

## FORMATION OF THE 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY INTELLECTUAL ELITE AND THE WORKS OF PROKHOR KOLOMNIATIN\*

This paper is devoted to the phenomenon of the intellectual elite emerging in Russian literature in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The image of Prokhor Kolomnyatin, a charismatic figure of the time in question, a man of literature and enlightenment, enables the author to see how this class took shape in Russian society. With reference to little-known manuscripts belonging to the literary legacy of the poet, the article demonstrates Prokhor's understanding of the role of a teacher and poet, and analyzes the perception and evaluation of his creative work within a sociocultural context. Additionally, the author identifies the main characteristics of baroque esthetics, concluding that the intellectual elite failed to fully develop further due to Peter the Great's reforms.

Keywords: Prokhor Kolomnyatin; 17<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature; Russia's intellectual elite; syllabic verses.

The notion of an intellectual elite did not exist in medieval Russia. Terms like "high rank" and "honor" were used to denote elite status in society, and these terms were based on factors connected with high birth, rank and social position in the state and in the church. That is why one of the elite groups was "noble" and "of high birth", and the other "ecclesiastical" and "pious". The latter included holy men or anchorites, including Sergei Radonezhsky, Stefan Permsky, Nil Sorsky, Maxim Grek, Dimitry Rostovsky and many others. These men were often called the Teachers. Their education was considered to be of little importance in comparison with their righteousness and piety. For instance, St. Dimitry Rostovsky (1651–1709) wrote about "outer" and "inner" learning:

Of double nature is man: of the outer self and the inner self, of flesh and blood and of spirit. The outer self of flesh and blood is seen, the inner self, the spiritual one, is not seen <...> the inner self is composed of many things: mind, attention to oneself, when fear of God and belief in Him makes one perfect. The outer self factors are seen, the inner self ones are unknown to us... Of double nature is education then: outer and inner. The outer one is in books, the inner one is in thoughts about God. The outer one is in philosophy, the inner one is in love to God. The outer one is in speech, the inner one is in prayer. The outer

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one is in wit, the inner one is in good will of the spirit. The outer one is in art and handicrafts, the inner one is in thoughts. The outer one exposes the mind, the inner one humbles it. The outer one is full of curiosity, though it already has abundance of knowledge, the inner one is concentrated on self and wants to know only of God [БАН, д. 218, л. 35 об.–36 об.].

The inner self of man's nature is contrasted to the outer self where the former takes the upper hand.

The intellectual elite could not form until the intellect itself came to be highly valued in society. And up to a certain period, spirituality was privileged over intellectuality. The image of the intellectual sitting in his study at home with books and rarities all around him, reading Voltaire in the original, seems to have started to take shape only by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. But the process of forming the intellectual elite in Russia was already long in the making, and arguably began in Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of the Baroque [see: Развитие барокко ...; Человек в культуре...]. The Baroque manifested itself in new literary genres, in syllabic verses, orations, plays, panegyrics, epistles, epitaphs, sermons and letters in poetic form. Some authors mastered the art of writing such texts<sup>1</sup> and others desired to do so. Apart from techniques and specific knowledge, proximity to wisdom and even to philosophy was required. One had to know of rhetoric and poetics to compose verses. To justify arguments, one had to know history: also, examples were taken from history to perfect prosody [Панченко, с. 185].

The monks were the first to become adherents of the Baroque, and among them appeared a small group of syllabic poets, men of book learning [Ibid., с. 150–160; Киселёва с. 71–98]. Interest in the composition of verses and in Western writings (mainly from Kiev and Poland) spread among the upper ranks of Muscovite *Prikaz* (sector of government) officials. “In the cultural context of Moscow of the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century,” A. M. Panchenko wrote, “awareness of exclusive impeccability’ (of the syllabic scribes) expressed itself in the concept of humanitarian elitism, which naturally came to be connected with scorn towards the uneducated ‘simpletons’” [Панченко, с. 185].

Within this context, Prokhor Kolomnyatin worked within the Orthodox enlightenment, contributing to “a new language of culture”<sup>1</sup>. He was not a well-known figure in comparison with the leading poets of 17<sup>th</sup> century literature. Prokhor Kolomnyatin's name is largely forgotten today. It has not even been included in the most authoritative compendium of ancient Russian authors “Dictionary of Ancient Russian Readings and Men of Learning” (“Словарь книжности и книжников Древней Руси”). By recovering his works, we refine our understanding of how “intellectualism” and “elitism” formed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Simeon Polotsky, Karion Istomin, Silvester Medvedev, Epiphany Slavnetsky, Evfimy Chudovsky, Ignaty Rimsky-Korsakov, Afanasy Kholmogorsky, Dimitry Rostovsky, Nikolai Spafary, Savvatei, Mordary Khonikov, Diomid Serkov, and many others.

Prokhor considered himself to be part of the intellectual elite of his time, one who wrote the works of the Enlightenment. In the 1680s he compiled two voluminous, handwritten collections of works [Мордовцев; Петров; Буш], from which most of his biographical data may be drawn. His second name (or nickname), *Kolomnyatin*, means that he was from Kolomna. Prokhor started drafting his collection called “The ABC Book for Schools” (“Школьные Азбуковники”) in the reign of Fyodor Alekseyevich in the monastery of Marchugi [Петров, с. 98] which belonged to the Solovetsk cloister and was located on the banks of the Moskva River (now, village of Faustovo). He was a monk in the order of the so-called “black priest” (“черный поп”). In the 1670s–1680s great stone churches were constructed in Marchugi. Prokhor must have witnessed this, possibly even participated in it. From Marchugi, he moved—whether by his own volition is unknown — to the Volga River, to the Ipatiev Monastery in Kostroma. There in 1682, he finished his collection of works. Because in his collection, there are several instances of the theme of a man in exile, he may have been hinting that he had limited freedom there. In 1684–1685 he styles himself “a hieromonk” and compiles a second collection of works for cellarer Feodosy on how to compose epistles in poetic form [about him, see: Кошелева 2011]. There is insufficient information of Prokhor’s later years<sup>2</sup>. Both collections were written by Prokhor upon the request of his acquaintances. The first collection was called, “The ABC Book for Schools” to distinguish it from the others. It appeared as a result of “A Letter Written by Applicants” (“Послание просительного”), which was written in poetic form by “a children’s teacher,” Serkov Diomid Yakovlev [about him, see: Семячко с. 613–622]. He asked Prokhor to pass on his “good knowledge” to those who wanted to go to school and to write for them about “how to behave in school” (i.e. regarding school rules), both of which were communicated only orally earlier (for text of the “Letter...”, see: [Демин, с. 433–439]). “A Letter Written by Applicants” suggests that at some time or other, correspondents had close contact with each other and discussed their problems. Now that they were separated from each other, the “applicants” wanted to receive a written text from Prokhor, who to all appearances, was the oldest and most educated of them. Prokhor wrote to Diomid that he had fulfilled his request [Ibid.]. Apart from a dialogue written by him in poetic form, “School Rules” (“Школьное благочиние”), Prokhor included numerous materials that he thought could be useful for a teacher. The collection is complicated and diversified; it includes short works in poetic and prosaic form, which at first glance seem to be put together chaotically. It is a manual for teachers and contains admonitions for pupils, *starostas* (village elders), and parents, all intermingled. A researcher studying the collection noted in perplexity that these texts are monuments “which we cannot give a rightful place to

<sup>2</sup> On “elites” as producers of cultured languages that are adapted for this purpose in popular culture, see: [De Serto, с. 41–42].

with certainty” [Буш, с. 32]. However, Prokhor had his own, clear logic, when compiling the text – the logic being “alphabetical”. Each new text starts with a colored letter that stands out. These letters ascend in alphabetical order, which is why all the seven sections of the collection begin with the words “*Azbukovnik*”. This method had already been in use for a long time before ABC texts [Ковалёва] and became extremely popular in 17<sup>th</sup> century Baroque verses [Киселёва, с. 112–126].

Prokhor’s works show that he was a typical Russian man of learning, a collector of texts, which are useful for the mind [on collections of texts, see: Грицевская]. But behind this image, the writer-intellectual appears in the initial stages of his development. The amount of work that he did to compile his collection demonstrates that he was well read: he referred to numerous, different works and was acquainted with various books printed in Moscow, Kiev and abroad. Interestingly, in “The ABC Book for Schools”, Prokhor reveals his personality, his “ego”, as an author. In contrast, the typical excuse for writing at the time was that higher-ranking authorities had required it. Baroque authors found it very difficult to work around this tradition.

In his dialogue, “School Rules”, Prokhor introduces the non-traditional Writer of Verses (i.e., the author), in addition to the customary Teacher and Pupil who converse with each other. By doing so, Prokhor reveals that the text is not a copy, a translation, or a compilation – it is written by the author himself. The reader is encouraged consistently to determine the author’s identity, and to help the reader do it, the Writer of Verses constantly prompts the reader with directions: “Here the Writer gives you his name”; “In the aforementioned writing: there you can find the name, rank and patronymic; for this he wrote it: the text gives you the name and rank” [РГАДА, ф. 357, № 60, л. 22]; “In the first line you will find the name of the writer, in the second – the first word gives the patronymic” [Ibid., л. 11]. “Curiosity is tensed to the extreme,” as V. V. Bush, who studied the text, commented, “but I have to own up that it is impossible to guess this charade” [Буш с. 26]. Prokhor made his literary game so complicated that it became possible to decipher his “charades” only centuries later. Even now, all may not have been deciphered. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, A. P. Petrov deciphered one of the entries [Петров, с. 98], and in 1976, A. S. Demin managed to decipher the full name of the Writer of Verses [Дёмин, с. 48 (по списку РНБ, ф. 14, л. 73)]. Demin also managed to decode the following acrostic on the edges of the writings: “When he wrote his works black priest, Prokhor Kolomnyatin, sent them to a teacher of children, Diomid Yakovlev, and his associates”. Clearly, Prokhor introduced the Writer’s speeches into the “School Rules” not to stress his authorial position, but to refine the acrostic.

Prokhor’s “charades” and their deciphering are complex and beyond the scope of this essay; nevertheless, a brief description will offer insight into Prokhor’s distinctive literary contributions. Here is Prokhor’s answer to Dio-

mid, and the inserted bold type on the left of the acrostic will make it easier to understand what Prokhor meant. At first glance the text is rather absurd:

Первостранником послание твое буди приятно,  
 Во нем же писано – со усердием внято.  
 Готовый за посещение твое Бога молю,  
 Благоразумием твоим велми ся хвалю.  
 В танце и на клиросе будущего ведати благоволиши,  
 Благоразумно чест святыню си и внятно zde узриши.  
 Ту искомое, от него же, и ему же, и о нем же писаса, обрящещи,  
 И в краегранесии якожде выше, тожде и zde, усящещи.

**ПРО**стираю руку сипавый третий, о дружe благий,  
**ШЕ**ствую к тебе грозный второй, нравом драгий;  
**НИ**чтоже препинает и пятому гласному,  
 Еже по господе Бозе житию согласному;  
**ТВОЕ** благоденствие вторым натужным здраво буди,  
 Вторым же громным подобнее и возразительным окончальн многолетен пребуди.  
**СЕ** тобою желаемое о школе изобразуется,  
**И** хотящим учитеся буквам о благоискустве пишется.  
**СПО**льным ума намерением приходящего в школу прияти,  
**НЕВ**сем, но единому, коему велит приветное слово воздати<sup>3</sup>.

The answer begins with a positive assessment of Diomid's "Letter". Then it indicates that he will get what he asks for. The phrase "*i v kraegranesii yakozhde*" (и в краегранесии якожде...) provides the key to the riddle that the message holds. Its translation into modern English reads: "The edges of the lines, above, and here also" (i.e. in "*Poslaniye prositel'noye*"). In other words, the Letters have a "second, false bottom" where those texts that are not seen at first glance are "hidden". This is why the phrase stating that Diomid's secret text had been read, and a similar answer has been prepared for him. It states: "Про/ше/ние/ твое/ в/се/ и/спол/нев" (Pro/she/niye/tvoe/ v/se/ i/spol/nev/) (Your request has been fulfilled) (see verses above). But that is not all. In the same part, Prokhor ciphered his name in a way that could only be understood by a person who had read his "Grammar Book" ("Грамматика"). This original "Grammar Book" is placed among a variety of other texts in "The ABC Book for Schools". If Diomid had been

<sup>3</sup> The chief (or the first, the main one) pilgrim will find your message pleasant, / Everything in it is written plainly and clearly, / I pray to God that you will come, / I am very proud of you that you are so wise. / You wish to know of the future while dancing and singing in the church choir / You wisely honor the sacred things, and clearly see what is here., / What you have found from him and what has been written about him, / You will find in the letters on the edges of the lines, above, and here also. / I point with my hand to the third voiceless consonant (П), oh dear friend, / I come to you, the second of the voiced (consonants) (P), dear to me. / Nothing stops the fifth vowel (O), / Living as God wills. / Your prosperity will be the second voiceless consonant (X), / The second voiced consonant (P), Reverend, and the last letter Ъ, live long. / As what you wish to be (taught) at school is shown here, / It is addressed to those who wish to study and learn of the importance of knowledge. / To those who really wish to get a school education, / A word of praise should be addressed not to all, but to the one who wishes to learn.

Prokhor's pupil, to all appearances he would have been well acquainted with "Grammar Book". If not, it is highly improbable that Diomid could have deciphered what Prokhor wrote. The subject here is the phonetic classification of the consonants of the Slavic language, which were named differently in the various Grammar Books. In Prokhor's "Grammar Book", the classification reads as follows: "voiced" – б, в, з, д (*b, v, g, d*), "sibilants" – ж, ч, ш (*zh, ch, sh*), "voiceless" – с, з, н, ц (*s, z, p, c*) and so on. Hence we can look for the necessary letter: "voiceless third" is *n* (*p*); "second voiced" is *p* (*r*); "fifth vowel" is *o*; and so on. As a result we can read the name "Прохоръ" (Prokhor) [Дёмин 2003, с. 48].

If we take these "directions" to the "Grammar Book" out of the text of the Letter, the lines will then join together and become readable:

Простираю руку, о друже благий,  
Шествую к тебе, нравом драгий,  
Ничтоже препинает,  
Еже по господе Боже житию согласному.  
Твое благоденствие здраво буди,  
Подобнее и многолетен пребуди...<sup>4</sup>

In this letter, one more phrase becomes clear. Its first line runs as follows: "*Pervostrannikom poslaniye tvoe budi priyato*" (*Первостраником послание твое буди приятно*) (The chief [or first, the main one] pilgrim will find your message pleasant). Who is this "*первостраник* (*pervostrannik*) (chief pilgrim)"? The explanation can be found in "*Tolkovaniye imen po alfavitu*" (Толкование имен по алфавиту) (Interpretation of Names in Alphabetical Order), which is found in the collection. The name "Prokhor" means "the one who goes first, the first singer in the choir" [РГАДА, ф. 357, д. 60, л. 138 об.–139] (i.e. "the one who goes in front of the choir, who is the first to start singing"). Prokhor calls himself the First One, "the one who goes first", "the main one" not only in the "Poslaniye", but in many other places in the manuscript.

Prokhor's sophisticated use of rhetorical devices, exhibited above as an intellectual game, demonstrates that he was a member of the cultural elite who could skillfully manipulate texts. Obviously Prokhor not only valued piety, which he spoke about quite often in his "*Azbukovnik*", but also creativity, which included the composition of acrostics. For instance, Prokhor writes about the importance of acrostics:

Акростикиды, гречески именую, помале в(е)селят,  
А творчестии разумы несытне души сладят  
[quoted by: Петров с. 81].

<sup>4</sup> I stretch out my hand to you, oh dear friend, / I go to you, a person of good will, / Nothing will stop us, / If we live according to God's will. / Let your prosperity be welcome, / Reverend, live long... (and so on).

Which means:

“Acrostics, as they are called in Greek, entertain quite a bit, and creativity of the mind brings pleasure to souls who are eager to learn”.

In accordance with tradition, Prokhor and many other 17<sup>th</sup> century men of learning gained authority not only through their piety, but also through their intellect, which fulfilled a certain function in society. Prokhor tried to increase the number of copies of his works in handwritten form (we know of eight copies of “*Shkol’niye azbukovniki*”). He wanted to publicize that he was the author and that he could produce a work of intellect. His work showed that he was not merely a specialist in schooling, but a poet who could compose poetic works to be used in schools.

Importantly, Prokhor wrote “*Azbukovniki*” as requested by a “school teacher”; for the first time in Russian literature, this teacher becomes the direct addressee of the texts compiled in the collection. The addressee is Diomid, who was not a professional teacher, but a scribe. This supplementary activity was typical for scribes at the time since professional school teachers did not yet exist as a social group in Russia.

Greater Russia did not have schools like the Belorussian or Ukrainian fraternity schools. Learning to read and write was a private affair, carried out by the so-called “teaching groups” [Безрогов, с. 683–707]. People who had a very small income from their main profession but were literate used their knowledge to support themselves. It was thought that any literate person could teach. Therefore, the process of education was conducted without schools and effectuated by society to fulfill its needs. This means that a teacher’s independent recognition and identification with the intellectual elite, was largely irrelevant for most people. Indeed a sexton reciting the alphabet with children never saw himself as a teacher or a spiritual mentor; he was only “a master in literacy” [Коселева, 2004, с. 115–135].

For the first time in Russian literacy, Prokhor’s texts established a teacher’s independent recognition by raising both the role and the significance of the teacher to a higher level. This independent recognition consolidated the social group, which in time became the cultural elite.

In “School Rules” the text under the Russian letter «У» (U) is fully devoted to the Teacher (*Uchitel*). Here, Prokhor summarized and rhymed those thoughts about teaching that were especially close to him. In other texts of the “*Azbukovniki*” the author also gives practical advice and religious admonitions. Many speeches addressed to pupils are written on behalf of the Teacher. All this is reflected in the practice of teaching and raising children [Коселева, 2013]. But special stress in its panegyric pathos is stressed in a text addressed to the teacher on behalf of Wisdom<sup>5</sup>. It begins by comparing the teacher to a preacher. The metaphor of teacher-preacher who guards his flock of sheep and

<sup>5</sup> For a translation of this text in modern Russian, see: [Коселева, 2013].

retrieves the lost ones has a direct analogy with the image of Christ the Preacher. However, the text is about ordinary shepherds who tend their flock of heedless creatures. How great, then, is the responsibility that is laid upon the shoulders of the teacher who is held accountable for “creatures that are not senseless”!

Having shown before God the great responsibility of the teacher as a guard of the souls of his pupils, the author gives the teacher practical advice. First, the teacher is to be “morally stable”, i.e. his behavior is to be untarnished. Second, the teacher is to teach his pupils orally and instill in their souls fear towards his person (“let them be afraid of your name”). The teacher is to have “the best and the brightest pupils,” or “police-officers”, who would show the pupils the right path to follow when the teacher is not there. Pupils should be under constant observation by the preacher and his helpers, day and night, because the Devil likes “to spoil” young and corruptible minds.

From the metaphor of teacher-preacher, the author moves to the image of teacher-brood hen (“*kokosha*”) that gathers its chicks under its wing. If the brood hen warms its chicks with its wings, the teacher warms the hearts of his pupils with his words, thus instilling love for God. Just as chicks are given light food, and then progress to hard food, so the teacher must give the beginners “a little of something in verse-form”. By hard food, Prokhor means the Word of God (The Holy Scriptures), and “so the Lord God let us by way of a teacher’s teaching do it”.

Next follows the metaphor of a teacher-blacksmith. People bring the blacksmith all kinds of old scrap metal to be re-forged into something new. Similarly, the teacher is brought “a good-for-nothing adolescent”: “Welcome him as if he were good, and as a master blacksmith re-forge him anew.”

At the end of the text the teacher is presented as a holder of “the key of reason” (“You have taken the key of reason, teacher: what are you to create with it?”). The teacher unlocks the souls of uncivil and negligent pupils and leads them out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of true knowledge. The word “key” is also used by the teacher. “The key of knowledge” turns out to be the key to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Wisdom sets the teacher on the right path: listen attentively and observe; teach not only with words, but also with corporeal punishment. What you do should serve as an example to your pupils. In other words, words (admonitions), punishment (fear) and exemplary actions – these are the teacher’s tools.

The teacher is to read “useful writings” aloud to the children, selecting texts that correspond to situations in the life of the pupils: “when you speak of wisdom, turn their thoughts to real knowledge, when you admonish them, set them on the path of good will, teach them to respect their parents and their teacher. Let them be clean in thoughts and in body, give examples that would prove what you say, and tell them about those who were spotless

from their childhood". At times the teacher can praise the pupils for their "diligent work", but at all times he must remember to give time off for rest on Sunday and on other holidays.

Thus, Prokhor, an ordinary monk, is shown to be a scholar, a poet, a tutor, a creative personality. He understood this himself, and his intellectual acquaintances valued his varied skills and abilities, asking him to write new texts. Prokhor's interest with educational affairs and pedagogy in schools should be viewed within the polemical context of educational development and discussions that persisted in Moscow through the 1680s [Фонкич, с. 235–237]. The end result was the establishment of the Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy. It might be that Prokhor undertook the teaching practice himself so that he could have first-hand knowledge. After all, the teacher for him was not only a tutor with a deep "inner self", but was one who boasted an "outer self" developed by the scholastic sciences. Both aspects of the teacher-personality were necessary. For Prokhor, as for other syllabic authors, the two selves ceased to contradict.

Conceivably the new idea of Orthodox education formed within this very milieu of intellectual monks, not just those who were closer to the ruling elite. In this view, education developed along a path that empowered the teacher to play a more significant role. Such developments in Russia's Orthodox education, however, were destined not to endure in the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century due to the reforms of Peter the Great. The czar's reforms reduced the liberal activity of the monks and the monasteries, especially as models of Western Europe were introduced and implemented into the Russian Empire.

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Рассматривается феномен интеллектуальной элиты, которая возникает в русской культуре начиная с XVII в. Колоритной фигурой времени является просветитель и литератор инок Прохор Коломнятин. Обращение к его биографии и трудам позволяет воочию увидеть процесс формирования этого слоя в русском обществе. Привлекаются малоизвестные литературные тексты из рукописного наследия поэта,

очерчивается понимание им роли учителя и поэта, раскрывается вопрос о восприятии и оценке творчества в социокультурном контексте. Определяются особенности поэтики, присущие эстетике барокко. Делается вывод, что дальнейшее развитие национальной элиты в выявленном направлении не состоялось в полной мере в результате Петровских реформ.

Ключевые слова: Прохор Коломнятин; русская литература XVII в.; интеллектуальная элита России; силлабические вирши.

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