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THE MOTIF OF KING DAVID IN MOTHER MARIA SKOBCOVA'S OEUVRE

Mother Maria Skobcova's¹ (1891-1945) revivalist religious philosophy and demand for evangelical love for one's neighbour did not during her lifetime evoke the attention she had wished. During the past decades, however, her oeuvre has become gradually accessible to wider audiences and new generations. The publicity has been recently reinforced by her canonisation, which has raised positive reactions, but also protests.² Against this background, in scholarly terms, it is impossible to write about Skobcova's life and oeuvre without mentioning their manipulation: in the Soviet Union, her biography was Sovietised according to the principles of socialist realism in order to praise her as a heroine of the French Resistance.³ In Israel, the Holocaust memorial organisation Jad Vashem granted Skobcova the title of 'righteous peacemaker' (*pravednik mitra*), but nevertheless censured her poem *Zvezda Davida*, „David's star“, so that its appeal for reunion between the Synagogue and Church would not be so evident.⁴ These examples are mentioned to introduce the focus of this article. It is Skobcova's central theological idea of reviving Orthodoxy through reconciliation between Jews and Christians, for that purpose she used the motif of King David⁵ in her

¹ Mother Maria Skobcova was born as Elizaveta Pilenko in Riga in 1891. She lived in France after 1924 and died in the Ravensbrück concentration camp on March 31, 1945. In her first marriage she was known as Kuz'mina-Karavaeva. Her oeuvre consists of modernist poetry, prose, pamphlets and modern sacral art. She is known as a religious thinker and activist, whose fiery evangelism and provocative opposition to the Nazis during the occupation of France led to her arrest and later death. Mother Maria Skobcova was canonised by the Orthodox Church (Patriarchate of Constantinople) in January 2004, together with her martyred collaborators Father Dmitrij Klepinin, Il'ja Fondaminskij, Jurij Skobcov.

² In his article „Paschal'nyj podarok konstantinopol'skogo patriarha“, *Russkij vestnik*, 14.5. 2004, S. Fomin criticised Skobcova's canonisation in hostile terms, whereas the priest Mikhail Špoljanskij (2004) in his sympathetic response to Hieromonk Sergij Rybko's negative view (2002) emphasised Skobcova's example of love to one's neighbour. The protests have appeared mostly unsophisticated. For example, Mother Maria's habit of smoking and her negligence of Sunday Mass as well as her contacts with intellectuals have been criticised, whereas minimum attention has been paid to her religious writings or her art.

³ Film „Mat' Mariia“ (1982) gives a good impression of the stylisation, as well as the novel bei the same name (1984) by E. Mikulina.

⁴ Aržakovskaja-Klepinina, 1999.

⁵ In the Jewish history, David's kingship signified the zenith of the nation-state, while in the Christian tradition, the image of David is seen as a messianic foreshadowing of Christ's com-

oeuvre. This topic, crucial for our understanding of Skobcova's intellectual legacy, has not yet been researched sufficiently.

According to Skobcova's interpretation of the *Zeitgeist* in inter-war Europe and her readings of V.S. Solov'ev's religious philosophy, the looming Second World War signified the eschatological end of linear history. In the apocalyptic situation, the way to salvation was only possible through the reconciliation between Jews and Christians, a task in which, according to Skobcova, the Russian Orthodox believers were supposed to play a leading role. From the 1930s to the early 40s, her pamphlets, poetry and visual art systematically promoted this idea.⁶ Simultaneously, these works were closely related to her real-life activities. Her artistic worldview was to a great extent influenced by the Symbolists' holistic concepts of merging life with art, or „life-creation“⁷ (*žiznetvorčestvo*), with which she was affiliated during her younger years in the St. Petersburg avant-garde circles. Skobcova systematically intertwined every-day tasks (*byť*) with an elevated viewpoint, thus contrasting her personal microcosmos with the divine macrocosmos. For example, her icon, which she painted for a small church in Paris, was a stylised, primitivist version of Andrej Rublev's medieval *The Old Testament Trinity/Abraham's Hospitality*, but at the same time it was reminiscent of the real-life canteen she maintained for her unemployed countrymen.

More than any other recurrent motif in Skobcova's oeuvre, the Old Testament's „King, Prophet and Psalmist David“, as she would call him in her works, incarnated her ideal of the god-manly creator and artist, the mediator between God and man. On the one hand, Skobcova's representation of David was based on the Scriptures and liturgical texts, on the other hand, it manifested current politico-theological issues in an apocalyptic light.⁸ David's personage and allusions to him are reiterated in Mother Maria's prose work *Jurali* (1915), in her versed plays and such essays as *Istoki tvorčestva*, „Origins of Creation,“ (1934). During the Nazi occupation of Paris, she reflected on the issue in her mystery plays *Soldaty* „Soldiers“, *Sem' čaš* „Seven chalices“, and in the long poem *Duchov den'* „Day of the Holy Ghost“. To its full extent, perhaps, her concept of David is incorporated in her pictures of King David with scenes from his life.

The following analysis consists of two sections. There will first be an introduction and synopsis of the biblical tale of King David, its main plot and narra-

ing. In medieval clerical and lay concepts, David appeared as a type of Christ, but also of the Church and of an ideal Christian ruler; therefore, his imagery found a wide resonance in various arts and was used to serve political interests. Obviously Skobcova was aware of this tradition, examined e.g. by Buslaev, 1861, in *Drevnerusskaja narodnaja literatura i iskusstvo*, „Dlja istorii ruskoj živopisi XVI veka“, esp. pp. 287-288.

⁶ Most of these texts have been republished in the collection *Zatva duča*, „Harvest of Spirit“ (2004).

⁷ See Paperno, 1994.

⁸ Mjuller, Ljudol'f, 2000.

tive functions.⁹ After that, the biblical concept of David's kingship will be contrasted by V. Solov'ev's theocratic concept of 'the New Israel', that is Russia. In the second section, Skobcova's concept of David in word and image will be examined. It will be asked from which elements and characteristics Skobcova's figure of David was constructed and for what topical purposes it was used.

1. King David of Israel and of New Israel

1.1. David of the Bible

One of the most powerful accounts of the Old Testament, the story of King David, delineates the throne succession history and political nation building of the Jewish statehood's heyday. Moreover, the text in 1-2 Samuel has elements of global wisdom literature and is great verbal art in its own right. Its narrative tension is grounded in the hero's paradigmatic relationship to Yahweh. The deity and judge, and David, his anointed hero, are bound to each other: whatever David undertakes, he has the divine blessing with him. And even in cases when Yahweh's retribution appears grim, David without protest yields to his dispensation. Through his repentance and sacrifices David can even make Yahweh remove his planned punishment from his people. Consequently, first and foremost David's tale represents the ideal relationship between God and the representative of his people of the covenant. The hero is repeatedly confronted by unapproachable and incomprehensible mysteries, which test his truthfulness to Yahweh. „Providence is not a matter of technical predestination“, says Gunn in his narrative analysis of David's story, and continues „In a sense the view is that we meet so often in the Old Testament, namely that blessing may come out of curse. Put it another way, Yahweh is the God of the unexpected“.¹⁰ This paradox highlights the dialogue and dispute between the Lord and his servant and makes the story an inexhaustible source for inspiration. Its drama consists of a series of up and downs: the hero gains and loses power; several times he has to flee and go through metamorphosis. He has inherited status and authority from his ancestors and for his part passes them on to his kinsfolk, but this requires exploits and sacrifices. David's story never ends: he is a link in the chain; his exemplary exploits and fame are commemorated in new versions and by new generations.¹¹

As for wisdom literature it is characteristic that the hero and his people never remain happy for a long period; rather, the story suggests that 'everything has its

⁹ For comments on this section, the author is grateful to Professor Timo Veijola (†).

¹⁰ Gunn, 1978, 110.

¹¹ Among countless reminiscences to King David's prototype, the Celtic myth of Parcivale and Holy Grail should be mentioned.

time'. Cycles of ordeals resulting in reward or reconciliation soon give way to new seeds of wrath; wrath leads to the necessity to escape and to loss of one's authority. The kiss of peace does not hold peace; lust causes adultery and murder. A wife's mockery leads to her childlessness, whereas, paradoxically, an illegitimate relationship conceives a legal male inheritor, which is one of the tale's great lessons. Continuously envy leads to fratricide, power to administrative corruption. In the epilogue, the mightiest king, lover of wives and concubines, is predestined to lose his potency. David's awareness of his responsibility before Yahweh and his people underline the mystery of divine law which is revealed to him. To communicate this message, the whole range of human experience is described in a non-discreete, illustrative fashion. David's significance is illuminated from multiple perspectives. As noted above, his kingship epitomises the heyday of Jewish monarchy, the so-called fourth period of history, before the fall in 587 BC and captivity in Babylon. As a prophecy, the account introduces David as forefather to Christ, „David's son“. In addition to David's public significance, his exploits as well as his sins as a private man are disclosed. In the following, the main narrative episodes as told in the Books of Samuel; are listed. To clarify the invariant functions, important in the organisation of the narrative, they are noted in brackets.

1. The Lord regrets having anointed Saul and wants to find him a successor to rule over Israel. He anoints the youngest child of the Bethlehemite Jesse. David is a shepherd, ruddy and good-looking. 1 Sam 16:12. (Presentation of origin and role)
2. When Saul is tempted by an evil spirit, David plays the harp to him and he is refreshed. Saul begins to love David who becomes his armourbearer. 1 Sam 16:21-23. (Presentation of a gift to mentor/adversary)
3. David prevails over Goliath with a sling and stone. 1 Sam 17:50. (Ordeal)
4. David is victorious in wars and is rewarded by getting Saul's daughter Michal as wife. Sam 18:8, and 18:20. Saul becomes envious and hates David. (Ordeal, reward; mentor turns into adversary, complication)
5. Jonathan, Saul's son and David make a covenant. 1 Sam 20. David has to escape Saul. By way of exception, Ahimelech the priest gives him hallowed bread to feed his men and Goliath's sword. Fearing King Achish David feigns madness. 1 Sam 21. (Cycle of ordeals, blessing/magic help by hallowed bread and sword).
6. David cuts off Saul's skirt [= cape] in secret, but does not kill him. He reveals himself to Saul saying that he has not sinned against Saul although Saul haunted his soul. 1 Sam 24. Repetition in Chapter 26. (David's superiority and his righteousness).

7. Saul's and Jonathan's deaths. David laments them. After a sequel of attacks and revenges, David is anointed King of all Israel. 2 Sam 1-5. (Losses; recognition and reward).
8. David brings the ark to the city and dances before the Lord with all his might. Michal mocks him and is punished by childlessness. 2 Sam 6. (Joy before God, non-recognition before wife).
9. David seduces Uriah's wife Bathseba and sends Uriah to war where he is killed. It displeases the Lord and David's and Bathseba's first child dies. 2 Sam 11-12. (Sin and retribution). After a series of conflicts and repentance, the famine in the country ends. 2 Sam 21. (Reconciliation). Later, David's and Bathseba's second child Solomon is born and will be anointed as king, which is revealed by the prophet Nathan. 1 Kgs 1:11 -2:12. (Curse turns into blessing).

In this short synopsis many important protagonists and story lines, like David's son's Absalom's uprising and revenge for his sister's Tamar's rape (signifying the cycle of envy, lust, fratricide, punishment and sorrow) are ignored. However, already these key episodes highlight the crucial tension between the narrative texture and its deeper meanings. On the texture level, the narration proceeds chronologically, but on the semantic level the conflict between human vs. providential planning is reiterated cyclically. The hero's intellectual and physical capacity, his courage and emotional depth are in focus, as well his errors, sin and repentance. All this manifests his several roles. For example, in the role of *psalmist* David calms down Saul by playing to him, while as a *prophet* he governs his people according to the providential plan. David the future *king* destroys enemies by tens of thousands, whereas Saul's reputation counts for only a tenth of that. In simple moral terms, David often acts controversially: he is absolutely strict in not harming Lord's anointed ones even when they haunt his soul; however, he commits adultery and murder, not to mention his engagement in massacres and tribal revenges. The providential dispensation, manifest through the omniscient narrator's voice, is illuminated through the hero's internal conflicts. Also the story's eschatological time perspective emphasises providential logic: every imperfection and unfulfilled mission is a necessary link that foreshadows the next generation's role and task.¹²

Apart from the narrative prose, there are two psalms included in David's life. One is David's lamentation over the deaths of Saul and the beloved youth Jonathan, the other one is to praise the Lord who delivered the protagonist out of the hand of all his enemies, including Saul (2 Sam 22). The unchanging paradox be-

¹² For example, since David has shed so much blood upon the earth he cannot build the temple (1 Chronicles 22:8). Fully aware of his obstacle, he makes arrangements that after his death, his son Solomon will build the temple.

tween human sufferings and providential necessity is valorised from multiple perspectives. For example, David as a loyal subject both laments Saul's death and thanks God for being saved from Saul's murderous rage. David's sovereignty as psalmist constitutes one more aspect is his portrait that is opposite to the man of action. When it comes to Skobcova's interpretation of biblical David, it seems that for her, the tripartite division of his roles is of major importance. Skobcova highlights the elements of an ideal king, prophet and psalmist, and utilises them in order to illustrate her version of Russian theocracy. In the following passage, the concepts of theocracy, delineated by Vladimir Solov'ev, one of Skobcova's favourite thinkers, will be addressed more in detail.

1.2. David and the Revival of Theocracy in the "New Israel"

Vladimir Sergejevič Solov'ev (1853–1900) is the religious philosopher whose theocratic visions evoked most enthusiasm among the pre-Revolutionary cultural elite. In *Evrejstvo i christianskij vopros*, „Jewry and the Christian question“ (1884), Solov'ev points to the reasons why the Jews did not approve Jesus as Messiah: first, the Christians' hostile attitude prevented them, and secondly, the coming of the Messiah was primarily a question of political relevance for them. Solov'ev asserts that theocracy is a common task for Jews and Christians and underlines that 'in religious terms' the most powerful part of Jewry [in the 19th century] lived within the territory of Russia and Poland.¹³ The geographical co-existence, in his thinking, contributes to the common religious, political and historical mission of the two religions. According to Solov'ev, Christians and Jews have the same mission of establishing a righteous (*pravednyj*) state. In his concept, it is necessary that divine administration expand itself beyond the purely religious sphere to the political and social spheres. In theocratic society, the administration has three functions: a high priest (*pervosvjaščennik*) is needed to administer the religious sphere, a tsar to administer the political sphere as anointed by God, and finally, a prophet, that is an independent preacher and teacher, is needed to administer the social sphere. In Solov'ev's triune concept, „Священник направляет, царь управляет, пророк исправляет“ (the priest directs, the tsar governs, the prophet corrects).¹⁴ According to the principles of divine administration, the clergy's authority is based on tradition, the tsar's on law, but the prophet's authority is based on his individual freedom. The Old Testament's Jewry had intact the service of clergy, starting from the time of Aron, and that of tsardom, starting from the time of Saul, but both of these services were subordinated to the prophet's service, which Solov'ev sees as disharmonious. „The greatest ambassador of the Jewish nation was not the high priest

¹³ Solov'ev, 1979, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33. (Translations of the citations are mine. – E.K.)

Aron, but the prophet Moses, and if later David played such a prominent role in the fates of Jewish theocracy, it was because he was not only the king, but also a prophet¹⁵

In the short pamphlet *Novozavetnyj Izrail'* (1885), „Israel of the New Testament“ as well as in the massive *Istorija i buduščnost' teokratii*, „History and Future of Theocracy“ (1885-1887), Solov'ev analyses at length the histories of biblical forefathers including King David. „Israel of the New Testament“ elaborates on the issue of the conversion of Jews living in Russia to accept the Messiah of the New Testament. His pamphlet is built upon a dialogue between the author-narrator and Iosif Rabinovich, the founder of the evangelical praying house „Bethlehem“ in Kishinev.¹⁶ Rabinovich proclaims the challenge for a new supranational covenant, that is, continuation of the old covenant by including Christians in it. He blames the Talmud, for example, for its human-centred beliefs and proposes a new religious concept of Israel of the New Testament. [...]

A more seminal work, „History and Future of Theocracy“, is a detailed account of biblical history seen as a deterministic development path leading to supranational theocracy. David is introduced as the ideal mediator and god-man (*bogočelovek*), foreshadowing the coming Messiah. In his critique relating to the three services or administrative functions (*služenija*) in theocracy, Solov'ev reproaches the institution of the high priests for concentrating too much on the past, and the kingship for concentrating on the present. To attain ideal harmony within the three services, free prophets are needed. The ideal differentiation of the three administrative functions appears to Solov'ev as the Jewish theocracy's culmination point,¹⁷ which occurred during King David's kingship. He portrays David as the ideal non-corrupt king: notwithstanding his victorious warfare, he preserves his humility and ecstasy before God, in contrast to his successors who betray God which results in the destruction of their nation-state.¹⁸ On the whole, Solov'ev's ideal of Jewish-Christian theocracy presents him as an inspired exegete whose influence on the Russian Symbolists – as well as on the conceptualists of Russian revolutions, the majority of whom were of Jewish origin – should not be underestimated.

It is evident that crucial elements in Skobcova's theocratic model and its mythical hero King David are drawn from Solov'ev, whom she both explicitly

¹⁵ Ibid., 33-34. As for his criticism towards Protestantism, Solov'ev argues that the Protestants had prioritised the role of prophet and thus belittled tsardom. Thus, priesthood was mixed up with the service as prophet and turned into everybody's right. In „real Christianity“, he asserts, priesthood requires exploits and asceticism as the examples of Elijah and John the Baptist illuminate. (Ibid., 40). When it comes to negative attitude toward Protestantism, Skobcova follows Solov'ev. However, in an ideal administration, all these three services would be in triune harmony.

¹⁶ Solov'ev, 1966, 207.

¹⁷ Ibid., 545-548.

¹⁸ Ibid., 560.

cited and alluded to.¹⁹ After the [...] collapse of old Russia, which had sustained illusions of theocratic organisation and administration, Skobcova like many of her countrymen did not lose her obsession with the idea of 'divine empire.' Russia remained for her the sole bearer of Christianity even under the Communist regime, which, as she thought, would remain in power only a limited period of time. Notwithstanding its atheist leaders, the true, faithful Russia would play a leading role in resolving Europe's future, which was equal to an eschatological utopia whose prerequisite was the reconciliation between Judaism and Christianity. To Skobcova, this concept appeared as the most burning issue of her time. It was the only logical outcome of World War II, she thought. Like Solov'ev, she was primarily interested in the reconciliation between the Russian Orthodox and Jewish believers, living side by side in the „New Israel“, a task to which she dedicated herself totally throughout the 1930s and early 1940s.

Skobcova's prophesy on Russia's future and its mission followed a modernised Solov'evian concept of biblical theocracy. While Solov'ev's analysis was written to criticise imperial Russia and its historical errors, Skobcova in her turn elaborated her prophecies, or political forecasts, from another position, first of a revolutionary intellectual, then of a *déclassé* exile. In Skobcova's elaboration on King David's motif, there are not only traits of a god-manly androgynous creator in the Symbolists' spirit, but also of an ideal political leader committed to an eschatological utopia. David's messianic figure in the Nazi-dominated Europe²⁰ strikes as the messenger (*vestnik*) for freedom, the *bonus vir* and bold bearer of the star of chosenness. Skobcova's manifestation of these motifs will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter.

2. The Motif of King David in Skobcova's Oeuvre

2.1. The image of a god-manly creator in the pre-Revolutionary period

As was noted earlier, the young Elizaveta Kuz'mina-Karavaeva was affiliated with the Russian Symbolists, especially with the poet Aleksandr Blok, who first introduced Solov'ev's ideas to her. Blok's worldview and his poetry were a decisive stimulus that influenced Skobcova's ideal of god-manly creativity, which to a great extent equalled to her concept of seeing life as a path of exploits (*podvižničestvo*) and dedication to fulfil one's missionary task (*obrečenie*).

¹⁹ In exile, Skobcova wrote two essays on Solov'ev's religious philosophy in which she tried to relate it to contemporary challenges. The first essay appeared in 1929. See Skobcova 2004b.

²⁰ In fact, the émigrés' situation in inter-war Europe resembled that of the Jews in pre-Revolutionary Russia or Poland: both groups were stateless and deprived of civil rights in their host countries. The challenge of reconciliation between the Synagogue and Church can be thus seen as a logical continuation to the pre-Revolutionary utopias and as an outcome of the collective fate of the intellectual elite in 'captivity of the godless Babylon'.

These issues are expressed already in the poet's early prose work *Jurali* (1915) and the collection of poems *Ruf* (1916). In his commentary Šustov has correctly called *Jurali* a „hagiography“ (*žítie*), that is, an idealised curriculum vitae presenting the prophetic hero's path toward transfiguration and deification seen as if from the end-point of the path. However, Šustov's characterisation of *Jurali* as stylisation of gospel texts is not sufficient.²¹ Rather, *Jurali* synthesises the biblical heroic prototype with the Symbolists' concept of god-manly creativity, and adds to them contemporary political-apocalyptic challenges. It is not enough to imply gospel paraphrase when both the political agenda and the author's personal quest of *modus vivendi* equally figured in the stylised autobiographical text.

Jurali begins with the narrator's statement that before his death, he wants to pass on his teacher's, *Jurali's*, words. After this typically hagiographic opening – the narrator poses as the protagonist's pupil – the account, divided into 57 passages, describes *Jurali's* exploits. At the beginning, *Jurali* is a young shepherd who loses a sheep,²² thus alluding to the images both of biblical David and Christ. Like David, *Jurali* is also characterised as psalmist (*pevec*), prophet and tsar, thus hinting at his three theocratic services. The hero performs various miracles: he heals both physical and psychic diseases, blesses ships before travel, soldiers before battle as well as fishermen and their nets before they go out to sea. When asked, he also resurrects a boy's dead bird, although by doing so he dismisses his own activity: all his miracles appear to him as casual and momentary. *Jurali* is well aware that he is assigned (*obrečen*) by Providence, which causes conflicts between his freedom of choice (including freedom to sin) and his god-manly mission, his mortality and immortality, which appear to occupy him the most:

Смертный, я обречен на бессмертие; но дабы исполнился во мне круг жизни человеческой, смерть избираю я. Она же не будет властна над мной.²³

(Although mortal, I am dedicated to immortality. If the cycle of human life is fulfilled in me, I will go to my death. However, it has no power over me.)

Aware of his chosenness, *Jurali* is willing to bear other people's sins, which is demonstrated by several examples. In his teachings, he underlines the importance of the purity of the soul: one can have blood and filth on one's hands, yet the soul can remain undamaged. In contrast, lack of blood on one's hands does

²¹ Skobcova 2001, 708.

²² *Ibid.*, 338.

²³ *Ibid.*, 386.

not necessarily mean purity of soul.²⁴ This paradox discloses the ambiguity of both the biblical David and of the modern „neo-theocratic“ hero. In the quest for meaningful juxtapositions between the profiles of David and Jurali, one notes the similarity of narrative displacements. In both stories, the hero develops and transfigures from a humble shepherd into a mighty, magically powerful king. David passes through a cycle of ordeals; and in *Jurali*, the hero at several times symbolically „dies“ (as Skobcova puts it). That is, several times the hero must flee his surroundings, leave behind his loved ones, take on a new appearance and begin anew. In addition, the hero's same-sex friendships (compare with David's covenant with Jonathan) are more intensive than those with his wives. This alludes both to David's story and to the ideal of androgyny, so central to the Symbolist movement.²⁵

Apart from David, there are other inter-textual allusions in Jurali's figure. Those are for example to the saintly (*prepodobnaja*) Marina or to the monk Vitalij, two ancient ascetics and sufferers for other people's sake about whom Skobcova later wrote in her collection of modernised and stylised hagiographic tales, *Žatva ducha*, „Harvest of Spirit“ (1927). There also are salient differences between the portraits of Jurali and biblical David: [...], Jurali experiences „a second birth“, after which „his lust died out“.²⁶ In his continence, Jurali clearly differs from the Old Testament model, which underlines procreation. However, the problems of erotic love are addressed throughout the account; and asceticism *per se* is not idealised. For example, although Jurali lives for a while in a monastery he strongly condemns the lack of love and grace prevailing there: love is called shame, and confessing one's love to someone leads to the expulsion of both persons. Because his *starec* loved him, Jurali was expelled from the monastery; and he ends up wandering and sustaining freedom of spirit. The freedom of spirit and dislike of monastic rule had a reflection in the author Skobcova's life. In 1932, seventeen years after having published *Jurali*, Skobcova took the monastic vows, but did not want to live in a monastery since she criticised its rule as “Outdated and incompatible with the émigré situation”. Her model of being ‘a nun in the world’ was of course not exceptional in the émigré circles, but rather to the contrary.

Jurali's death is not described: he only takes leave of his pupils and ascends into the mountains. Prophetically, he describes his fate as a mystery of grace and magnificence, and continues:

²⁴ Ibid., 379.

²⁵ Matich 1994, 25-50. Through androgynous behaviour, renunciation of procreation, and sublimation of erotic love into creation of eternal pieces of art, the Symbolists aimed to break the natural cycle of birth and death.

²⁶ Skobcova 2001, 372. Skobcova called her work autobiographical. The author's everyday reality as a single mother, disappointed in love, could have been interpreted as reflected in her hero. At several places, Jurali's figure appears as maternal (nourishing children), but it also seems to exhibit the author's ideal of androgyny.

Вот ухожу я от вас и знаю, что не оставлю печали в ваших сердцах. По земле рассеетесь вы; ко всем алчущим в дверь простучитесь; и радость великую им даруете. Вам оставляю я бремя радости моей горькой.

(I leave you knowing that no pain remains in your hearts. You will disperse on earth and knock on the door of all thirsty; and give them great joy. I will leave you with the burden of my bitter joy).²⁷

This 'testament' again reveals modernist tones and the paradoxical mission of the god-manly artist. In sum, *Jurali* proclaims divine, free creativity and merging of the ideals of the Old and New Testaments with modern life's challenges.²⁸ It is noteworthy that *Jurali* was written already during World War I. Later in her life, Skobcova gradually came to the result that the way out of oppression was not in a political revolution, but in spiritual renewal. The spiritual leader would be the anointed, religious and political prophet and creative artist, a lord (*vlastelin*) of his destiny. She described this prototype in her art and imitated it in her life.

As we see, parallels between the two heroic figures, biblical David and Skobcova's *Jurali*, are to some extent complementary. However, it remains noteworthy that Skobcova elaborated on the god-manly hero systematically and in several art forms. The ideal hero is at the same time a manifestation of an idealised artist-creator, and a model of religious emulation. A similar androgynous, god-manly hero appears, for example, in her watercolours *The Good Shepherd* and *Tsar, Prophet and Psalmist David*, both dated in 1913-1917.²⁹ The portrait of the Good Shepherd does not reveal the character's sex in spite of its nakedness, which resembles the Orthodox icon of Christ's baptism and manifests androgyny as a metaphor of transfiguration, that is, advanced spirituality. *The Good Shepherd* watercolour matches both with the Symbolists' transfiguration concepts and with the themes addressed in *Jurali*. However, the male androgynous hero may have not fully exhibited Skobcova's ideal creator, and in the next year she published a complement to it, the collection of poems *Ruf*, „Ruth“. *Ruf* appears as a logical continuation to the theme of god-manly creativity, now presented from a nominally feminine speaker's point of view. The feminine speaker does not, however, as such diverge from the masculine one: the figures of *Jurali* and *Ruth* are both representations of a free creator, messenger and prophet of the

²⁷ Ibid., 388.

²⁸ Solov'ev's *Smysl ljubvi*, „The meaning of love“, may have influenced the author of *Jurali*. See Solov'ev 1966.

²⁹ See illustrations in Skobcova, 2004a, 116-117. The scene of herd and desert are symbolical, and they allude to both David and the gospels. Both of these watercolours present their heroes in serene contemplation, in dusk or dawn.

historical signs.³⁰ The title *Ruf'*, naturally, refers to the heroine's genealogical link to David and thus to Jesus. Since both works, *Jurali* and *Ruf'*, are conditionally autobiographic, the name Ruth seems to have one more designation: it refers to the author's self-identification as partaker in the Judeo-Christian covenant and building of the New Jerusalem. The biblical Ruth's exogamy may explain why her name was given to the collection of poems, since in other aspects the biblical Ruth's story has very little in common with *Ruf'*. The name *Jurali*,³¹ in its turn, connotes a merging of the name of the author's biological father, Jurij, and the name of her mentor, poet Aleksander (Blok). The combination of names appears as a playful act between 'texts of life and texts of art.'

2.2. The Motif of the Theocratic Hero between 1929–1942

Skobcova, like the average Russian intellectual in exile, suffered both materially and mentally. A way out was eventually found in the revival of spiritual struggle and new organisation of religious life. Together with like-minded friends, like the philosopher Nikolaj Berdjajev or Father Sergii Bulgakov, she condemned socialism and capitalism equally strongly and called for a new spiritual-social creativeness as a prerequisite of authentic Christian revival.³² Although Berdjajev and Skobcova did not have exactly the same views about modern sacral art,³³ both equally enthusiastically proclaimed its importance. A sequence of crises starting from the loss of a child in 1926, leading to an ecclesiastical divorce and entrance into monasticism in 1932, set Mother Maria on a radical missionary path for good.

However, as an artist, Skobcova's quest of spiritual freedom seems not to have changed that much; rather, she remained true to her ideals of god-manhood and the critical role of artist-prophet in society. Skobcova had not abandoned ideals of theocracy, but started to promote them in her texts and in sacral art anew. In addition, she anew started to study theology and art history. It is not excluded that she became affiliated with some of the examples of King David's representations in western medieval literature and art, and, what is more intri-

³⁰ The chapters of *Ruf'*, *Ischod*, *Vestniki*, *Vojna*, *Obrečennost'*, *Prozrenie*, *Iskupitel'*, *Sputniki*, *Preobražennaja zemlja*, *Poslednie dni*, *Monach* (Exodus, Messengers, War, Dedication, Regaining sight, Redeemer, Fellow-travellers, Transfigured soil, Last days, Monk) to a great extent parallel the themes of *Jurali*. Its quotations of the Old Testament's Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Joel, as well as of Blok's *Nečajannaja radost'*, underline the poem's prophetic message.

³¹ In his comments, Šustov has noted that the latter part of the name relates to a Muslim imam Ali. In the Symbolists' context the ideal religion consists of a combination of religions, thus, allusion to „Ali“ is possible. Nevertheless, Aleksander Blok seems to be a more obvious point of reference. In: Skobcova, 2001, 708, fn 1.

³² See Berdjajev, *Smysl tvorčestva*, [1916], 1985, 32. Paris: Ymca-Press.

³³ Skobcova's *Istoki tvorčestva* (Origins of Creation), 1934, was written as a comment to Berdjajev's *Smysl tvorčestva*.

going, with their explicit political connections. For example, in a Basel statuette Emperor Sigismund is portrayed unmistakably as David Rex and Sacerdos.³⁴ The scene is a pre-figuration of the Epiphany: David's offering of water (2 Sam 23, 13-18) is seen as a pre-figuration of the gospel's Epiphany, depicted as the visit of the Magi, but it also indicates to the latest policy of the council in Basel. In other words, the medieval rulers felt free in combining biblical themes with lay interests and proudly presented themselves as „new Davids“.³⁵

Thus, Skobcova's illustrations of King David's life in a modern setting obviously continue this tradition. However, she combined the medieval, iconographical tradition, both western and Russian, with a revivalist Russian Orthodox political theology in an original manner. Her pictures of King David with scenes from his life illustrate a burning issue of the 1930s and 40s, epitomised in the persecutions of Jews. Her solidarity toward the persecuted manifested itself not only in art but also in life. With her companions within the organisation Orthodox Action (*Pravoslavnoe Delo*) she helped the Jews to escape deportation; it seems as if in her poems, pamphlets and visual art she explained the meaning and sense of her actions.

In a renowned poem of 1942, Skobcova suggested that the significance of David's star was a noble mark of chosenness.³⁶ In another work, the pamphlet *Razmyšlenija o sud'bach Evropy i Azii*, „Contemplation on the fate of Europe and Asia“, written only shortly prior to her arrest, she wrote:

Сын Давидов, не признанный своим народом Мессия, распинается сейчас вместе с теми, кто некогда его не признал. Крест Голгофы лег на плечи всего Израиля. И этот голгофский крест обязывает. Сейчас речь идет о небывалом и не могущем быть раньше – речь идет о христианской церкви израильского народа, о свершении и исполнении времен.³⁷

(The son of David, who was not recognised by his people Messiah, is crucified today together with those who at the time did not recognise him. The cross of Golgotha was laid upon the shoulders of all Israel. And this cross of Golgotha obliges. The question is now about the unprecedented and previously impossible – the Christian Church of the Jewish people, about end and completion of times.)

This statement puts it clearly enough: the author saw the war as an opportunity for religious disputes to be finally overcome. According to her eschatology,

³⁴ Eggenberger 2003, 488.

³⁵ The medieval cult of King David found its apotheosis when Charlemagne was canonised on David's feast day on 29 December in 1165 in the cathedral of Aachen. Ibid.

³⁶ See Skobcova 2001, 189. The poem starts: «Два треугольника, звезда» (Two triangles, a star).

³⁷ Skobcova 2004, 496.

if the reconciliation and reunion between the Jews and (Orthodox Russian) Christians were to take place, the mythical Third Rome (Moscow) would triumph. It would become „Mecca for the proletariat, Israel for the lovers of freedom“, and as a result, „a grave for despotism“. ³⁸ In secular terms, Skobcova's last pamphlet appears wildly unrealistic and at best comments on the dead-end in which the author and her companions found themselves. She did not want to save her life, but acted provocatively, not trying to hide her activities before the Nazi surveillance. On the contrary, she prophesied in a poem that she would be „burnt at a stake“, ³⁹ that is to say, she chose Golgotha voluntarily as the logical conclusion of her dedication to *imitatio Christi*.

In the mystery play *Soldaty*, also written in the early 40s, in a scene of interrogation by the occupiers, through the old man's character the author holds up the protecting shield of the forefather David and the guiding star as the vehicles for salvation:

Старик (про себя)

Знак Егови, щит праотца Давида...

Третий солдат

Какой там щит? Щитом не защитися

От танка быстрого иль пулемета...

Старик

Звезда, звезда... ⁴⁰

Old man (for himself)

Jehovah's sign, forefather David's shield...

Third soldier

What shield? A shield is not to protect you

From a quick tank or machinegun...

Old man

Star, star...

This war-time play and especially its denouement manifest the author's wishful thinking: the old Jew and a Christian youth find each other. The youth prays to God:

[...]

Последний час, последний их Исход

И очевидностью смени их веру.

³⁸ Ibid., 512.

³⁹ Skobcova 2001, 185.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 326.

(Last minute, their last Exodus
By evidence, change their faith).

And the old man addresses his prayer to his people:

[...]
Слушай Израил, – склоняются главы, –
Царь приближается в облаке Славы.⁴¹

(Listen Israel, – heads are bowed
The king approaches in a cloud of Glory.)

At the climax, their prayers soften the interrogator's heart and he lets the two men go free. *Soldiers*, surrealistic as its message may appear, must have encouraged its author and her closest companions, including her own young son Jurij Skobcov (the liable model for the youth in the play) and the converted Jewish activist П'я Fondaminskij. In real life, however, the partakers of the interrogation were not set free but sent to death camps where they perished.

These above-quoted texts reveal, however, only one part of Skobcova's works dedicated to King David's mythology. In the following section, her visual interpretations of King David's life and his three services will be addressed.

2.3. Pictures of the King David with Scenes from His Life

In France, Mother Maria established several religious community-dormitories, the sanctuaries of which she decorated with her own hands. In 1932-1940, she completed two peculiar sacral pictures depicting King David with scenes from his life.⁴² One is completed in the traditional icon-painting technique, that is, with tempera on a wooden panel. As the Illustration 1 shows, the work is seriously damaged so that the last scenes are difficult to interpret.⁴³ Fortunately the other one, Illustration 2, completed on fabric, in just forty days,⁴⁴ as a tour de force, has survived better. It is a huge textile, length 5 m and height 70 cm, stylised according to the medieval Bayeux tapestry, which illustrated the Englishmen's victory over the Frenchmen in the battle of 1066.⁴⁵ Skobcova's work

⁴¹ Ibid., 336.

⁴² Skobcova 2004a, 135-145.

⁴³ www.mere-marie.com/print217.htm (visited 21.2.2005). The work is dated 1932-1940, that is in the period when Skobcova founded and decorated several churches in Paris. Today, the icon is in the premises of the Russian Orthodox monastery in Marcenat, France.

⁴⁴ Smith 1965, 126.

⁴⁵ See the illustrations: http://www.mere-marie.com/images/p011_1.jpg, http://www.mere-marie.com/images/p011_2.jpg, http://www.mere-marie.com/images/p011_3.jpg. (visited 21.2.2005). We know that Skobcova had seen the Bayeux tapestry in a book that her son gave her as a present. It would be interesting to know whether she also was familiar with the Bamberg Codex (ca. 1170/80) containing scenes from David's life. As Stolz notes, „The po-

bears salient similarities to the Bayeux tapestry, which can be regarded as an illustration of a great national victory and its leader. For example, in both textiles, the king sits on the throne in the central scene. Some of the geometrical, architectonic as well as floral (tree) ornaments are strikingly similar. In both works, illustrative texts are provided; in Skobcova's work, they are placed above each scene. One could ask, why out of the complex, multi-plotted biblical narrative the author chose exactly those scenes. Apparently, she relied on the tradition of combining familiar scenes with topical issues of the time and situation and therefore picked those scenes that best suited her purposes. In so doing, she skilfully combined western and Russian Orthodox traditions into one and tried to persuade primarily her fellow émigrés, parishioners of the Church at the Rue de Lourmel, to take action. In her theological writings, she likewise asserted that only in freedom (in emigration) the Russian believers had the opportunity and obligation to promote theocracy and reconciliation between religions. From her point of view, Christians had to learn to honour the prehistory of their religion, that is, Judaism, whereas the Jews should be challenged to look into the future and accept Christ as the Messiah. Apparently, the tapestry was supposed to [...] pose the question: who is the David of today, who is the redeemer of the nation's sins? Who has the courage to rely on God, throw away the official power-holders' [Hitler's] armour and guns and protect the oppressed? Even if the tapestry urges radical action, its ambience is lyrical, beaming joy and praising the subordination of man's acts to divine realm and administration.

Benevič has recently correctly noted that although Skobcova was influenced by new theologians' hopes that the Jewish theocracy of King David's times would expand itself globally, her David is 'first of all a model of man's dedication to God', praising God in all his services and exploits, an archetypal poet-prophet.⁴⁶ However, in his analysis Benevič goes beyond these evident motifs. Unconvincingly he interprets the eight scenes of David's life in the light of the eight Beatitudes (Matt 5:3–10). Although it is not wrong to emphasise the author's message of reconciliation between adversaries and promotion of love of one's neighbour, the Beatitudes' text patterns do not match with the tapestry's scenes. It is more appropriate to analyse the scenes both against their context as against the biblical and liturgical intertexts. In other words, Skobcova has contrasted liturgical texts with her theocratic message of promoting the „New Israel“. The tapestry of King David's life has nine scenes in one long row, with the hero on the throne in the middle, provided with the following texts:

litical elite of the time identified with the troubled history of David's kingship, while clerical scholars saw David as a role model whose encounters with God were expressed in Psalms". Stolz 2003, 498. (497-530). The Bamberg Psalm commentary served as a model for further illustrations of „typical dialectical palace epics“. In lyrics of the same period, in particular in the *Song of Roland*, King David is equated with Duke Heinrich the Lion, *Ibid.*, 498-499.

⁴⁶ Benevič 2005, 1.

1. *Pomazanie na carstvo* (Anointment to the throne)
2. *David i Saul* (David and Saul)
3. *Pobeda Davida nad Goliafom i filistimljane* (David's victory over Goliath and the Philistines)⁴⁷
4. *Chleba predloženija* (Hallowed bread)
5. *Car', prorok i psalmopevec David* (King, prophet and psalmist David)
6. *Plasč Saula* (Saul's skirt)
7. *David pljačet pered kovčegom zaveta. Melchola.* (David dances before the ark of covenant. Michal).
8. *David i Virsavija.* (David and Bathseba)
9. *Smert' Davida.* (David's death)

The story proceeds chronologically and is organised in a way that is usual in iconography, to be read from the left to the right. Scenes (1) and (9) designate the boundaries of the narrative, beginning and end, while scenes (2-4), and (6-8) have their equivalents in the Psalms and liturgical texts. The theocratic hero is presented in the central scene (5), with the important inscription. Thus, the semantic interpretation of the work is possible to be based on the information within the work itself, without relying on reminiscences in the New Testament.

Around the central scene, the hero's portrait, his three services – of the tsar, prophet and psalmist – are named explicitly. It must be added that in both Skobcova's icons of David, the „psalmist“ has replaced Solov'ev's function of „priest“, perhaps by way of a commentary to the collapse of old hierarchy of the church life. Also the side scenes illustrate the hero's three services: the anointment (1) and the victory over the Philistines (3) illustrate the service of the *king*. David's peace-maker's ability to console Saul (2), his receiving the hallowed breads (4), and his righteousness in withdrawal from killing the Lord's anointed (6), illustrate the (*priest's*)/*psalmist's* function, whereas the freedom of spirit and individual conscience are best manifested in the *prophet's* scenes. Scene (7) depicts the prophet's ecstasy before the ark of covenant manifesting his joy to please his God and wish to build him a permanent home. In scene (8) the hero covets Bathseba and sends her husband to be killed in war (after having been ridiculed by his wife Michal in the previous scene). Although the two scenes seemingly only dramatise the sequence between Michal's mockery and Bathseba's appeal, we know from the scene's subtext, Psalm 51, that the underlying idea is to demonstrate David's repentance, often seen as the main reason for his

⁴⁷ In a poem of the 40s, she wrote «Какой Давид сегодня отсекает | У Голиафа голову, сначала | Державных лат отбросивши почет? (Who is the David of today to cut off/ Goliath's head, first/having thrown away the honour of king's armour?) Skobcova 2001, 271.

eneration within the Christian tradition.⁴⁸ Apparently, in this tapestry, Skobcova wished not only to highlight David's three theocratic roles in a modern setting, but also his most significant trials and exploits in order to present him as a role model in a specific situation.

The style and details of the work deserve special attention. The bright colours of the threads and joyful atmosphere magnificently manifest the divine godmanhood and freedom of spirit. The choice of the material brings to mind a shroud, or *pelena*, a sacral cloth.⁴⁹ The reminiscence connects the work with the idea of sacrifice through martyrdom. In those grim years, Skobcova systematically and with fervour appealed to people to sacrifice their lives and to celebrate carnal death as spiritual rebirth.⁵⁰ In this light, the tapestry of King David as well as some other late works appears quite prophetic.

All characters in the scenes are depicted in a modern setting. For example, here David is fully dressed while dancing before the ark, while in the Bible, he was half-naked, which aroused Michal's rage and jealousy. This seems to imply that the episode has less to do with sensuality or wife's jealousy, and more to do with the purely political, as it aims to encourage people to fearlessness. Bathseba's bath is another scene typical to the 1930s, reminiscent of any woman trying to wash her hair in a tiny tub without running water.⁵¹ Both scenes are stripped of all sensuality: they relate to the iconic, divine realm. Between the throne scene and the one where David shows Saul the cut-off piece of his skirt, there is a pillar. The pillar, obviously, suggests exile: the righteous David, as the exiles, must flee the wicked ruler's rage. The last scene, depicting David's deathbed, best illustrates the theme of resignation, and possibly, it connotes religious conversion. In it, David's hands are crossed on his breast as when receiving the Eucharist, as if he greets his death as rebirth and union with Christ, that is, encourages his people to receive Christ as their Messiah. It also calls on the stateless Russian émigrés „having thrown away the honour of king's [=Russian tsar's] armour“ to resist the persuasion of Goliath-Hitler, and to oppose him.⁵² Personal sacrifice and its price are repeatedly represented in the work: for exam-

⁴⁸ Psalm 51, the psalm of repentance, is read in Orthodox liturgical services and in private prayers. A Russian proverb refers to the same issue: «По Давиду грешим, но по Давиду не каемся.» (We sin like David, but we do not repent like David).

⁴⁹ For example, the painter Michail Nesterov was impressed by a *pelena* embroidered, according to a legend, by the mother of the murdered tsarevich Dmitri, and used it in his famous painting *Dmitrij carevič*, Durylin 2004, 280.

⁵⁰ See *Roždenie v smerti*, „Birth in Death“, in Skobcova, 2004b.

⁵¹ Benevič (2005,3) has interpreted the appearance of Bathseba as of a Russian emigrant woman in Paris of the 30s.

⁵² As known, the majority of Russian emigrants in France joined the Nazi army, only a handful the Resistance, and the issue has been a taboo until recently. Benevič 2000, 17. It may also be added that Skobcova's controversial tapestry was removed from the church wall as soon as she was arrested. Today, it is located in England, at the Orthodox monastery of John the Baptist.



King David. 1932-1940. Embroidery

example, Ahimelech breaks the law by offering David hallowed bread. From the biblical subtext we know that he is killed as a punishment for his transgression. In the biblical setting, his exploit manifests the peculiar dynamism of the covenant between God and man, in Skobcova's version, one may suppose, the scene with hallowed bread manifests the urge for ultimate personal sacrifices needed to contribute to the fulfilment of eschatology. Ahimelech's sacrifice also reminds of Skobcova's and Father Dmitrij Klepinin's bold act when they provided the persecuted Jews with falsified baptismal certificates, for which they were punished.





King David. 1932-1940. Tempera on wooden panel.

As was said above, there exists a parallel version of *Tsar, prophet and psalmist David* completed on a wooden panel, dated in 1932-1940. Although its size, technique and the representation of the figure of David differ significantly from the tapestry, the topics of its scenes are very similar. Around the central figure sitting in a meditative posture holding a harp, dressed in a white shirt, green undergarment and red cape, with a mitre on his head denoting his role of high priest, there are also nine scenes of his life. This second David on the wooden panel obviously contrasts and complements the magnificent tapestry, which was intended to dominate on a church wall. This second David, furthermore, is depicted in a white cloth and is small like a child in all scenes except in the central portrait. This „pastoral“ and intimate icon, with its bright colours, may have been intended for private use. (As a role model for Skobcova's own son, Jurij?)

David, who at the beginning is a young shepherd, preserves his childish appearance also as king and adult man. The white clothes and asexual, child-like/androgynous appearance manifest his innocence and god-manhood. His tiny dove-like figure in motion – in battle against Goliath, in playing the harp to Saul, in dancing before the ark, swinging in Saul's skirt, or praying before the oak – appears to manifest a divine lightness. The allusion to the dove, the symbol of peace and the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, is obvious. Moreover, David is depicted as a free man, an ageless sage totally lacking attributes of official power: in the central scene, no throne is visible. Apparently, his throne is not from this world, but eschatological. It is interesting that unlike in the tapestry, here David has a nimbus, which is unusual. David wears Saul's red cape, the sign of his being the legal successor to the throne. Unlike the tapestry, this composition is plastic and intimate, underlining David's ecstasy in his motions before God.

The content of the scenes is not fully identical in the two versions. Here, the story begins with David's childhood where he pastures the sheep (1). In the battle against Goliath, he is without arms (in the tapestry, he holds Goliath's cut-off head) (2). The anointment is quite similar in the both works. (3). Here, Saul, possessed by evil spirit, threatens the playing David with a cane, while in the tapestry he sits more calmly on his throne (4). Here, the ark of covenant is like an apparition: it is white and David carries it on his back. Intriguingly, David is not dancing *before* the ark but *while carrying* it: he is in ecstasy with his divine burden (6). The scene where David shows Saul his skirt is presented without Saul; and the viewers are soldiers in modern helmets (7). Here, there is no Bathseba (maybe because the scene is damaged?): we only see David in trembling motion (8). Here, there appears to be no scene of the hallowed bread, instead, David is praying before an oak and repenting his sin (9). The last scene is damaged so that we only can assume that it may depict his death (10). In general, this more private version represents David and his exploits from another point of view than the "official" tapestry, thus contributing to the ambiguity of this ideal hero.

Conclusion

In this essay, the aim was to highlight Mother Maria Skobcova's use of the motif of King David in her oeuvre, in word and image. It was demonstrated how tradition-conscious, but simultaneously avant-garde, synthesising, and provocative the quality of her art was. Today, Skobcova's intellectual, artistic and spiritual legacy is being reconsidered and raises wider interest. As was mentioned in the introduction, her biography has systematically been distorted in order to serve different national-political interests. Against this backdrop, it seems even more important to highlight the artist's own concepts, among them the motif of King David.

To sum up, King David as a heroic role model was present in Skobcova's work already in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Allusions to biblical David were present in the androgynous hero depicted in the prose work *Jurali* as well as in the watercolours. In France, after a lengthy pause and in very different circumstances, Skobcova re-established her artistic creativity. In the totalitarian Europe, she began to elaborate on the theme of David anew. The god-manly, angelic and androgynous features in David's image, derived from the Symbolists' heritage, were contrasted with and complemented by topical political issues. Skobcova merged elements from western medieval painting and Russian iconography to produce the exquisite tapestry and the wooden panel icon of King David's life. In those works, the biblical throne succession narrative,

Solov'evian concepts of theocracy, David as a preview of Christ, and Skobcova's own image of the figure as a modern warrior and artist are intertwined.

Skobcova's oeuvre may be characterised as truly modernist and fully integrated to her time's concerns. Only by analysing her art in parallel with her thought it is possible to reveal the integrity of her worldview and the mutual contingency between her art and life which deserves more attention in future scholarship.

Especially in her last works, it occurs that the challenge of reconciliation between the Synagogue and Church strikes as her central theme. The author challenges her countrymen, the faithful Russians in exile, to oppose "Goliath" and to volunteer for death in the name of apocalyptic fulfilment and spiritual rebirth. Skobcova's vision of David is not a sage or singer of peaceful times, but a voluntary determined to self-sacrifice. By representing an ideal uncorrupted king, free prophet and ecstatic psalmist, the artist encouraged her closest companions to sacrifices in order to change history.

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