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Emergence of the Russian Public Education System in the Patriarchal Era (1593–1721)

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Abstract

The paper explores the complicated path the emerging public education system took in the patriarchate period spanning from 1593 to 1721. It focuses on efforts to establish educational institutions in Russia and the role of the Orthodox Church as a protector of its flock from foreign religious influence.

The materials used include works on the history of the public education system, created in Pre-Petrine Russia. The methodology of the research was based on the principles of historicism, system analysis and objectivity. With the scarce number of sources, we also widely utilized the descriptive method to rebuild as a complete picture of events as possible to show how the public education system evolved in Russia in the period from 1593 to 1721.

As a summary, the authors point out that the emergence of public education in Russia's patriarchal period had distinctive features. According to the authors, these comprise attempts by the Orthodox Church to pioneer its own way in matters related to the preservation of the old world order. Maneuvering their way between Greeks and Latins, first centers of religious education in Russia suffered considerable harm, and the controversies caused the expulsion of the Likhud brothers from Moscow. In addition, as early as at the end of the patriarchal period, attempts were made to confer powers of a medieval inquisition on the Moscow Academy to combat dissent in the theological community.

Keywords: public education, patriarchal period, Russia, Tsar Fyodor, Likhud Brothers.

1. Introduction

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The emergence of the public education system in Russia in the Pre-Petrine period is a cavalcade of tangled socio-economic upheavals and challenges, contextualized in a specific historical situation. On the one hand, all Christian teachings reckoned on the religious education of their own flock, and on the other hand, they went into fairly harsh competition to win the flock over. Pre-Petrine Russia, affected by the nearly total lack of pedagogical staff, had to engage scholars from other countries, and this was one of its major pain points throughout the entire patriarchate period.

2. Materials and methods

For materials, we reviewed works on the history of public education in Russia in the Pre-Petrine period, as well as the Law Code (*Sobornoye Ulozheniye*) of 1649. The methodology of the research was based on the principles of historicism, system analysis and objectivity. With the scarce number of sources, we also widely utilized the descriptive method to rebuild as complete picture of events as possible to show how the public education system evolved in Russia in the period from 1593 to 1721.

3. Discussion

The subject under review has quite extensive historiography. The major works include A. Gorsky's "On theological schools in Moscow in the 17th century" ([Gorskii, 1845](#)), as well as S.K. Smirnov's "History of the Moscow Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy" ([Smirnov, 1855](#)). 1854 saw the publication of N.A. Lavrovsky's thesis "On the ancient Russian schools" ([Lavrovskii, 1854](#)), later – I. Kupriyanov' article "Notes on the history of enlightenment in Russia" ([Kupriyanov, 1862](#)). Other works worthy of note are: Rudnev "On education in Russia in the 16th and 17th centuries" ([Rudnev, 1855](#)), I.Ye. Zabelin "Nature of early public education in Russia" ([Zabelin, 1856](#)), D.L. Mordovtsev "On Russian school books of the 17th century" ([Mordovtsev, 1862](#)).

4. Results

The Patriarchal See was established in Russia in 1593 ([Gorskii, 1845: 151](#)) and existed until its abolition by Emperor Peter the Great. In the late 16th and first half of the 17th centuries, no system of public education operated in Russia. According to the accounts of explorers who traveled to Russia in the early 17th century, "the Russian people knows neither schools nor universities. Some priests – it must be said few pursue the activity – instruct the youth in reading and writing" ([Mirkovich, 1878: 3](#)). Russia's one of the first schools was founded by Arseny the Greek and taught young people Greek and Latin. The event is estimated to take place in 1649. Until that time, children's education was provided informally by so-called learned people (*gramoteis*), and this experience was typical for many European and Russian regions ([Mamadaliyev et al., 2019](#); [Cherkasov et al., 2019](#); [Cherkasov et al., 2020](#)). We should note that following the establishment of the Patriarchal See in Russia, attempts were almost immediately made to expand the education system. This was in part caused by the council of Eastern patriarchs who recommended to use every endeavor at a local level so that the Russian flock studied the Bible and Holy Scriptures. Acting on the patriarchs' advice, Boris Godunov, after he had been crowned tsar, decided to amplify the education system. He intended not only to introduce elementary schools, but also to create a university. As he faced the shortage of the teaching staff, to handle the issue, Boris Godunov sent 18 people to Europe to study various arts and languages, and additionally, invited German scholars. However, Boris Godunov's educational initiatives very quickly came into collision with the Orthodox Church – the church argued the invitation of European scholars would eventually disrupt the community of religion and consensus of opinion, which formed in Russian society. Boris Godunov had to take the priesthood's position into consideration.

The first documented establishment of a school took place in 1649. The school was patronized by Fyodor Mikhailovich Rtishchev and opened at the St. Andrew Monastery (Andreevsky Monastery) ([Gorskii, 1845: 155](#)). The school invited monks trained in Slavic and Greek grammar, rhetoric and philosophy as teachers. Epiphanius Slavnetsky (expert in Greek and Latin), Arseny Satanovsky, Damaskin Ptitsky, monk Isaiah and others were most renowned among the monks ([Mirkovich, 1878: 8](#)). However, the primary mission of the monks was not to "teach liberal arts" but translate the Bible into Slavonic. To enhance the efficiency of the work on translations, the monks were assigned to different monasteries, and the school was moved from the St. Andrew

Monastery to the Chudov Monastery. Epiphanius Slavivetsky was appointed rector of the school. The efforts of another devotee, Arseny the Greek, facilitated the introduction of linguistics into the curriculum in Moscow. However, by the 1660s, both schools were in complete disarray, because a number of critics came forward who opposed the correction and reprinting of the books and accused the teaching staff of distorting ancient Orthodoxy (Gorskii, 1845: 158-159).

In 1665, the Spasskaya School was opened in Moscow by Symeon of Polotsk. It was aimed at educating young people of the Privy Prikaz (Prikaz tainyh del), i.e. the sovereign's own chancellery. Given the fact that the school did not enroll children, it delivered secondary education, at a minimum, rather than an elementary school curriculum. Students at the Spasskaya School were trained in poetics, rhetoric, and practiced composing verses and orations. Latin was one of the principal disciplines, while Greek was not studied at all. Nevertheless, the school did not last long as well and was closed down about 1672.

In 1679, Tsar Fyodor III Alekseevich established a Printing Greek School that was reorganized into an academy a few years later (Mirkovich, 1878: 17). The school enrolled 30 pupils from various social estates (Gorskii, 1845: 174). In its first years, the school was surrounded by fierce controversy concerning the risks of teaching Latin, as alien to Orthodox Russians and the benefits of Greek. The polemic arose not without reason... The point was that when it came to the project to open an academy in Moscow, a question immediately ensued where to recruit a sufficient number of teachers. Of course, Moscow had no required teachers. Inviting foreigners was fraught with danger as the latter could potentially implant an alien religion, and sending Russians abroad for training was also risky, because such students could, in turn, adopt a foreign religion.

We should understand that after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, Greek education degenerated into decline, and Greeks were forced in the 16th century to go to Latins in Venice, Padua and other places to receive education. These individuals, subsequently gave rise to a whole group of scholars (for example, Epiphanius Slavivetsky) in Left-Bank Ukraine, who took guidance from Latin education. As early as in the 17th century, the books received from Greece were regarded in Moscow as cautiously as books from Left-Bank Ukraine: Muscovites viewed their own translations of holy books as more accurate than Greek originals, especially in the form in which they were published in Venice, Rome, Paris and other places (Mirkovich, 1878: 32-33).

In other words, both Greeks and natives of Western Russia had little credibility among Muscovites in the second half of the 17th century. Naturally, Muscovy faced a dilemma – whom to choose as teachers? Who are better, or rather, who are worse of the foreigners? Greeks could offer only one advantage, meaning the authority of the Eastern patriarchs. The latter, as “pillars of Orthodoxy”, constituted the supreme, albeit not absolute, authority in matters of faith at the time. As a result, preference was given to Greeks (Gorskii, 1845: 178).

But before the request was dispatched to the patriarchs to send teachers, a scholarly privilege (*privilegirovannaya gramota*) was issued for the academy (Mordovtsev, 1862: 44). The privilege was comprised of 18 clauses, and granted a broad range of rights and benefits to the academy. The academy syllabus was planned to include both secular and religious disciplines – from grammar, poetics, rhetoric, dialectics, rational, natural and moral philosophy, to theology (Gorskii, 1845: 180-181). In addition, courses of ecclesiastical and civil law were supposed to be delivered. The academy was organized inside the compound of the Zaikonospassky Monastery, in Kitaygorod. Funding for the academy's teaching staff was provided by an entire group of church institutions, along with the Zaikonospassky Monastery, money was also allocated by the St. John the Theologian Monastery (Pereslavl-Ryazansky uезд), St. Andrew Monastery (Andreevsky Monastery on the Moscow River), Trinity Monastery of Stromyn (Stromynsky-Troitsky Monastery), St. Nicholas Monastery on the Peshnoshka River (Peshnoshsky-Nikolaevsky Monastery), St. Boris and St. Gleb Monastery (Borisoglebsky Monastery), as well as Medvedeva Pustyn. Besides, the tsar granted from his own behalf income from the Vyshegorodskaya Palace Volost and nine waste plots of land. Moreover, private donations were also used (Mirkovich, 1878: 34).

A strict supervision system was put in place to keep an eye on the teaching staff. Only Orthodox Russians or Greeks could apply for a teaching position, but no Greeks were accepted otherwise than on the grounds of the testimony about their strong Orthodox faith, signed by the ecumenical patriarchs, and only after clear assurance was obtained that the applicant had no bent for heresies. Scientists from Left-Bank Ukraine and Lithuania were allowed to teach only if they

had passed an extremely rigorous selection procedure. New converts from other religions had no opportunity to join the academy.

The overseer and teachers should, as required by the privilege, kiss the cross (take an oath – Auth.) that they would deeply and unfailingly profess the Orthodox faith, guard and protect it from the invasion of all other faiths and heresies; in case of violation of the cross-kissing oath, the charter stipulated to punish oath-breakers by stripping them of ranks and titles, and in the case of blasphemy against the Orthodox faith – by burning without mercy (Mirkovich, 1878: 35).

The academy admitted orthodox students of all estates, ranks and ages. Only pious sciences were permitted to the curriculum, and the ones unauthorized by the church, such as “natural magic”, were strictly prohibited; studies in the latter, as was ordained, entailed execution by burning at the stake for both teachers and students as magicians, without any mercy. Hiring teachers of foreign languages for work at home was also prohibited – children were required to send to the academy to study foreign languages.

All individuals, related to the academy, both the teaching staff and students, were transferred from the jurisdiction all other people were subject to. The academy was entitled to mete out justice independently. For example, if students ran up debts, the collection was cancelled until after the end of education not to interfere with learning process. All non-criminal offences of students were examined by academy teachers, while criminal cases were handed over to a civil court. If the overseer himself (rector – Auth.) was suspected of a crime, he was tried by teachers, and a teacher was tried by the overseer and other teachers (Gorskii, 1845: 183). Teachers could not seek other employment at their own discretion, and were awarded a pension for a long record of service at the academy. After graduation, the best students were excellently positioned to build a career as civil servants.

The academy also performed other important functions. All scientists who arrived from abroad to join the tsar’s service had to take an exam at the academy and could be hired only upon approval. The teaching staff was also responsible to monitor that no doubters who put in question the Orthodox faith appeared in Moscow, that sceptics did not fuel strife and discord; all such persons were to be reported to the tsar. In addition, the teaching staff was put in charge of watching over that no one kept Polish, Latin, Lutheran and Calvinist heretical books, as well as magic, witchcraft, fortune-telling and other books outlawed by the church.

All those who abandoned their religions for sake of Orthodoxy were closely supervised by the teaching staff; they were registered on special lists. If it was found out that a recent convert did not devotedly follow it, the guilty were exiled to Siberia, and if they persisted in their old beliefs, they were burned. If any foreigner or a Russian was charged of committing blasphemy against the Orthodox faith, and the accusation of the academy court was just, the person was then sentenced to the death by burning. If any foreigner was previously of the Orthodox faith, and later, as they arrived in Russia, were baptized a Roman, Lutheran, Calvinist Christians or accepted some other faith, he was burned. Conversion from the Roman faith to Lutheranism was subject to exile to Siberia. All these provisions were enshrined in the privilege of the academy (Mirkovich, 1878: 36). As an important reminder, the sentence to death by fire for blasphemy against the Orthodox faith was fully copied from Article 1, Chapter 1 of the Law Code of 1649 (Sobornoe ulozhenie, 1961: 70).

The construction of a building was planned to be financed from the state budget.

Hence, the Moscow Academy was created for the benefit of the church to combat dissent in religious matters. The Moscow Academy, as envisioned by Tsar Fyodor, was a citadel built by the Orthodox Church in the face of the unavoidable clash with the heterodox West; this was not only a school, it was an inquisitional organization. It is also good to emphasize that the scholarly privilege was not a charter of the educational institution. Apparently, the privilege was formulated by Symeon of Polotsk; a combination of circumstances indicated this fact: the academy was supposed to be opened in the Zaikonospassky Monastery where Symeon lived (it was there where he ran a privy prikaz school, which, in all probability, was planned to be transformed into an academy). More over, the school’s additional functions were more suitable for an operational investigative department than an educational institution.

Unluckily, August 25, 1680 saw the death of Symeon of Polotsk. Two years later, Tsar Fyodor Alekseevich also dies. The tsar’s demise sparked off the Streltsy Uprising, and riots among dissenting sectarians, schismatics, occurred. The events hindered the opening of the academy (Gorskii, 1845: 185). When the time of troubles ended, first (in 1683) a disciple of Epiphanius, Karion Istomin, hierodeacon of the Chudov Monastery, and later (in 1685) a disciple of Symeon of

Polotsk, by the name of Medvedev, submitted their requests to Tsarevna Sophia to institute an academy as envisioned by Tsar Fyodor. However, their attempts were unsuccessful, and one explanation may be that at that time teachers from Greece was already expected to arrive, and before the arrival, opening an academy was considered premature.

A request for teachers from Greece was sent by Tsar Fyodor Alekseevich in 1681 and delivered to the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch. In March 1683, two learned educators, brothers Ioannicus and Sophronius Likhud, arrived from Venice to Constantinople (Gorskii, 1845: 188). After they had spent 5 months preaching at the cathedral church and taken an examination, Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople, with the consent of other patriarchs, recommended them to the Russian tsar. The Likhud brothers accepted the patriarchs' proposal and set out on the journey to Russia. On arrival in Moscow on March 6, 1685, they were taken to the Ambassadorial Prikaz (Posolsky prikaz) and were for two days interrogated on their reasons to visit Moscow, and on the third day they were invited by Tsars John and Peter and Tsarevna Sophia to a royal reception.

Specifically for educational purposes, a school was built at the Epiphany Monastery (Bogoyavlensky Monastery), and as soon as it was commissioned, the Greeks began instruction. The first students were five first grade pupils of the Printing School, soon two more students joined the group. However, the tight premises at the Epiphany Monastery were criticized by the Likhud brothers, who insisted on opening an academy in accordance with the scholarly privilege of Tsar Fyodor. The Moscow government could not afford the spending, and the initiative was put to life thanks to donations, including by Prince Vasily Vasilyevich Golitsyn. When the building was completed and inaugurated, the educational process began. As a result, the first higher theological educational institution was established.

All other students of the Printing School were transferred to the new building, and furthermore, over 40 boyar children were added to the number (Gorskii, 1845: 190), as well as members of the Moscow clergy. The debates on the principal language was renewed after the opening of the academy, but the Likhud brothers advocated the need for both languages. The academy's curriculum featured a fairly large range of disciplines, but the problem was that there were no respective manuals and guidebooks at all, and the brothers had to first write the guidebooks and then introduce the corresponding discipline. The first class – grammar – was opened in 1687, later followed by classes in poetics, rhetoric, logic and physics. The instruction language for grammar and poetics was Greek, while rhetoric, logic and physics were taught both in Greek and Latin. The students demonstrated such considerable advances that they completed the study of the subjects in three years, could speak the languages fluently and even translated several books into Slavonic.

The Likhud brothers took no time to rest as they were eager to cover the entire academic program, so they published manuals and guidebooks one by one with no intervals. Even when he was on a visit to Venice, where went in 1688, Ioannicus wrote guidebooks on psychology and physics. Overall, the period from 1686 to 1693 saw the publication of 6 manuals and guidebooks. To ensure a quicker and better understanding of dialectical techniques by students, the Likhud brothers arranged training disputations that were typically held on Sundays and holidays. The academy introduced and practiced a peer support process, when senior grade students helped younger ones, and this explains the significant success of the academy.

The Likhuds had access to the tsar's library, and the academy itself also had a library housing 603 copies of manuscripts and printed books in Greek, Latin, German and Polish. Despite all their rigorous efforts, the Likhud brothers finished only half of the academic program. After that they were removed from the academy and sent to serve exile to the Hypatian Monastery in Kostroma in the early 1700s (Gorskii, 1845: 195). However, their hard work was not fruitless; in 1706, Metropolitan Job of Novgorod and Staraya Russa petitioned and obtained permission to invite them to Novgorod to organize a school. As early as in the first year of the school's operation, they opened a Latin class there. Meanwhile, Moscow was increasingly affected by a shortage of learned scholars, and as a result first Sophronius, and later Ioannicus was transferred to Moscow. However, Ioannicus died as early as August 7, 1717, at the age of 84. He was buried in the undercroft of the Zaikonospassky Monastery.

In the meantime, Sophronius continued both with his teaching efforts and non-educational activities. One of his key non-educational activities was revising biblical texts of the Old Testament

books. Sophronius was engaged in this project from 1712 to 1723, and in 1723 his was elevated to the rank of archimandrite and appointed administrator of a Ryazan monastery in recognition of his services. Sophronius died on July 15, 1730, at the age of 78 (Mirkovich, 1878: 60). In 1721 the central administration of the Russian church was handed over to the Holy Synod, which marked the end of the patriarchal period.

5. Conclusion

As a summary, we would like to point out that the emergence of public education in Russia's patriarchal period had distinctive features. In our opinion, these comprise attempts by the Orthodox Church to pioneer its own way in matters related to the preservation of the old world order. Maneuvering their way between Greeks and Latins, first centers of religious education in Russia suffered considerable harm, which made the expulsion of the Likhud Brothers from Moscow inevitable. In addition, as early as at the end of the patriarchate period, attempts were made to confer powers of a medieval inquisition on the Moscow Academy to combat dissent in the theological community.

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