th centuries, we speak of the miracle as a category of consciousness not as existing by itself, but within a specific system of a world view. In contrast to the 16th century ideas of dynamism, development and movement which built the world view of the new era, the medieval thought based its model of the world on the opposition of rest, immobility, stasis and order to disorder, changes, loss of balance and of the established relationship in social strata and in institutions. The norm was order, stability and absence of change. Disorder, changes or attempts at reform represented violations of the basic law of life. In fact, "order" was considered as given, as bequeathed, and thus sanctified by religion and the church.

This is how the historian S. M. Solov'ev writes about it: "A Russian's horizon was narrow to the extreme; his life evolved among a very scant number of immutable phenomena; this immutability of phenomena led necessarily to the idea of their everlasting, divine illumination, they acquired a religious character, a religious inviolability, changing them was considered a sinful deed"⁴.

Throughout the 17th century, for the religious struggle within Orthodoxy this system of concepts about the world's immutability is very characteristic. Nikon with his politics of "cleansing" the church books as well as the Old Believers defended the immobility and immutability of rites and, consequently, of life itself.

What place can the miracle have in a world view with such a stable system? The miracle seems to disturb it, introduce into it an element of anarchy and surprise.

In fact, though, in the life of Russian society of that time, the miracle was taken not as upsetting the stasis of life but as a requisite correction, as an aid in the trials and tribulations of the Orthodox people. It functioned as a tie between the world of the sinners and the world of the holy and the just

² Cf. JU. M. LOTMAN, B. A. USPENSKIJ, *Rol' dual'nykh modelej v dinamike russkoj kul'tury (do konca XVIII veka)* (The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture), *Učenyje zapiski Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* (Scholarly Notes of the Tartu State University), Vol. 414: *Trudy po russkoj i slavjanskoj filologii* (Works on Russian and Slavic Philology), XXVIII, *Literaturovedenie* (Literary Criticism) Tartu, 1977, pp. 12-25.

³ Cf. P. SAINTYVES, *Le Discernement du Miracle ou le Miracle et les Quatre Critiques* (The Recognition of Miracles or the Miracle and the Four Critiques) Paris, 1909; GEOFFREY ASHE, *Miracles*, London and Henley: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

⁴ S.M. SOLOV'EV, *Istorija Rossii s drevnejšich vremen* (History of Russia since the Ancient Times), Moscow, 1883, VIII, p. 392.

who live by the precepts of the church. This duality in the common medieval world view Huizinga defined in the following manner:

C'est un dualisme complet dans la conception du monde pécheur mis en opposition avec le Royaume de Dieu. Dans l'esprit médiéval, tous les sentiments purs et élevés sont absorbés dans la religion, tandis que les penchants naturels, sensuels, consciemment refoulés, tombent au niveau de coupable amour du monde. Dans la conscience du moyen âge, se forment pour ainsi dire l'une à côté de l'autre, deux conceptions de la vie: la conception pieuse, ascétique, attire à elle tous les sentiments moraux; la sensualité, abandonnée au diable, se venge terriblement. Que l'un ou l'autre de ces penchants prédomine, nous avons ou le saint ou le pécheur; mais en général, ils se tiennent en équilibre instable avec d'énormes écarts de la balance⁵.

The miracle afforded hope and pointed to a goal which man tended to forget otherwise. All participants and all the parties of the social and religious struggles appealed to the miracle. Ignoring the earlier epochs for the moment, we can trace in 17th century hagiographic works, and particularly in the middle of the century, the influence of the religious and ideological crisis in the fixation of the miracle in literature⁶.

Intensive literary "miracle-working" so characteristic precisely for the 17th century, seemed to be an accepted and reliable means of overcoming all doubt and of solving all problems in everyday life and in spiritual life.

Thanks to the fundamental research of the last decade the biased view of hagiographic literature as monotonously repeating the hagiographic canon is well disproved⁷. For example, L. A. Dmitriev's research shows that north Russian hagiographic literature as a whole represents a most interesting example of inter-relationships and transitions from oral legendary tradition into literary forms of saints' lives. What is most important for our subject here, we further find that in the 17th century this intrusion of oral legendary material into Lives does not recede but, on the contrary, becomes stronger. Here it is important to note that also earlier redactions of certain Lives can be traced back to legendary traditions⁸.

Summing up his analysis of the literary history of Varlaam Chutynskij's *Life*, L. A. Dmitriev points out that the "literary path" of this Life

⁵ J. HUIZINGA, *Le déclin du Moyen Age* (The Decline of the Middle Ages), Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, n.d., pp. 186-187.

⁶ S. ZENKOVSKY, *Russkoe staroobrazčestvo. Duchovnye dvizenija semnadcatogo veka* (The Russian Old Believer Movement. Religious Movements of the Seventeenth Century), Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1970, pp. 59-73, 82-90.

⁷ Such was the opinion of Ključevskij. See V. O. KLJUČEVSKIJ *Drevnerusskie žitija svjatykh kak istoričeskij istočnik* (Old Russian Saints' Lives as a Historical Source), Moscow, 1871, pp. 403-404.

⁸ L.A. DMITRIEV, *Žitijnye povesti russkogo Severa kak pamjatniki literatury XIII-XVII vv.* (The Stories of Lives of the Russian North as Monuments of Literature of the 13th-17th Centuries), *Évoljucija žanra legendarno-biografičeskich skazanij* (The Evolution of the Genre of Legendary-Biographical Tales), Leningrad, 1973, p. 16.

evolved “from a short, edifying story to a spacious narrative”⁹ and that the stories about new miracles of this saint kept appearing into the 17th century: one is dated 1663.

Concerning the *Life* of Artemij Verkol'skij, Dmitriev reiterates still more emphatically that legends about miracles of this saint “were nourished by oral folk traditions... They render rich material for a series of questions to be solved concerning the history of literary fiction, both oral and written. Occasionally, the folklorist finds in these notations traces of folk tradition which are still alive in our days as oral legends about the distant past along the White Sea coast”¹⁰.

The legend and the miracle are almost always interconnected. Later, I shall turn to a legendary subject which is linked to Russia's north. First, though, I would like to show on a few examples that the miracle turned out to be the essential argument to which both opposing parties, in religious or in social disputes of the time, appealed repeatedly.

Thus, in 1654, Patriarch Nikon ordered the destruction of all icons painted by artists who adopted a Western manner of painting¹¹. Pavel Alep'skij, who was in Moscow at that time with his father, the Patriarch Makarij of Antioch, left behind a description of the way this order was implemented. Taking from the citizens icons painted in the new manner, “Nikon put out the eyes ... after which the *strelcy* who were serving the function of Tsar's public criers, carried them [the icons — I.S.] through the town shouting: ‘From now on, all who paint icons in this manner, will receive similar punishment’”¹². In the Moscovers' awareness, the defilement of icons on Nikon's orders came to be associated with impressions from the plague epidemic spreading in Moscow as well as with a certain sense of being abandoned: Tsar Aleksej Michajlovič and his troops were away in Poland, and Patriarch Nikon too had left Moscow, to save himself from the plague.

On August 25, 1654, there appeared during the service in the Uspenskij Cathedral in the Kremlin “many people from *zemstvos* and other various settlements” bringing with them the image of the Saviour not made by hands whose “face was scraped out,” on the “Patriarch's order.” One of the leaders declared: “From this image an apparition came to him, that he should present that image to the lay people. And the lay people should for such a defilement arise”¹³. That is, this was a call to an uprising, to a rebellion. It was the actual start of the so-called “plague rebellion.” (The rebels believed that the plague represented God's ire for Nikon's

⁹ DMITRIEV, p. 95.

¹⁰ DMITRIEV, p. 255.

¹¹ Cf. I. E. DANILOVA, N. E. MNEVA, *Živopis' XVII veka* (Seventeenth Century Painting), *Istorija russkogo iskusstva* (History of Russian Art), Moscow, 1959, IV, pp. 345-466.

¹² Quoting from V. S. RUMJANCEVA, *Čumnoj bunt 1654 g.* (The Plague Rebellion of 1654), “Voprosy Istorii” (Questions of History), Moscow, 1980, V, p. 181.

¹³ RUMJANCEVA, p. 184.

“iconoclasm.”) The uprising was put down and the “miracle” (the apparition) to which the rebels referred received no literary formulation, and it was preserved only in the text of the investigation documents.

In the middle of the century, the Romanovs took care to establish the view of the Time of Troubles as the accession of the new dynasty with the blessing from above and with the miraculous protection of the Russian saints. In this connection Simon Azar'in's work is very interesting, about a new literary version of the *Life* of Sergij Radonežskij. The *Life* was published in 1646 with the title *The Book about Miracles of Saint Sergij*. The new redaction was needed to elucidate in greater detail the role Sergij played in liquidating the disturbances and in the accession of the Romanovs. To this end, Simon Azar'in incorporated new miracles, i.e., miracles earlier not included in the texts of the *Life*. The State Publishing House's officers, i.e. editors, were doubtful about some of these miracles, “considered them an accident, but not a miracle”¹⁴, and did not allow their publication in 1646. Still, the basic text included the story that Sergij appeared three times to Koz'ma Minin, “ordering him to collect money and to equip the military men”¹⁵. Minin could not believe it at once. (An element of doubt is always present in stories about “apparitions.”) He was punished, “getting sick in the belly.” But after being elected elder in the *zemstvo* he understood that the apparition told him the truth, and he submitted to the command of Saint Sergij.

S. F. Platonov, having made a study of literary and hagiographic reflections of the Time of Troubles, wrote: “we can assert that in Simon Azar'in's narrative we are dealing with a legend which lived in the oral tradition for close to half a century”¹⁶. He refers here to Simon's testimony about the apparition of Saint Sergij as being reported by Minin himself to the Archimandrite Dionisij of the Trojckij Monastery still in 1612, when there was militia stationed by the Trojckij Monastery and was about to move to Moscow. And Dionisij began telling those close to him about it only after the capital had been freed¹⁷. Later he informed Simon about this miraculous apparition. Platonov adds that one must not expect “of the story [about the miracle — I.S.] a strictly factual precision: it necessarily has omissions and mistakes, or might show layers of legends, and still the tradition does not lose its historical value”¹⁸.

¹⁴ S. F. PLATONOV, *Drevnerusskie skazaniia i povesti o Smutnom vremeni XVII veka kak istoričeskij istočnik* (Old Russian Legends and Tales about the Time of Troubles of the 17th Century as a Historical Source), St. Petersburg, 1888, p. 377.

¹⁵ PLATONOV, p. 380.

¹⁶ PLATONOV, p. 382.

¹⁷ PLATONOV, p. 381.

¹⁸ PLATONOV, p. 382.

In his historical study of the Time of Troubles which came out ten years after his first book, Platonov writes about Minin's story without any reservations or doubts¹⁹.

The well-known historian Ljubomirov, a student of Platonov, allows for a psychological probability of such a vision: "Concerning the apparition of Saint Sergij in Minin's dream vision, one cannot dispute the correctness of the remark that it is possible from the psychological point of view"²⁰.

In the judgment of venerable historians of the end of the preceding and the beginning of our century, one senses the same "psychological" need for the miracle which inspired Simon Azar'in and other authors of his time. Thus, deposed from his patriarch's throne, Nikon writes to vindicate himself and also tells about the visions which appeared to him. He saw, for example, Saint Iona who made the rounds of all the prelates and asked them to sign a petition for the return of him, of Nikon, as patriarch²¹.

Before turning to hagiographic literary material of the Old Believers, I would like to point out a most interesting and surprising similarity between the state of Russian religious life and the situation in France which is chronologically very close. I have in mind the conflict between the Jansenists and the Jesuits in regard to miracles²². In this fight, Blaise Pascal and Racine were on the side of the Jansenists. The cause of the dispute was the miracle healing which occurred in Port-Royal on March 24, 1656. A ten-year old school girl suffered from an infected abscess on her eye for three years, but was healed when she put her eye to the thorn of Christ's crown (sainte épine). The Jesuits maintained that the Jansenists' account of the miracle was false. Pascal wrote that those who doubted the authenticity of this miracle revealed lack of true faith in God's omnipotence²³. Racine supported Pascal²⁴.

Disputes about the above-mentioned miracles in each case concern the concrete nature of a given miracle but do not question the possibility of miracles as such. More often than not, when a miracle was necessary, it occurred. But one had to see it and understand it.

3. In the collaborative work of the Pustozersk prisoners, of the Old-Believer authors, the enemies of Nikon, the question of miracle and its place in their

¹⁹ S.F. PLATONOV, *Očerki po istorii Smuty* (Sketches of the History of the Time of Troubles), Moscow, 1899, pp. 519-520.

²⁰ P.G. LJUBOMIROV, *Očerki istorii Nižegorodskogo opolčeniia, 1611-1613* (Sketches of the History of the Nižegorod Militia, 1611-1613), Petersburg, 1917, p. 49, n. 3.

²¹ A.S. ELEONSKAJA, *Russkaja publicistika vtoroj poloviny XVII veka* (Russian Publicistic Writing of the Second Half of the 17th Century), Moscow, 1978, p. 60.

²² SAINTYVES, *Le Discernement du Miracle*, pp. 338-344.

²³ SAINTYVES, p. 341.

²⁴ J. RACINE, *Oeuvres complètes* (Complete Works), Paris: Seuil, 1962 pp. 334-337.

writing their Lives was handled, apparently, at the point of deliberations²⁵. Thus, for example, Epifanij substituted the naturalistic description of Avvakum's execution with a picture of a miracle²⁶. N. S. Demkova believes that the whole re-working of Avvakum's *Life* proceeded from documentation to hagiographic stylization, to the introduction of miracles as motivation for events which were earlier explained otherwise²⁷. A conviction of personal holiness gradually emerges from the suffering the Pustozersk prisoners experienced: "The monk Epifanij, asking God if his suffering pleased Him, received the answer, 'It's your road, do not grieve'; deacon Fedor was also visited by an apparition of an angel at the little window of his dungeon: And I saw how a streak of lightning was shining, like someone bright, who said to me, Blessed be thou!.. Peace be with thee, God's holy man!'"²⁸.

Miracles used in literature appear not only in autobiographical works of the Pustozersk authors. In their hands, miracles are given literary form also in connection with the life and struggle of other Old Believers²⁹. Certain legends created by them enjoyed a comparatively wide popularity in folklore and were reflected in poetry of the early 18th century. The fate of these subjects gives us the opportunity to trace which particular form of the category of miracle turned out to be productive over the 17th-18th centuries.

The miracles in question appeared as a literary reflection of the famous Soloveckij "sitting" — a seven-year siege (1668-1676) of the Soloveckij monastery by the Tsar's troops whom the Old Believer monks resisted successfully³⁰.

The first of the miracles connected with the siege, happened to the relics of Saint Irinarch, Father Superior of the Soloveckij monastery (1613-1626) which were kept in a special chapel on monastery land. By Avvakum's account, these relics began to exude a sweet smell during the siege; "by this miracle Irinarch cheered the faithful in the whole land, but enraged the Nikon followers... and caused them grief with this apparition"³¹.

²⁵ A.N. ROBINSON, *Tvorčestvo Avvakuma i Epifanija, russkich pisatelej XVII veka*, (The Works of Avvakum and Epifanij, Russian 17th Century Writers), *Žizneopisanija Avvakuma i Epifanija. Issledovanija i teksty* (Descriptions of Lives of Avvakum and Epifanij. Studies and Texts), Moscow, 1963, pp. 43-58.

²⁶ N.S. DEMKOVA, *Žitie protopopa Avvakuma. Tvorčeskaja istorija proizvedenija*, (The Life of Archpriest Avvakum. [A Creative History of His Work]), Leningrad: Leningrad University, 1974, pp. 29-30.

²⁷ DEMKOVA, pp. 101-104.

²⁸ DEMKOVA, p. 100.

²⁹ DEMKOVA, p. 148.

³⁰ Cf. I. JA. SYRCEV, *Vozmuščenje soloveckich monachov staroobryadcev v XVII v.* (The Revolt of the Soloveckij Old Believer Monks in the 17th Century) Kazan', 1880; N. A. BARSUKOV, *Soloveckoe vosstanie 1668-1676 gg.* (The Soloveckij Revolt, 1668-1676), Petrozavodsk, 1954; V. ZENKOVSKY, *Russkoe staroobriadčestvo*, pp. 312-313, 336-339.

³¹ A.N. ROBINSON, *Bor'ba idej v russkoj literature XVII veka* (The Struggle of Ideas in Russian Literature of the 17th Century), Moscow, 1974, p. 209.

The other miracle associated with the Soloveckij siege spread even further among the Old Believers and became subject of a folk song and of a long poem by Semen Denisov. This legend began forming as soon as the news of Tsar Aleksej Michajlovič's death reached Pustozersk, i.e. not later than in February 1676. The stimulus to interpret the Tsar's death as punishment for his persecuting the Old Believers arose from the chronological contiguity of the two events: the fall of Soloveckij monastery occurred on January 22, 1676, and the death of the Tsar on January 30 of the same year. The Tsar was only forty seven years old, and it was not difficult to interpret his death as punishment. Avvakum was not satisfied with a mere juxtaposition of events; he wrote:

...He was weakened before death and judged before the last judgment, and before the eternal torments. Distressed by despair, weakened at his end, he called out and spoke: "my masters, Soloveckij elders, leave me repent my thievery, for I acted lawlessly, repudiated the Christian faith, was frivolous. I crucified Christ and made the lady our Virgin, and the young child the Theologian, and your Soloveckij people I subjected to the sword, as many as five hundred brethren and more. Some I hung by the ribs, some I froze in the ice, and the boyars put alive into five-sažen pits to die. And others I burned and hung, many countless Christian believers. My Lord, ease my burden somewhat!" And from his mouth and from his nose and his ears poured ichor like from a slaughtered cow. And the cotton could not absorb it, stuck closely over his nostrils and throat. And so, you Nikon men, you yourselves witnessed him, watched God's punishment for the destruction of what is old, Christian and holy in our faith. Dying he called: "have mercy, have mercy!". And you asked him: "whom did you... supplicate?". And he said to you: "the Soloveckij elders are grating me with saws and various weapons, order the troops to retreat from their monastery!". But they were already slain in those days³².

The "co-prisoner" of Avvakum, deacon Fedor reports that a courier had been sent with an order to stop the siege of the monastery: "And the boyars sent a swift courier, on the command of the tsar, but at the very time of his illness the monastery was taken and destroyed"³³. Fedor's story had a striking ending: a meeting of two couriers — one bringing the order to stop the siege with the other one who carried the news of the taking of the monastery. The couriers met and returned home.

This legend became the subject of the historical folk song *The Siege of Soloveckij Monastery*, widely known in the White Sea region still in the beginning of the twentieth century. In the song, the tsar first sends prince Saltykov to "destroy" the Old Belief — to take the Soloveckij monastery. Saltykov objects but yields when threatened with punishment, begins the

³² *Žitie protopopa Avvakuma im samim napisannoe i drugie ego sočinenija* (The Life of Archpriest Avvakum Written by Himself and His Other Works), Irkutsk, 1979, p. 189.

³³ ROBINSON, *Bor'ba idej*, p. 211.

march, but on the way he falls ill out of anguish and returns to Moscow. In his place "prince Peščerskoj" gets on the march and, with the help of a deserter, conquers the monastery. The song continues, the tsar meeting punishment as did the commander who destroyed the monastery and executed the monks. In the song, a miracle accompanies the violence against the defenders of the monastery:

Father Superior was tortured:
His fluent tongue they cut —
Overnight came such a miracle —
He got all well again...³⁴

In the song the tsar's death occurs the same "dark night" that Father Superior of the Soloveckij monastery is killed.

Historical songs usually have the identical subject matter with oral legends, although one cannot establish the priority of one over the other exactly, as is the case here³⁵. In this case, the song arose undoubtedly in response to a legend formulated in literature.

Another version of this legend is offered in Semen Denisov's poem³⁶. He made not the tsar, but patriarch Ioakim the culprit of the Soloveckij monastery siege. The tsar only falls victim to adamant Ioakim's decision to have his way the Soloveckij elders. The tsar falls ill as soon as the siege begins; he sees in a vision the Soloveckij elders; he sends a courier to stop the siege, but the courier arrives too late and the tsar dies "from tears"³⁷.

4. As is well known, subjects connected with the struggle and suffering of Old Believers began infiltrating new Russian literature only in the second half of the nineteenth century. Before, the Soloveckij siege and the schism are not mentioned at all in literature. Only Lomonosov remembered this event in his poem *Peter the Great* (1760-1761), i.e. almost one hundred years after the Soloveckij "sitting."

This mention is included in the tale of Peter's sailing along the North Sea. M. Pljuchanova remarked that the stormy sea and the *strelcy* mutiny which tsar Peter describes in that song with some detail to Superior Firs of the Soloveckij monastery, "develop the common theme — saving, in one case, the life of the tsar from the elements, and in the other — from the intrigues of a treacherous sister"³⁸. To this, we can add one more observation about the connection of these episodes in the poem. Peter's story offered a

³⁴ *Narodnye istoričeskie pesni* (Historical Folk Songs), Ed. B. PUTILOV 2nd ed., Moscow-Leningrad, 1962, p. 170. One of these songs was recorded still in the beginning of the 19th c.

³⁵ V.K. SOKOLOVA, *Russkie istoričeskie predanija* (Russian Historical Legends), Moscow 1970, pp. 225-230.

³⁶ Cf. ROBINSON, *Bor'ba idej*, pp. 212-213.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ M. PLJUCHANOVA, 'Historical' and Mythological on Early Biographies of Peter I, *Secondary Modeling Systems*, Tartu, 1979, pp. 82-83.

necessary motivation for bringing into the poem miracles which, as we shall see, helped Peter the Great, in Lomonosov's view, throughout his life.

The first miraculous rescue of Peter from a popular riot incited by Old Believers is described by Lomonosov in his *Encomium to Peter the Great* (1754-1755). Here, Peter speaks directly just once, when he explains the necessity for strict punishment of the *strelcy* who revolted during his journey through Europe in 1696. His monologue begins with a recollection of events of 1682, of the danger he was subjected to, and of his miraculous rescue: "a sharp weapon was aimed at my heart. I was saved by God"³⁹. In general, the *Encomium* defines Peter's activities and life by a "miraculous divine fate". The other miraculous rescue refers to an episode in his military biography: "The Lord lighted over His head with powers from above on the day of the Poltava battle and let not deadly metal touch It!" (p. 606). Here, it is a question of the famous episode of the Poltava battle about which the *History of the Swedish War* edited by Peter himself says the following: "And thus, by the grace of the Almighty, a complete victory was achieved (the likes of which is rarely heard) with slight effort and little blood, against a proud enemy thanks to the tsar himself, his personally brave and wise leadership and the brave officers and soldiers, for the tsar, in that case of need, acted for his men and his fatherland as a good leader must, not sparing his person, as his hat was shot through by bullets..."⁴⁰.

It is characteristic that in this text there is not the slightest hint of a miracle. The idea of a miracle, applied in this case from Peter's life, appeared for the first time in Feofan Prokopovič's *Praise to the Battle of Poltava, Given... on the 27th Day of June of 1717*. Prokopovič dwelled with some care on the episode with the bullet ridden hat of the tsar: "And we witnessed a frightening example of his manly disdain of death: his hat was pierced by a bullet. Oh, frightening and fortunate moment! Was death at all far from the anointed head? Did God not clearly show hereby that He Himself stood by our tsar in battle? He ordered death to approach him but forbade it to touch him"⁴¹.

As we see, Peter did not want this case included as a miracle in history. Lomonosov, however, accepted Prokopovič's version "about the miraculous rescue" and reproduced it in his speech which is constructed entirely on assigning a special role to Providence in the fate of the tsar. He adopts the same view also in his poem *Peter the Great*.

By constructing the story of the poem on Peter saving himself from the storm on the White Sea when he disembarks on the Soloveckij islands and is saved by the monastery's prior Firs, Lomonosov motivated the subject of

³⁹ M.V. LOMONOSOV, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij* (Complete Works), Moscow-Leningrad, 1950-1956, VIII, p. 706. Further page references are given in the text.

⁴⁰ *Žurnal ili podennaja zapiska Petra Velikogo s 1698 g. daže do zaključenija nejstadskogo mira* (Journal or Daily Notation of Peter the Great from 1698 on even to the Conclusion of Peace of Nystadt), Sanktpeterburg, 1770, I, p. 215.

⁴¹ FEOFAN PROKOPOVIČ, *Sočinenija* (Works), Ed. I. P. EREMIN, Moscow-Leningrad, 1961, p. 56.

their conversation. The prior recounts the past of the monastery and the most bloody epoch of its history, i.e. the Soloveckij siege. On his part, Peter tells the prior about the riot of the *strelcy* in 1682 which was instigated by the Old Believers. In Firs's story arises the theme of miracles:

...pointing to the traces where
 For seven years the church awaited victory over the enemy,
 He said: "Here, before the wall, stone ramparts
 Were erected against schism and abuse.
 Wishing to pluck out heresy, your Father
 Sent to this dwelling to straighten church order,
 But the rough ignorant people in these safe walls
 Did not bend to either hunger or fear of just desert.
 Enticed by imaginary miracles, they held out,
 Did not budge, though blood was spilled,
 Until God's judgment felled their stubbornness:
 Now they live in full obedience of the church (706).

The prior of the monastery, a distinguished high priest of the Orthodox church, expounds for him a negative evaluation of the Soloveckij siege. Rightfully he calls the miracles by which the Old Believers besieged in Solovki "held out" — imaginary, i.e., false, invented.

What could Lomonosov know about this famous siege of the Soloveckij monastery?

According to testimony of his contemporaries and fellowcountrymen, for two or three years during his adolescence he joined the schism⁴². It seems he may have fallen under the influence of some itinerant preacher of Vygovsk, many of whom were wanderers in the north⁴³. No doubt that Lomonosov heard some variant of the legends of miracles connected with the "Soloveckij sitting".

In Voltaire's *La Henriade* which undoubtedly served Lomonosov as a model, there is a storm, and a conversation of the future king of France with a monk after the rescue, and his story of the Bartholomewtide when his life was threatened. (The new epic tradition which Lomonosov followed, required both a storm and a rescue of the hero.) Voltaire's poem too was built on an active involvement of Providence, of miracles. Lomonosov had to be cognizant of the two solutions to the problem of the miraculous which Voltaire offered:

La Henriade est composée de deux parties: d'événements réels dont on vient de rendre compte, et de fictions. Ces fictions sont toutes puisées dans le système du merveilleux, telles que la prédiction de la conversion de Henri IV, la protection que lui donne saint Louis, son apparition, le feu du ciel détrui-

⁴² M. V. Lomonosov v vospominaniach sovremennikov (M. V. Lomonosov in the Memoirs of his Contemporaries), Moscow-Leningrad, 1962, p. 50.

⁴³ Cf. A. A. Morozov, M. V. Lomonosov. Put' k zrelosti. 1711-1741 (M. V. Lomonosov. His road to maturity. 1711-1741), Moscow-Leningrad, 1962, p. 82.

sant ces opérations magiques qui étaient alors si communes... Les autres sont purement allégoriques: de ce nombre sont le voyage de la Discorde à Rome, la Politique, le Fanatisme personnifiés⁴⁴.

As we see, for Voltaire the miraculous takes on two forms: one quite canonical, the form of predictions, signs, apparitions of saints, etc.; the other, as a general realization of the divine omnipotence:

Ce Dieu, dont la sagesse ineffable et profonde
Forme, élève et détruit les empires du monde
Sur le héros français daigna baisser les yeux
Il le guidait lui-même. Il ordonne aux orages
De porter le vaisseau vers les prochains rivages⁴⁵.

In the second song of the *Henriade*, Henry IV tells Elizabeth of England about Bartholomewtide and about the fact that he was spared as a hostage. In this saving of the future king of France he himself as well as the author of the *Henriade* see only chance, result of political calculation, and not a miracle at all.

In Lomonosov's poem, Peter the Great on hearing Firs's account recalls those actions of the "schism" which threatened the power of the Russian tsars:

The Monarch recalled so much
Impudence spreading up to the throne too;
He sighed, recounted cunning Sofija's
Awful assault and passion for power (706).

Then, there comes Peter's detailed story about the Streleckij rebellion and the danger he was subjected to. Peter recalls how he was under threat of death when the rebelling *strelcy* demanded that his mother carry him out to the entrance of the Kremlin:

My Mother held me in Her arms,
With tears drenched my head and chest,
Paling, she feared our last hour,
When the villain in senseless insolence
Held his lance to my throat
And shouted: "Tell, where is the brother, or
Your and your son's last hour will come this instant" (712).

The *strelcy* demanded to see tsarevich Ivan, the older brother of Peter, since the cause for the rebellion had been the rumor that tsarevich Ivan was killed by Naryškin.

⁴⁴ F.-M. A. VOLTAIRE, *Oeuvres complètes* (Complete Works), Paris 1865, II, p. 282.

⁴⁵ VOLTAIRE, p. 286.

The “miracle” was given a structural function in Lomonosov’s poem, which it did not have in his *Encomium*. In the poem, the event itself was offered in a different version: the lance held not to Peter’s heart, as in the *Encomium*, but to his throat. His escape from death is represented as a complete miracle, not metaphorical, but a miracle in the true sense:

Oh, Providence! At that hour you did a miracle,
By a villain’s you averted a villain’s hand:
Midst men who thirsted my demise was found,
One who sought hard my rescue at the time (713).

M. Pljuchanova believes that in the narrative, the moment of Peter’s rescue usually served the clear intent to extol him. The defeat of danger attested to Peter’s heroism, his rescue from danger — to his being god-chosen⁴⁶.

What M. Pljuchanova calls “god-chosen” in Lomonosov’s works about Peter, appears precisely as a miracle, and it may seem unexpected to those who tend to present Lomonosov almost as an atheist, a poet-scientist who based his scientific activity and his popularizing science and his “cognition of nature” on a struggle against superstition and beliefs in miracles⁴⁷.

Actually, in Lomonosov’s view, in the sphere of nature, whatever the ignorant man considers a miracle or a manifestation of God’s ire or grace, the investigator of nature considers only a manifestation of natural laws which man not only can but must study if he truly believes in God’s might and not in imaginary miracles. Lomonosov believes that from this point of view it is possible and necessary to study all natural phenomena and particularly the ones which superstition considers miraculous:

...God gave to the wild animals too the sense and the power to defend themselves, and to man, additionally, the perceptive reasoning to foresee and prevent all that may harm his life. Directed against it is not only lightning coming from the depth of richly abounding nature, but so are many other things: epidemics, floods, earthquakes, storms which harm us no less, frighten us no less. And when we defend ourselves from deadly plague with medicine, from floods with dams, from earthquakes and storms with firm foundations, and when we do not think that we thereby counter God’s ire with impudent efforts, then how could we find a reason which would forbid us to save ourselves from thunderpeal? Would men be considered impudent and disrespectful who for the sake of contemptible profit traverse unmeasurable, roily stormy seas, knowing that they too could have similar adventures such as many before them and even their parents may have suffered? In no sense; rather, they are lauded and in addition commended to God’s protection by

⁴⁶ M. PLJUCHANOVA, p. 88.

⁴⁷ A.A. MOROZOV, *M. V. Lomonosov i teleologija Christiana Volfa* (M. V. Lomonosov and the Teleology of Christian Wolf), *Literaturnoe tvorčestvo Lomonosova. Issledovanija i materialy* (Lomonosov’s Literary Works. Studies and Materials), Eds. P. N. BERKOV & I. Z. SERMAN, Moscow-Leningrad, 1962, pp. 179-196.

popular prayers. And so, should we consider impudent and impious those who for general safety, to glorify God's greatness and deep wisdom in his works in nature, study lightning and thunder? Not at all! I believe that they especially make use of his bountifulness, receiving most rich rewards for their effort, that is, the discovery of such great natural wonders (4, 435).

According to Lomonosov, miracles as they are understood by religion, do not and cannot exist in the sphere of nature. Miracles in the sphere of nature are mysteries which as yet are not examined by man; while in the history of mankind, in that chaotic condition in which human societies live side by side, miracles are possible. We people can understand much in history and what is quite important in it only if we understand that it occurred as an intervention of God's will, of Providence, which always creates Good. The possibility of miracles in history, according to Lomonosov, is directly proportionate to the meaning of the event which we want to understand and explain. Thus, for example, he considered a miracle the birth of Elizaveta Petrovna on the very day of Peter's arrival in Moscow after the victory at Poltava, i.e., December 22, 1709 (8, 588).

We have already discussed the miracle of Peter's hat. In the poem, Lomonosov did not restrict himself to one miracle but introduced here another miracle, without further comments — God toppled a wall of the fortress in Narva and thereby helped the Russians seize the fortress.

It is interesting that in his tragedy *Tamira and Selim* where the fate of the characters depends on the outcome of the Kulikovo battle, Lomonosov did not incorporate into Narsim's battle description the miracle described by Russian chronicles and historical compilations which he knew well (an angel's apparition to the Russians during the battle)⁴⁸. Would Lomonosov have thought it impossible for the Tartar narrator to share in the Russians' belief in an angel's help? And another explanation may be given: that Lomonosov accepted those miracles which did not involve intermediating powers or circumstances. In the legends about the Kulikovo battle the angel appeared as such an intermediary between the men and God. Lomonosov, however, believed that the Almighty will did not require any heavenly messengers. He has Narsim saying:

I turned my clouded eyes upward.
Then, skies opened over the Russian troops
And sent down at them a bright light.
Thunder crashed around us, overcoming the others,
And gave the sign that God is coming to help them. (8, 362)

The whole complicated belief, perfected through the centuries into special ways of man's understanding the miracle and the miraculous, all this

⁴⁸ V. ROZANOV, *Tragedii Lomonosova. Lomonosovskij sbornik* (The Tragedies of Lomonosov. A Lomonosov Anthology), Sanktpeterburg, 1911, p. 248.

monopoly over the experience and evaluation of a miracle's truth jealously preserved by the Orthodox church, is in essence repudiated by Lomonosov. All the miracles recounted in his poem and in the *Encomium to Peter the Great* are given by him without the attribute customary for miracles and even necessary for its acceptance by believers. All the miracles performed by God are expedient, reasonable and directed to the good of Russia. His Peter is really a God-chosen sovereign, he is "sent by God" (8, 595). Miracles which Lomonosov describes with complete conviction prove that God creates good, and that evil — the schism, for example — is what resists His will. For Lomonosov, evil does not counterbalance good; for him, evil is a consequence of ignorance, of hostility to enlightenment, to science.

The schismatics, the *strelcy* of the revolt of 1682, Sofija and her supporters — they all served evil, according to Lomonosov. Avvakum and his followers declared that what they considered evil was a consequence of the coming of anti-Christ or of the advent of the "last days". In Lomonosov's poem, Peter by many — and not just the Old Believers — considered anti-Christ, acts on the will and under the protection of God.

There is a difference in their approach to understanding a miracle, as we can see, between the 17th century tellers of miracles and Lomonosov, on the one hand, and between Lomonosov and the professional scholar-historians of the 20th century. In those cases when a miracle was among the ones approved officially by the Orthodox church, Avvakum and his friends relied on their social and individual experience, on their intuition. Lomonosov considered that Providence controlled history and determined the fate of historical personages who acted in the name of common weal, i.e., in the name of the good. Professional historians of the 20th century, required to examine critically their sources, in order to justify their belief in miracles ("apparitions") advance in its explanation their "psychological possibility".

Without examining closely miracles of many varieties dealt with by the bearers of Russian self-consciousness over a period of three hundred years, we can make only one, very cautious conclusion: the belief in and the longing for miracles, the hope of encountering it finally has a steady hold in this national consciousness in spite of (and maybe thanks to?) all the catastrophes along the historical path of Russia.

