

Simeon Polotsky's Epistolary Corpus: From Manuscripts to Edition

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About 260 of Simeon Polotsky's letters and epistles in the form of autographs and scribal copies survive as manuscripts from the 17th century. The letters are written in six language varieties: Polish, Latin, Ruthenian, Ruthenian Church Slavonic, Russian Church Slavonic, and Russian. Establishing principles for the publication of such a multilingual corpus is a far from trivial matter. It is clear that the texts must be edited in a way that will satisfy the needs of the widest possible circle of researchers.

A letter may by its very nature be viewed not only as historical biographical document, but also as a distinct literary form and an important source of linguistic information. The publication of Simeon Polotsky's letters and epistles will thus allow historians:

- to settle a number of disputed questions about the biography of the famous poet or shed light on little-known but interesting episodes of his life,
- to present new data on Simeon's correspondents, who were prominent Ukrainian and Belorussian literary, church and public figures in the 1660s – 1670s,
- to establish new facts relevant to the complicated cultural and political situation of the East Slavic lands in the second half of the 17th century.

Simeon Polotsky's Epistolary Corpus will allow literary historians:

- to discover another aspect of his literary work: Simeon Polotsky, the "sweet-worded preacher", "philosopher", "orator and poet", was also an epistolary writer of vast rhetorical knowledge,
- to present Simeon's letters as a new stage in the history of the East Slavic epistolary culture and to place them in the context of the literary culture of the Moscow and Ukrainian-Belorussian Baroque in the second half of the 17th century,
- to define their place in the development of modern world literature, placing them in the context of Polish epistolary culture as well as of the Humanist literary *cult of epistolary friendship*.

The letters and epistles of Simeon Polotsky provide valuable material for language history as well. They are of interest not only from the point of view of historical linguistics, but also from the perspective of historical sociolinguistics and historical pragmatics. They will help:

- to convincingly demonstrate the heterogeneity of the language situation in the Moscow State in the second half of the 17th century,
- to show what meaning Ruthenian and Ruthenian Church Slavonic varieties had at the level of Government (*resp.* the Tsar's court),
- to explore by means of fresh materials the role of the Ruthenian language as a linguistic catalyst in the history of Russian,
- to describe use of language varieties in the Moscow State of the 17th century and reconstruct the mechanisms of code switching,
- to broaden the language contact studies to include the theory of "texts in contact",
- and finally, to approach questions of pragmatics, i. e., determining and ideally differentiating elements of literality and orality in epistolary conversation.

The perspectives outlined above by no means exhaust the possibilities that will open up for researchers studying Simeon Polotsky's letters and epistles. The value of the materials is beyond doubt and the publication of the letters will without doubt stimulate future generations of historians, literary critics and linguists, as well as philosophers and theologians.

What should the editing principles be to make the entire corpus of texts accessible to scholars from a wide range of disciplines? How faithfully should we try to reproduce the handwritten text? What kinds of unification are appropriate, when do we need to retain the linguistic information of the texts, while improving their readability for non-linguists? Should we handle the Cyrillic texts and those written in the Latin alphabet using the same editing principles, or assume that the Polish and Latin texts contain no separate linguistic information regarding their graphics, orthography or grammar, thus attaining the highest possible degree of unification? These issues will form the core of the proposed presentation.