

## Rus' — the New Israel: the Medium and the Message of Medieval Russian Political Philosophy

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The article explores the influence of the religious and political concept of “Rus' — the New Israel” on the public consciousness of Russia and its foreign policy culture. Over several centuries of Russian history, this concept played a leading role for understanding and conceptualizing the major political events in Russian chronicles and religious literature. The Russian land was identified with ancient Israel, affecting the perception and interpretation of the events of the time and the way people thought, helping to establish a national foreign policy culture. The influence of the idea of “Rus' — New Israel” is dominant as a way of transmitting the message (medium) and thus becomes a message as such. This suggests that it was this religious-political construct that, in the early stages of the evolution of the Russian state, became the most fundamental way in which it identified itself in the surrounding world.

*Keywords:* political culture, self-consciousness, medieval history of Russia, God's chosenness, Russian Land, New Israel, Russian lands.

Vasiliy Klyuchevsky, addressing the question of the significance of the spiritual and educational activities of St. Sergius of Radonezh for Russian political history, wrote in 1892: “A person who once breathed such faith into society and made it vividly feel the presence of moral forces that it did not expect within itself, becomes for it the bearer of a miraculous spark, capable of igniting and bringing to action these forces whenever they are needed when the available means of the people's everyday life are insufficient. The impression of the people of the 14th century became the faith of the following generations. The fathers passed on the inspiration they perceived to their children, and they traced it back to the same source from which their contemporaries first drew it” (Klyuchevsky, 1969: 49).

These words were spoken at a time when Russian historiography was at its greatest flourishing; they convincingly characterize the meaning of these symbols and images. They helped to spread the understanding of historical experience and contributed to the formation of a national political consciousness.

If a people's ability to respond to the external threats and opportunities that arise in the course of human civilization's development can be characterized as a plant, its foreign policy culture can be thought of as the soil in which it either grows or withers. This culture is a complex set of beliefs, practices and expectations that shape the ability of its bearers to make and act on assumptions about the limits of the possible. It also determines the forms and symbols that express their behavior in relations with other peoples (Keenan, 1986: 116). Written tradition, as expressed in historiography and literature, is

a way of transmitting foreign policy culture, but under certain conditions it becomes a means of its formation. This is especially important when we are talking about those stages of development of a society when it is holistic in spiritual and moral terms, and all its social strata turn to one source for the satisfaction of their spiritual needs.

The debate between historians and philosophers regarding the ideological basis of Russian political culture, particularly in relation to foreign policy, raises the question of the significance of the concept “Rus — New Israel” in comparison with the idea of “Moscow — Third Rome”, which is more prevalent in historiography. It is important to examine why the idea of the “Rus — New Israel” occupies such a dominant position in the religious-political philosophy of medieval Russia. My hypothesis is that this idea asserts the intrinsic value of the Russian land in relation to other peoples. It is important to examine why the notion of “Rus — New Israel” occupies such a dominant position in medieval Russian religious-political philosophy. The evolution of the concept of God’s chosenness of the Russian land (known as “Rus — New Israel”) provides an excellent example of how the medium becomes the message and gives order and fundamental meaning to political life.

There is nothing exotic at the core of Russian religious and political philosophy that would radically distinguish it from the ideas shared by all the Christian peoples of Europe in the Middle Ages. At the same time, I see parallels with the concept of “Rus’ — the New Israel” and the idea of the chosenness of the Russian land in the concept of the *covenant of grace*, which spread in the 17th century within the Protestant communities of Europe, then in America and South Africa. The differences, of course, are significant. First of all, this was due to the fact that on Russian soil, the object of choice was the “land”, i.e. the territory controlled by the Russian state, and not the people who lived there. While the belief in a Covenant between God and England (or Scotland) was common among the English and Scottish Puritans, the place of the state in their worldview is different, from that of the New England Puritans. This is particularly pointed out by D. Rowland, who notes in his work that the followers of the Covenant did not associate it with any specific political form (Rowland, 1996: 614).

The particularly strong connection between the ideology of God’s choice of the Russian state and the land under its rule suggests that here the impact of the main political-religious doctrine on political consciousness and foreign policy behavior turned out to be different in duration and depth due to the main factors determining the external context of the development of the Russian state. First, the antagonistic relationship between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, which worsened with the weakening of the Byzantine Empire and its death in 1453. Second, the special position of the Russian lands in terms of military strategy, which made the achievement of their self-reliance within the framework of a unitary state a task directly related to physical survival. Both determined the special conditions in which religious and political doctrines developed in their own way and became the ideological basis of a state that was equally autonomous in its domestic and foreign policy manifestations. In other words, one can agree with Dominique Lieven’s idea that for Russia, “its medieval imperial heritage and geographical location

ensured that it would never fit into the European scheme” (Lieven, 2007: 331). The fundamental division between Russia and Europe occurred not as a result of the expansionist aspirations of each of these political civilizations, but as a result of their independent interpretations of the basic tenets of Christian political philosophy.

This article aims to demonstrate the reasons for the dominance of the religious-political idea of “Rus’ — the New Israel” as a tool for interpreting current events, and at the same time, to understand their nature in Russian medieval literature. I will also examine several striking examples of how the interpretations made by Russian scribes and theologians of the message of the lived historical experience led to the emergence of established ideas about cause-and-effect relationships in political life, as well as certain categories accepted in Russian and foreign historiography. For this reason, I will turn to the literature and sources available to modern researchers, covering the most important stages of the development of Russian statehood in the Middle Ages.

Written at the turning point (fall of 1480) of the last large-scale confrontation between the Russian lands and the Horde state, Bishop Vassian Rylo’s “Message to the Ugra” turned out to be the most important political document of the era. At the same time, it summarized the religious and political heritage that Russia had accumulated by that time (PLDR, 1982: 523 — 536). The argumentation of the confessor of the Grand Prince of Moscow and All Russia Ivan the Third contains characteristics of the nature of the power of the Russian sovereign and his main opponent, explanations of the causes of the events that took place in previous historical periods and, finally, a forecast and prescription of how the addressee of the message should act in terms of providentialism characteristic of the Russian religious thought (Kudryavtsev, 1951; Rudakov, 2017; Seleznev, 2019; Gorsky, 1999; Miller, 1968).

It will become clear how consistent and convincing the components of the “Message to the Ugra” are in their logic, based on the identification of the Russian land with ancient Israel. However, this already allows us to assume that we are talking not only about the completion of the process of forming a certain doctrine, but about the application, in extreme conditions, of an already deeply rooted system of analysis and prescriptions for political actions. The emergence of this rootedness can be attributed to the consistent, centuries-long activity of Russian scribes and theologians, which started almost from the moment the Russian lands became Christian in the late 10th century. Thus, we also observe here the stability of the Russian religious and philosophical tradition, despite the shift at the beginning of the 14th century of the political and spiritual center of the Russian land from Kiev to the Vladimir-Suzdal region.

It is all the more remarkable that the issue of the role of the concept of Rus’ as the New Israel has received so little attention in Russian and foreign historiography. The only complete monograph known to us is the work of N. Efimov: “Rus’ — the new Israel: the theocratic ideology of the native Orthodoxy in the pre-Petrine literature”, published in Kazan in 1912. We can also turn to the wonderful article by the American historian Daniel Rowland, “Moscow — the Third Rome or the New Israel?” (Rowland, 1996), and a limited number of studies that deal with the theme of the Russian land being chosen by

God in the historical period of interest to us in sufficient detail (even if indirectly through other topics), or are devoted to its individual manifestations in Russian literature and chronicles (Goldberg, 1976; Laushkin, 2019; Perevezentsev, 2019).

In addition to the above-mentioned works, topics related to the emergence and development of the concept “Rus’ — the New Israel” in Russian religious philosophy and in literature are found in the works of K. Bazilevich, I. Budovnits, A. Gorsky, M. Dyakonov, V. Kargalov, N. IN. Sinitsina, Yu.G. Alekseev, Y. Krivosheev, Ch. Galperin, A. Zamaleev, D. Likhachev, A. Korenevsky, V. Kuchkin, Y. Lurie, V. Nazarov, A. Nasonov, S. Perevezentsev, V. Tomsinov, L. Cherepnin and a number of others (Alekseev Yu., 1989; Bazilevich, 2001; Budovnits, 1960; Gorsky, 2000; Dyakonov, 1889; Zamaleev, 1998; Kargalov, 1984; Krivosheev, 2015; Korenevsky, 2001; Kuchkin, 1990; Likhachev, 2012; Lurie, 2021, 1960; Nasonov, 1969; Perevezentsev, 2008; Cherepnin, 1960).

Among the works of foreign scholars, one can mention the studies of P. Bushkovich, Ch. Keenan, D. Ostrowsky and N. Andreev (Andreyev, 1959; Bushkovitch, 1986; Keenan, 1986; Ostrowski, 1990). Of course, the issue that interests us is touched upon, albeit “in passing”, in the classic works of S. Solovyov and V.O. Klyuchevsky. Even in Klyuchevsky’s case, however, he addresses the subject without delving too deeply into it in order to determine its place in the history of the religious and political ideology of the Russian state. This topic is almost completely avoided in the historiography of the Soviet period, with the exception of Kudryavtsev and Goldberg (Kudryavtsev, 1951; Goldberg, 1976).

Indeed, one can, speculate endlessly on this relative (and in my opinion, unfortunate) lack of attention. Among the more obvious reasons, I would like to highlight at least two. In the literature on Russian religious and political philosophy, the dominant position is occupied by the discussion of the later idea of Moscow being “the Third Rome”. Despite the fact that the bibliographic list of its mentions as an object of research is minuscule compared to the presence of this concept in Russian chronicles and literature, it is this concept that has been popular among scholars for the past 100 years. For foreigners, this concept provides convincing support for the thesis that Russian foreign policy is first and foremost imperial and messianic in character. It is hard to argue with the fact that such an idea is extremely valuable to some European and American researchers.

In addition, the emphasis on the idea that “Moscow is the Third Rome” allows one to place the foreign policy behavior of the Russian state in the general context of European international politics in the second half of the 15th and early 16th centuries. This, in turn, has been a major intellectual task for all those engaged in historiography since Peter I (Bauer, 2011). In short, the idea of Moscow as “the Third Rome” is quite understandable to the Western reader since it is associated with Byzantium and Rome, i.e. the most important episodes in the history of European political civilization, and thus fits well into the conventional framework of Western historiography. According to the author, this is the most reliable way to provide a relatively simple explanation of the differences between Russia and the West, precisely within the Western coordinate system (Rowland, 1996: 596).

A thorough study of the role and place of the concept that Rus' is the New Israel may be hampered by its appeal, not outside the Russian state, but inside Russian society. In this sense, "Moscow is the Third Rome" is indeed of greater importance for researchers outside Russia, and our own scholars are attracted by the opportunity to clearly explain to foreigners the nature of Russian foreign policy behavior within the framework of accessible categories of topics and, above all, without plunging them into the jungle of Russian religious philosophy itself. This is especially true when one takes into account that the idea of God's chosenness, in its content, appeals to experiences and sources that have little to do with the formation of European political civilization. This is not to say that there is not a close connection between the two concepts; they can even be seen as intellectually complementary to each other. However, if the idea that "Moscow is the Third Rome" is, in many ways, a product of the unique external conditions of the middle and second half of the twentieth century, then the idea that "Rus' — the New Israel" is a tool and in part a product of the constant understanding of the nature of Russian statehood since the adoption of Christianity.

Finally, it seems acceptable to assume that the reason for the comparative unpopularity of studying the ideological structure that interests us is precisely its deep-rootedness; it is such an organic presence in the self-consciousness of Russian society that its careful study is not considered necessary. Perhaps this is the origin of our illusion that the practical foreign policy of the Great Moscow Princes and Russian Tsars was not strongly dependent on the ideas of their religious mentors. Formally, of course, they were. However, I assume that the influence of the idea of "Rus' — the New Israel" on political practice was indeed not direct, but much more complex, mediated by the entire ideological system of the Russian nation of that time.

That is why the perspective chosen in the works of N. Efimov and D. Rowland, to interpret the position in Russian religious philosophy of the concept that "Rus' — the New Israel", seems so successful. Both authors focus not so much on the doctrinal articulation of this category in the political documents of the period, but rather on its impact on the developing Russian political culture. This ultimately allows us to understand the relationship between the concept and the new organizational and spatial form of Russian statehood, centered in Moscow<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, it is independent of the specific sphere of state activity in which it is reflected. It seems to us that this perspective is it seems to us, important — it allows to evaluate the deeper meaning of the phenomenon of Russian intellectual life that interests us.

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1. According to contemporary Russian historiography, the term 'Russian land' has implied the territory inhabited by Russians in its entirety. From the 12th to the 16th centuries, the term "land" in common parlance came to not only be applied not only to Rus' (Russian land) as a whole, but also to individual regions of Rus'; i.e. political entities that are usually called "principalities" in historiography, were called "lands" at that time ( Gorsky, 2014: 7–12.). The meaning of "Russian state" is used in historiography to designate the administrative form of management of the Russian land (lands); see the example of such use in "History of the Russian State" by N. M. Karamzin, which is devoted to the historical period from the emergence of statehood in the Russian land to the Interregnum of the first quarter of the 17th century.

The authors conclude that the appeal of Russian scribes to Old Testament categories, meanings and comparisons to describe the nature of current or past events in social life is highly characteristic of most of the sources available for study throughout the development of Russian statehood since the adoption of Christianity. In particular, Efimov points out that the Primary Chronicle is literally replete with applications of Holy Scripture: “plots, external cladding, tone and turns of speech, material for descriptions and characteristics are drawn from it” (Efimov, 1912: 9). Whatever the chronicler does not do, he does precisely in biblical terms, since they seem to him to be a divine revelation.

Metropolitan Hilarion in his “Sermon on Law and Grace” (between 1037 and 1050), wishing to glorify Vladimir the Holy and Yaroslav the Wise, “compares them with David and Solomon, Jacob Mnich equates the epic favorite to David, Hezekiah and Josiah, and Theodosius “The Greek” — to Moses. Rev. Nestor sees in St. Gleb a resemblance to David; Andrei Bogolyubsky’s chroniclers place him closer to Solomon” (Efimov, 1912: 25). The author also notes with irony the political reasons why the scribes used this particular method to convey their message: “biblical history was more flattering to the patriotic sentiment of the time than the history of Byzantium, and similarities with its figures were valued more than similarities with the Bosphorus autocrats” (Efimov, 1912: 27). The complex relations of the Russian land with Byzantium have been well studied in domestic and foreign historiography: “The essence of Greece has been flattering to this day” (PSRL: 971). The sacred texts of the Old Testament, selected by Russian scribes, were not used to justify a ready-made concepts, but shaped and generated them throughout the early history of Russian religious historiography.

Efimov notes: “State theorists were imbued with biblical legal consciousness and combined legal systems on the basis of scriptural texts” (Efimov, 1912: 29). The leitmotif of the Bible — the idea that God chose Israel from the moment Abraham was called — characterizes history as a process of interaction between the divine and the human. Russian scribes knew no other language than the language of the Old Testament and no other categories for describing the destiny of the people, other than the Old Testament categories of their direct interaction with God. Efimov points to those of them that are central: that God chose Israel and that God is the ruler, King and zealot of his people (Efimov, 1912: 31).

The comparisons and interpretations inherent in the Old Testament were not only integrated into the Russian political consciousness, but also determined its main categories for assessing social interactions. At the same time, this was true not only within the society, but also in interaction with other ethno-social systems. It could not have been otherwise when for the Russian scribes themselves, biblical meanings were the only tool not only for knowledge, but also for interpretation of the existing reality. They formed the basis of an ideal image, the desire for which was always the main factor in their political development (Adrianova–Peretz, 1964: 12, 14; Perevezentsev, 2008: 18 — 19; Efimov, 1912: 33–34). In relations with other peoples, the Rus’ proclaimed God’s Chosen People, in this capacity “contrasted with their stepp. neighbors, and, in the following centuries, with the Tatar-Mongol enslavers” (Goldberg, 1976: 111).

Rowland, who believes that biblical examples functioned for Russian scribes “both as a means of conveying a certain meaning and as meaning itself,” comes to the same conclusion (Rowland, 1996: 595). Note that the assessments of both authors go significantly further than the views of D. S. Likhachev, who points out that “a verbal definition, a verbal analogue, selected in the Holy Scripture or in the existing literature,” was primarily a tool for cognition of current events (Likhachev, 1994: 284). At the same time, it is Rowland who draws attention to the popularity of Old Testament examples and comparisons in the religious and philosophical works of medieval Europe, which indicates the unity of the spiritual heritage of Russia and Europe mentioned above, rather than their fundamental differences, as is commonly believed in the Russian and, especially, foreign historiography (Rowland, 1996: 596). This in itself is extremely important, because it calls into question the popular thesis that the differences that define the nature of relations between Rus’ and Europe are of a fundamental nature. No, these differences were formed from the same soil, but through fundamentally different historical experiences.

Rowland sees the triumph of “Rus — New Israel” already in the pre-Mongol period of Russian history in the fact that “Russian scribes, like the ancient Israelites, saw their political and military history as a sequence of punishments and rewards from God” (Rowland, 1996: 598). He draws attention to the fact that turning to Old Testament examples and meanings forms “not the desire for a universal empire and the intention to rule the world, but a feeling of special divine protection and mercy” in relation to the Russian people and their state (Rowland, 1996: 613).

Thus, the two main works of the aforementioned Russian and foreign authors, which deal in detail with the idea of God’s chosenness of the Russian land and the position of the idea of “Rus — New Israel” in its political life, allow us to arrive at the following hypothesis: *an appeal (of Russian religious and philosophical literature) to Old Testament examples was the basis of how Russian literature, almost from the moment of Russia’s Baptism, looked at events and phenomena of political life, determining their interpretation and the generalizations. The more and more direct identification of “Rus — New Israel” in the world view of Russian literature has gradually occupied a central place in the interpretation of the Russian state’s destiny, understood in terms of its relationship with God.* Beginning with Metropolitan Hilarion’s apology for the Russian land and the First Chronicle, the idea is affirmed that the Russian people are especially pleasant to God. The Russian scribes, who likened their heroes to Old Testament kings and filled their thoughts with constant references to the Old Testament, were confident that Rus’ had taken the place of the ancient “people of God” on the paths of divine Providence, had taken the place of the ancient “people of God” (Efimov, 1912: 36). With this confidence they taught their audiences, who turned to the books for explanations of current events and inspiration for new achievements.

The limited number of studies dealing directly with the topic of this particular interest makes it necessary to turn to works that enable to see the place of the idea that Rus’ is the New Israel in terms of the various historical experiences of the Russian people in the medieval period of its history. In all cases considered in these studies, this idea becomes

a way for Russian literary scholars to interpret current events and, at the same time, a prescription for the most appropriate behavior in the prevailing circumstances. At the same time, the way Russian scribes interpret the most significant political events fully reflects their “psychology of compilers”, for whom the most common form of expressing the author’s power and thought is a collection of extracts from Divine Scripture, welded together with introductory lines, reasoning and conclusions, according to the principle: “It is not written, but collected from Divine messages” (Efimov, 1912: 22).

In A. Laushkin’s book “Rus’ and its Neighbors: the History of Ethno-Confessional ideas in the Old Russian literature of the 11th–13th Centuries”, the question of God’s chosenness is raised in the context of the evolution of ideas about neighboring peoples in the Russian literature of the pre-Mongol and early Mongol periods. The author comes to the important conclusion that not only the connection of the “Russian language”, with biblical history, as with other Christian peoples, but also the self-identification as the “New Israel” was already present in Russian literature by the middle of the 11th century (Laushkin, 2019: 193). This allows creating a solid basis for the formation in chronicles and other works of an archetypal ethno-confessional and ethno-social systems, differing in relation to the Russian land. The main experience here is the interaction with nomadic neighbors, which accompanied the Old Russian statehood from the moment of its emergence in the 9th century, i.e. always. At the same time, for the authors of chronicles since the 11th century, the most important thing is not the search for specific situations from the Old Testament past, but the identification of certain general approaches and modes of action of the Lord in relation to the chosen people, with whom the Russians are consistently associated (Laushkin, 2019: 150). This seems to indicate that in the Russian literature of the time the question of God’s chosenness of the Russian land was an obvious given, and Old Testament references and analogies were already being used as indications of how the “New Israel” should act in a certain situation, or why it developed in a certain way. The latter, quite accurately, is placed in the context of God’s direct relationship with His Chosen People.

The negative experiences Russians had in interacting with other ethno-confessional communities became the main reason they turned to the Old Testament to assign categories to different groups (Laushkin, 2019: 133). It is impossible, therefore, to overestimate the influence exerted by the interaction of the Russian people with its neighbors on the formation of the idea of God’s chosenness and the political-religious concept that “Rus’ is the New Israel”. These relations are usually hostile — especially in the East, from where a serious military threat most often arrived on Russian land. But the Christian West also had to deal with Russian scribes. A researcher studying the question of the formation of the archetypes of Rus’ neighbors in the chronicles draws attention to the remarkable comparison. First of all, while describing the disasters that befell the Hungarian army of King Béla IV during the campaign against Galich, the chronicler identifies the Hungarians with the Egyptians, and their Russian opponents with the chosen people of Israel (Laushkin, 2019: 151). Against the backdrop of constant military confrontations with neighbors, as Efimov notes, for the Russian masses Orthodoxy is “a religious advantage



that determines the success of the struggle itself. This native advantage served as a sufficient reason for the scribes, brought up on the Bible, to transfer to Rus' the characteristic features of the Chosen People of whom the Holy Book narrates" (Efimov, 1912: 34).

On the already prepared ground of Old Testament interpretations and their perception in the national consciousness, in the middle of the 13th century, came the most difficult experience in terms of its magnitude (and influence on the moral state of Russian society) — the Tatar-Mongol invasion, as well as then established tributary dependence on the Horde. Due to the dramatic nature of the events, they turn out to be central to the process of the entire development of the idea of God's chosenness and the related concept of "Rus' as the New Israel". First of all, an appeal to Old Testament categories underscores the Russian scribes' understanding of the causes, meaning and consequences of the invasion. The richness of the historiographical material in this case is connected with the fact that the disclosure of the theme of "Batu's pogrom" in books helps to understand the nature of the special relations between the Russian lands and the Horde state for quite a long historical period (until the end of the 15th century).

Understanding the "destruction of the Russian land" within the framework of providentialism helps, among other things, to understand the refraction of the already established idea of God's chosenness in extreme foreign policy circumstances. According to the most accepted interpretations of the chronicles, the Mongol-Tatar invasion of Rus' is interpreted as "God's punishment," and the conquerors themselves act as an instrument of God's wrath against His Chosen People for numerous sins (Krivosheev, 2015). The Tatars are a "punishing sword" in Rus' according to God's will and, as V. Rudakov notes on the basis of a comparison of chronicles, they act fantastically successfully, easily destroying all attempts to resist them (Rudakov, 2017: 60). However, it is known that in a number of cases, the Tatar forces met stubborn resistance, suffered considerable losses and, sometimes, completely failed to achieve their immediate objectives, preferring a peaceful settlement with their enemy (Kargalov, 1967; Krivosheev, 2015). We can see, therefore, that widespread assessments of the relative ease with which the Tatars accomplished their military tasks during Batu's campaigns in Rus' may be due to an insufficiently critical perception in Russian literature. For the medieval Russian author it was important to show that resistance to God's will was "by definition" doomed; the invasion had a providential character, as indeed did every event in the life of the people directly under God's hand. In other words, the exaggerated ease with which the Tatars achieved their goals is a projection of the interpretation of events in Old Testament categories accepted in Old Russian literature.

In telling the story of the invasion, the chroniclers repeatedly drew parallels and made comparisons with biblical texts, which were already fully rooted in the Russian literary tradition. Therefore, as A. Alekseev notes, at the time of the invasion, "the misfortunes of Jerusalem and its inhabitants became for Rus' the historical model that shaped social thought and provided a criterion for evaluating its own history" (Alekseev A., 2003: 448). No other historical comparisons would be easily accepted by readers who have been brought up on strictly defined images and symbols for about 200 years. Accordingly, the

acceptance of God's punishment, as well as all its consequences, seems necessary to Russian scribes within the framework of the ongoing relationship of the Russian land with God (Adrianova-Peretz, 1974: 12, 14). The assessment of the invasion as an "execution by God" (divine punishment), which has no alternative in Russian literature, is a product of the tradition of formally identifying the Russian land with the ancient Kingdom of Israel, which had taken root in Russian intellectual soil (by the middle of the 13th century). In exactly the same way, it is reflected in contemporaneous works of folk art about the Tatar invasion (Budovnits, 1974).

At the same time, in the Russian literary tradition, the apparent success of the Tatars' campaign against the "New Israel" is in no way connected with God's grace towards the "filthy" aliens. Moreover, the Tatars are consistently endowed with exclusively negative traits as has always been the custom to describe the relations of the chosen people with their adversaries — be it in ancient Israel or in the new, Russian land (Efimov, 1912: 33). The compiler of the Laurentian Chronicle goes so far as to point to their struggle with the Orthodox faith as the motive for the atrocities of the invaders. Summing up how Russian literature of the time interpreted the invasion, we see that the concept of God's chosenness of the Russian land is the most important theoretical (ideological) construct, based on the awareness of the disaster. Then only the defining of the paths of spiritual and political revival can provide the basis for the organized resistance of the Chosen People, who have "corrected" themselves by abandoning their sinful ways.

The activity of Alexander Nevsky at the head of the Russian lands falls within this historical period (1249–1263), when it was far from not only correction, but even full awareness of causes of Divine punishment. His "Vita" is one of the most important documents of the Russian Middle Ages, combining hagiographic and secular features. It is no coincidence that the interaction of these dimensions of the "Vita" became the object of attention of several serious works on the history of Russian literature (Ostrowski, 2013; Selart, 2017; Danilevsky, 2005; Fennell, 1983; Gorsky, 1996; Okhotnikova, 1987; Kuchkin, 1990). According to the ideas recognized in the scientific literature, the "Vita" in its original edition appeared in the 1280s in Vladimir (on Klyazma). There is also a point of view that it dates back to an earlier period and was written shortly after the death of the prince in 1263. Other historians consider the time of its composition to be the middle of the 14th century, and in the final version even the second half of the 15th century (Ostrowski, 2013). Regardless of the specific historical circumstances of the composition of the Vita, it is important for us that its author (or authors) in the hagiographical part strictly adhered to the already established tradition of resorting to Old Testament analogies and comparisons, identifying their hero with the biblical leaders, and in the Russian land, indirectly through the personality of the prince, with ancient Israel. The author compares Alexander's face to the face of Joseph, and his strength to the strength of Samson, pointing out that "God gave him the wisdom of Solomon". That is why, according to the Vita, "one of the most important men of the Western land, one of those who call themselves servants of God, came, wanting to see the maturity of his strength, just as the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon in ancient

times". The main military victories of the prince — the Battle of the Neva in 1240 and the Battle of Lake Peipus in 1242 — are fully described using Old Testament analogies. The first is compared to the miracle "under Hezekiah the king. When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came to Jerusalem, wanting to conquer the holy city of Jerusalem, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrian soldiers, and when morning came, only dead bodies were found."

Before the Battle on the Ice, Alexander turns to God, calling out to Him: "Help me, Lord, as you did with Moses in the victory over Amalek in ancient times," and after the Crusaders were defeated, "God glorified Alexander before all the regiments, like Joshua at Jericho." Then, after the victory, Alexander himself, turned to the once-betrayed inhabitants of Pskov, and, threatening them, demanded gratitude for their deliverance from enemies: "If you forget this before Alexander's great-grandchildren, then you will become like the Jews, whom the Lord fed in the desert with manna from heaven and baked quails, but you forgot all this they and their God, who delivered them from the captivity of Egypt." The reaction of the foreigners to the approach of such a formidable warrior is characterized by the words: "And the women of Moab began to frighten their children, saying: 'Alexander is coming!'" Such a filling of the hagiographical part of the "Vita" with Old Testament images shows that the Old Russian author did not need and did not have any other comparisons in order to explain to the reader the essence and scale of the prince's actions in an accessible language. The reader, in turn, formed a stable conceptual series, the center of which was the identification of the analogy of the Russian land with ancient Israel, mediated by the personality of the prince and the events that happened to him.

The political and personal fate of Alexander Nevsky represents the dramatic experience of serving as a statesman in the era of the most dangerous foreign policy crisis in Russian history. For several years (1237–1242), the Russian land found itself in the position of having to deal with an enemy that seemed invincible and incomparable in power to anyone before it, plunging the country into a state of, if not physical, then moral devastation. It was a time of terrible national disaster, countless casualties and national mourning. Simultaneously, it was a time of great heroism, perseverance and self-sacrifice (Kargalov, 1968: 94).

Foreign invasions, of course, occupy an important place in Russian history and have repeatedly become an occasion for demonstrating the unparalleled courage and resilience of our people. However, all of them invariably ended in the defeat of the aggressors and did not influence the development of Russian statehood in a way that could be compared to internal turmoil. In the middle of the 13th century, the Russians suffered their first military defeat on such catastrophic proportions that their very existence was threatened. Most importantly, they could not win it back over the course of several generations; they were not slaves or subjects of the Horde's khans, but tributaries, regularly defeated by them on the battlefield. The appearance of an enemy who turned out to be invincible became a great source of trauma and national humiliation, which for several generations proved physically impossible to heal with one's own victory.

In this regard, the question of the interaction between two phenomena of Russian historiography may be of significant interest: the identification of Rus' with Israel through Old Testament analogies and parallels, which had reached its full form by the time of the Tatar-Mongol invasion, and the subsequently established characteristics of relations between Rus' and the Horde as "slavery", "captivity", etc. Here we come close to assessing the nature of such a phenomenon as the relationship between the Russian lands and the Horde over a fairly long period of time, which in itself is one of the most important issues of domestic historical science and public consciousness (Krivosheev, 2015: 190 — 197). It is so important that not only do historians argue about it, but lively public debates rage around it, and politicians at the highest levels regularly refer to it. Here the historical science is confronted with several fundamental contradictions, whose presence provokes the emergence of exotic versions that tell about the nature of relations between the Russian land and the Horde. Perhaps it is possible to come a little closer to understanding these contradictions if we look at the problem through the prism of the interpretation of the events that interest us in Russian literature within the framework of the ideology of God's chosenness and the concept of "Rus' — the New Israel". One of the central paradoxes of Russian history would thus be resolved: the established historiographical idea of the Tatar-Mongol "yoke" in the absence of one from the point of view of the documented practice of relations between Rus' and the Horde, especially in comparison with other countries that were subjected to Mongol conquests and invasions in the 13th century.

The interaction of concept and history begins with an assessment of the immediate physical effects of the invasion of Russian lands. First of all, this concerns the traditional approach to assessing the Tatar invasion in 1237–1241, as an exaggeration of the tragedy of the Russian people (Krivosheev, 2015: 140– 150). There is no doubt that the destruction that befell the Russian lands was monstrous. Nevertheless, during the spring and summer of 1238, almost everywhere there was a return to the "structures of everyday life". Many Russian cities did not defend themselves and were not destroyed at all; the Tatar troops simply did not reach many of them. The number of Russian princes killed in battles with the Tatars was less than 1/3 of their total number (Krivosheev, 2015: 148-149; Rudakov, 2023: 9).

However, the events that followed from the beginning of the 1250s cannot put the relations between Rus' and the Mongol Empire, and then the Golden Horde, on the same level as the situation of other countries that were subjected to Mongol campaigns of conquest in the first half and middle of the 13th century — Khwarazm in Central Asia, the Chinese states or Iran. We are not talking about the minor conquered peoples of the Volga region, the Urals or Siberia, where the power of the Mongol feudal lords was absolute. Compared to them, if we go back to the definition given by Lev Gumilyov. Rus' was "neither subordinated nor conquered": there was no loss of sovereignty for the Russian princes to make decisions on major issues of domestic and foreign policy. As a result, the Golden Horde, as B. Shpuler rightly notes, did not have a significant impact on the Russians and did not change their nature (Shpuler, 2021: 8). The Russian lands are the

only part of the “Juchi ulus” where not even a temporary Mongol administration arose, and “the essence of tributary relations inevitably entails the conclusion that the Mongols preserved in Rus’ the social system that took shape in the middle of the 12th century and continued at the beginning of the 13th century.” (Krivosheev, 2015: 226). The main reason for the comparative military dominance of the Tatars in the second half of the 13th century was the agony of the system of grand-ducal power in Rus’ (Fennell, 1983). As soon as the power structure of the Russian lands was stabilized around several large centers, among which Moscow soon began to play a leading role, the Tatars became a formidable, but external enemy of the Russians. The Horde troops participated in inter-princely affairs, including military engagements, but never during the entire period of the so-called “yoke” were they in the position of rulers surrounded by silent slaves. The military victories of Alexander Nevsky’s sons Dmitry (1285) and Daniil (1300) over large Tatar forces and the victory of Mikhail Tverskoy over Muscovites and Tatars in 1317 were combined with trips to the Horde. The Moscow princes, often seen as the conduits of Sarai’s influence, actually disobeyed the Tatar khans appropriating the titles without regard to any yarlighs (Gorsky, 1999). As the military-diplomatic interaction with the Horde progressed, the Russian rulers, already in the first decades of these relations, “were completely freed from Tatar influence on their internal regulations” (Solovyev, 1988: 477). The granting of yarlighs to the Russian princes in the Horde was a diplomatic act of subordination, but recorded the absence of Tatar interference in the administration of Russian territories.

However, when analyzing the relations with the Horde and their role in the fate of the Russian people, the scribes turned to examples and comparisons, which by that time, over many generations, had become the central part of the entire system of meaning, with the help of which the content and meaning of certain events were conveyed to the reader. Such characteristics of relations with the Tatars as “captivity” or “slavery” could arise precisely within the framework of the deeply rooted concept of God’s chosenness of the Russian land, expressed in the idea that “Rus’ is the New Israel.” As in many other cases, the authors of Russian chronicles and hagiographic works simply had no other way to convey the message. The movement initiated by the Orthodox Church to understand the causes of the Tatar conquests and thus develop approaches to the ideology of victory over the enemy, had to be supported all the more by the most severe assessments of the situation in the Russian lands.

In other words, the assessment of the reasons for the invasion and the nature of relations with the Horde in Russian chronicles and other documents of the period cannot be considered in isolation from the existing religious and political tradition. That is why the term “yoke,” first mentioned in the works of the Polish historian Jan Dlugosz in the second half of the 15th century, was so easily adopted from foreign historiography. Subsequently, the “Old Testament” definitions turned out to be the most attractive for Russian, as well as foreign, historiography due to their brightness, which Karamzin was already striving for, and their political persuasiveness that was the case for a significant number of other authors.

As a result, they were the ones who laid the foundation for the general assessment of the relations between Rus' and the Horde by historians, with the exception of S. Solov'ov, L. Gumilyov, B. Shpuler, and at the present stage — Yu. Krivosheev, A. Gorsky and a number of other Russian historians. In reality, such an interpretation of the nature of relations between Rus' and the Horde may be nothing more than a product of the tradition of conveying meanings inherent in Russian medieval literature. The way in which the Russian scribes conveyed the message to us thus became a message in itself, and so convincing that it has taken a central place in the entire historiographical tradition of assessing the nature of the Horde's rule over the Russian lands in the 13th — 15th centuries.

Moreover, the use of Old Testament comparisons to influence the people of "New Israel" developed gradually from the 1270s. The Church Council of 1274, convened by Metropolitan Kirill, became one of the most important events in the history of Russian Orthodoxy and, at the same time, a turning point in understanding the foreign policy situation in which the Russian land found itself after the Mongol-Tatar invasion and the subsequent establishment of tributary dependence on the Horde. In addition to resolving a number of issues related to church life, the Council is considered by historians to be the starting point for understanding the causes of the Mongol-Tatar invasion and the tributary dependence of the Russian lands, going beyond determining the immediate causes of these events (Rudakov, 2017: 90). It was at this moment that a movement began within the Russian Orthodox Church, which, according to Vasiliy Klyuchevsky, later made it possible that "the people, accustomed to tremble at the mere name of a Tatar, finally gathered their courage, stood up to the enslavers and not only found courage to stand up, but also went in search of the Tatar hordes in the open stepp. and there it fell on the enemies like an indestructible wall, burying them under many thousands of bones" (Klyuchevsky, 1969: 54). It was no longer only the causes of disaster and "slavery" that occupied Russian literature, but also the ways to correct them, which were conceptualized in the Old Testament categories familiar to it. The central document of the epoch is the "Teachings" ("Words") of Serapion of Vladimir, whose appointment to the see of the capital of the Russian land took place at the Council of 1274. The main content of this work is the exposure of human vices and the instruction of the true path, which lies in the sphere of repentance, purification from sins and spiritual self-perfection (Kuchkin, 1990; Rudakov, 2017). It is not surprising that in order to pose a problem, whose solution can open the way to freedom from the humiliating dependence on the Horde, Serapion turns to the most understandable and familiar way of conveying the message: a direct analogy to the fate of Old Testament Israel. A researcher of the Mongol-Tatars' representation in Russian literature points out that in the second teaching Serapion indicates the specific historical period from the invasion of the Tatars to the appearance of the sermon: "This is already approaching 40 years of languor and torment, and it is given that this heavy burden will not cease for us, our belly is iron and pestilent, and we cannot eat our bread for sweetness, and our sighing and sorrow dry our bones" (PLDR. 13th century: 444). It can be assumed that such a precise indication of the time during which the Russian land will be subjected to God's punishment is connected not only with the attempt of the author

of the “Teaching” to give an exact chronology, but also with his desire to give his own interpretation of the events. Vladimir Rudakov points out a clear parallel with the forty-year period of Israel’s wanderings in the desert, which suggests Serapion’s intention to raise the question of the reasons for the continuation of God’s punishment of His Chosen People after the expiration of the “control” period of disgrace (Rudakov, 2017: 91). Since the Bishop obviously expects that his passionate call for the correction of spiritual life and morals will receive a response, he resorts to the most understandable and, from the point of view of Russian national consciousness, most appropriate analogy with the fate of Ancient Israel. Serapion not only equates the disasters that befell the Russian land with those that befell Ancient Israel, but also sees in them signs of the same attitude of God towards His Chosen People. This latter allows him to persistently demand truly sincere repentance and correction.

“The ecclesiastical and spiritual unity of the Great Rus’ around Moscow preceded the political unity” (Prokhorov, 2000: 41) and already from the beginning of the 14th century, the motive of the connection between the spiritual basis of the self-awareness of the Russian lands and their struggle with foreign adversaries gradually came to the fore. The Great Principality of Moscow, whose rulers since the time of Ivan Danilovich (Kalita), enjoyed the special favor of the church hierarchy, gradually found itself at the head of this struggle. In the midst of changing circumstances, the idea of the exceptional closeness of the Russian people to God is present in the first chronicler: Dmitry Donskoy before the Battle of Kulikovo says in prayer, “For You are Our God and we are Your people”, and Metropolitan Photius, in one of his teachings to Grand Duke Vasily Dmitrievich, calls his subjects “the chosen flock” of God (Efimov, 1912: 35). Then, at the final stage of the emancipation of the Russian land from the consequences of the military catastrophe that befell it in the middle of the 13th century, the assessment of the situation of the Russian land, based on the idea that “Rus’ is the New Israel”, takes the form of a political manifesto, containing an indication of a possible program of foreign policy action. Under the influence of the method of its transmission, the message takes the form of a political manifesto written by the Bishop of Rostov Vassian Rylo, at the moment of the most decisive confrontation between the Russian land and the failing Horde.

First of all, it is necessary to examine the nature of the document of interests to us, in which the concept of “Rus’ — the New Israel” takes on a completed form. The ideological content of the “Message to the Ugra” is analyzed in the works of V. Rudakov, Yu. Seleznev and I. Kudryavtsev, as well as the ideas expressed in the review work of A. Konotop (Kudryavtsev, 1951; Konotop, 2011; Rudakov, 2017, Seleznev, 2019: 36). Vladimir Rudakov notes that “the main task of the “Message” was to create a coherent system of evidence in favor of the legitimacy of the fight against the Horde” (Rudakov, 2017: 167). Thus, in the “Message” the author uses the Old Testament meanings, in order to point out the falsity of the order of things and the possibility of its correction. I. Kudryavtsev, in turn, characterizes the “Message” as follows: “In it the dogmatic stream merged with the social stream in a uniform patriotic direction, and perhaps most of the genre features of this type of Old Russian literature have reached their perfection” (Kudryavtsev, 1951: 166).

This characteristic of the “Message”, it seems to us, most reliably defines the nature of this document: the combination of the results of a moral search and a political process. On this basis, through the power of refined Old Testament images, the meaning and significance of the foreign policy actions of the Russian state in this specific historical period are given resonance.

The political circumstances of the appearance of the “Message” are well known; their details, unlike the content of the document, are the subject of extensive historiography and discussion (Lurie, 2021: 223–261). Summarizing the conclusions of historians, we can say that the “Message”, written in early October 1480, pursues several goals. All of them are determined by specific circumstances and seem to the author to be legal (fair) within the framework of the identification of the Russian land with God’s chosen Kingdom. Starting with an analysis of the nature of the Horde state and its supreme power, Bishop Vassian points to the reasons for the Russian lands falling into dependence on the Horde as having been an “execution by God”.

Another aspect of the “Message” is the justification of the fight against the Horde and the need for the prince to act decisively, which is based on an analysis of the Tatar ethno-social system that reflects the nature of the power wielded by Ahmed Khan. Questions of the domestic political development of the Russian land provide an assessment of the power of the Grand Duke also in Old Testament categories and indicate the mode of behavior necessary for him in certain circumstances. This method of action stems from the results of what happened in the second half of the 15th and early 16th centuries: “The understanding of the Russian sovereign as the only righteous one, the identification of the Moscow sovereigns with the biblical kings indicates their universal mission as the only righteous rulers for the last Chosen People in this world, the New Israel” (Perevezentsev, 2019: 177). Finally, the “Message” contains a description of the inevitable consequences of the triumph of “Rus’ — the New Israel” over its principal enemy within the framework of providentialism. The combination of these three storylines not only sums up the results of many years of understanding of the nature of relations between the Rus’ and the Horde, but also indicates the further correct path for the “New Israel” after its final liberation from “captivity.”

The specific content of the “Message” and its internal chains of argumentation have been analyzed in detail in the works of Russian historians and we will not go into them here detail (Kudryavtsev, 1951: 169–178; Rudakov, 2017: 164–173; Seleznev, 2019: 32–39; Nazarov, 1980: 116; Lurie, 2021: 223 — 261; Alekseev Yu., 1989: 128–132; Nazarov, 1980). In his text we see that the entire system of argumentation is grounded in the basic tenets of the concept of God’s choice of the Russian Land that had been formed by that time. For the author, the “New Israel” is in the “captivity” of the “Pharaoh”, whose role is played in specific historical circumstances by Ahmet Khan. According to Vassian, Ivan’s proper conduct in the conflict with Ahmet stems from the fact that he is a political and spiritual ruler, placed by God “at the head of the people chosen by him (God), the people — New Israel”, who must fulfill the will of this Chosen People “to complete liberation from foreign and heterodox enslavement” (Kudryavtsev, 1951: 171). If we place the “Message” in



the context of the use of Old Testament analogies by Russian literary scholars, which is analyzed in N. Efimov's monograph and a number of other works, we can assume that Bishop Vassian uses a concept that was already at that time a central element of the self-understanding of the audience of this document.

Therefore, "Message to the Ugra" does not simply continue the tradition of viewing the major historical experiences of the Russian people in categories based on a literal analogy with Ancient Israel. In accordance with the demands of the time, it summarizes the heritage created during the 500 years since the adoption of Christianity in relation to the problem, on the solution of which depends the fate of Russian statehood. It is no coincidence that Bishop Vassian sums up his reasoning about the political relations between the Russian land and the Horde with a direct reference to the fate of the enemies of Ancient Israel, whom the "merciful Lord enslaves" to the Chosen People (PLDR, 1982: 532). This prediction, based on an Old Testament analogy, concludes the history of relations between Rus' and the Horde at the level of their religious and philosophical understanding. During the "Horde captivity", Russian society, as God's Chosen People, went down the path of repentance and spiritual purification that was intended for it, and is entering a new stage in its history, just as it happened after the liberation from Pharaoh's captivity with its ancient counterpart. The method of conveying the message, accepted in Russian books, eventually becomes the message itself, and the Russian land becomes, on the level of political doctrine, the "New Israel," chosen by God and subordinate, along with its Grand Duke, directly to God.

## Epilogue

The basic political task of preserving and strengthening the national statehood was solved by the Russian land in the last episode of relations with the Great (Golden) Horde during the reign of Ivan the Third. Subsequent appeals to the concept of God's Chosenness in the formulation "Rus' — the New Israel" are observed in the description of the Nikonian Chronicle of Ivan the Fourth's campaign against Kazan in 1551, in the "State Book", in the message of Andrei Kurbsky to Tsar Ivan the Terrible, in some documents from the Time of Troubles, as well as in a number of works of Russian architecture and fine art (Kono-top, 2011: 44-47; Rowland, 1996: 604, 609-612).

However, they no longer occupy such an important place in understanding foreign policy tasks and challenges facing the Russian land. The emerging unitary Russian state had its own political and legal ideology, at the center of which, as V. Tomsinov defines it, was "the idea of intrinsic value" (Tomsinov, 2003: 74). Russian religious political philosophy, which grew through centuries of intellectual culture into national identity, formed the basis of this self-esteem, and thus the internal legitimacy necessary for the further development of the state.

This internal legitimacy had two sources. First, the Russian religious and political consciousness, based on the idea of one's chosenness by God from the moment of the adoption of Christianity and, especially, against the backdrop of the external threats that

intensified from the middle of the 11th century. Second, the colossal volume of material accumulated in the process of understanding the nature of relations between the Russian land and its foreign policy adversaries since the second half of the 13th century. In both cases, the influence of the method of transmitting the message — Old Testament analogies tending to directly identify the Russian land with ancient Israel — was not direct, but indirect. The medium was Russian religious literature — “one of the oldest and most diverse in post-classical Europe” (Petrov, 2008). The religious and philosophical idea of “Rus’ — the New Israel”, which took shape under the decisive influence of special international conditions, became for the Russian state the spiritual and intellectual core of its “consciousness of independence and special interests” (Presnyakov, 1918: 2).

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## Русь — Новый Израиль: medium и message средневековой русской политической философии

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Статья посвящена вопросу влияния религиозно-политической концепции «Русь — Новый Израиль» на общественное сознание России и ее внешнеполитическую культуру. Эта концепция на протяжении нескольких веков русской истории играла ведущую роль в осмыслении и концептуализации основных политических событий в русских летописях и религиозной литературе. Таким образом, имело место влияние отождествления Русской земли с древним Израилем на образ мышления, восприятие и интерпретацию этих событий, формирование национальной внешнеполитической культуры. Влияние концепции «Русь — Новый Израиль» является доминирующим как способ передачи сообщения (medium) и, таким образом, становится сообщением (message) как таковым. Это позволяет предположить, что именно этот религиозно-политический конструкт стал на ранних этапах развития российского государства важнейшим способом его самоидентификации в окружающем мире.

*Ключевые слова:* политическая культура, самосознание, средневековая история России, богоизбранность, Русская земля, Новый Израиль, русские земли.