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'*RASKOLNIKS*' AND '*INORODTSY*': A MUTUAL ATTRACTION*

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ABSTRACT

Old Belief emerged as a broad social and religious movement in the second half of the 17th century as a result of church reform. The Old Believers who did not adopt the reforms were forced to flee to the outer reaches of Russia and were persecuted by both the church and secular powers until the beginning of the 20th century. This contributed to a great extent to the development of eschatological opinions and the striving for social and general isolation. A distinctive feature of the Old Believers' culture is traditionalism, which is expressed in both everyday and religious practice. Old Belief, as a form of Christianity, is seen among most scholars and the general public as an exclusively Russian phenomenon. However, it was also quite widespread among a number of Finno-Ugric peoples; in the territory of the Ural and Volga region most of the non-Russian Old Believers were Mordovians or Komi-Permyaks.

The main reasons for the process of transition from '*inorodtsy*' ('infidels') to '*raskolnik*s'[1] ('schismatics') were the lack of social barriers (both were religious outsiders) and the conflict caused by the State's policy of violent Christianisation. There were many different nuances in this process related to the problem of language, the perception among Finno-Ugrians of the use of books, and the closed nature of the group. In this paper, I would like to describe this based on archival documents and my own field research.

KEYWORDS: Old Believers • '*raskolniks*' • '*inorodtsy*' • bookishness • religious practice • Ural-Volga region • Finno-Ugrians

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INTRODUCTION

The confessional policy of the Russian Empire, formed in 1721, was conditioned by two major peculiarities. Firstly, the state had appropriated the right to act as the highest arbiter in questions of the religious identity of its subjects. Secondly, it supported the historically shaped confessional hierarchy led by the Orthodox Church. In this hierarchy, a particular place was devoted to Old Belief, which was on the one hand an archaic form of Orthodoxy, and on the other, represented a considerable opposition to the official Church component. At the same time, Old Belief was often seen as a proper Russian phenomenon, a "petrified splinter of Ancient Russia" (Shchapov 1859: 3). Until the adoption in 1905 of the famous law on religious freedom, apostasy from Orthodoxy was fully prohibited, as was any transfer from a Christian religion to a non-Christian one. However, by the end of the 19th century, in the words of Paul Werth (2012: 45), a contemporary American historian and scholar of religion, "the Russian confessional landscape became more dynamic and complicated". Situations in which nominally Orthodox people, who had earlier converted, or whose ancestors had converted, wished to go back to their previous confessions, were fairly widespread, and even among Orthodox believers there were more often than not people who followed other religions or dogmas. This mobility within the religious landscape is further illustrated by the spreading of Old Belief among Finno-Ugric communities.

Across the immense Volga-Ural territory, the ethno-confessional nature of which has always been characterised by diversity, Old Believers were mainly to be found among the Mordovian and Komi-Permyaks, with only isolated cases of transferring to the 'dissent' observed among the Udmurt or Mari. What reasons led to the 'allogenes' registering as 'dissenters', and why did existing 'dissenters' accept them among their number? How did these conversions happen, and how were they reflected in the religious practice of the neophytes, who were compelled to turn towards a ritual and dogmatic tradition different from their own? These are the questions to which I would like to find an answer, in order to divine the secret of this mutual attraction. In view of the fact that Old Belief has always been associated with the written book tradition, and has become a kind of group marker, I will focus in more detail on the existence of Ancient Slavic bookishness among those Finno-Ugrians who adopted the old faith. The article will draw upon archival and published sources, as well as my own field materials.

I conducted field research among various groups of Old Believers for a period of several years, from 2009 to 2014. Geographically speaking, they generally coincide with the places of contemporary settlement of Old Believer groups among the Mordvins and Komi-Permyaks (several districts in Ulyanovsk and Orenburg regions, the Afanasyevsky district in Kirov region, and the Cherdinsky district in Perm Territory). Analysis of materials drawn from the First All-Russian Population Census and other sources contributed to the identification of these areas. I used a method of semi-structured interviews, asking questions about the history of Old Belief, about its existence in this particular settlement, the time and reasons for its appearance, and about the features of Old Believers' lives and rituals in general.

Those who at the end of the 17th century did not accept the reforms of Patriarch Nikon, and thereby put themselves in opposition to the official church, were called '*raskolnik*s' ('schismatics'). Accordingly, Old Believers, who saw in the reform a devia-

tion from the true faith, perceived this name negatively. The terms '*inovertsy*' ('infidels') or '*inorodtsy*' ('aliens'), according to Andreas Kappeler (2012: 32–33), had a longer history, but by the middle of the 18th century had come to be a collective term for the non-Russian peoples of the Volga region and the Urals, indeed even for those who had already been converted to Orthodox Christianity, for example, the Kryashens. At the end of the same century, the term '*inorodtsy*' came to be used initially in relation to the peoples of Siberia, and subsequently to all non-Russian peoples of Russia, based on criteria of lifestyle and origin. These concepts, with their nationalistic or marginalising potential, were used in both official documents and social discourse. The negative connotations associated with them make it impossible for them to be included in modern research without quotation marks, except when directly quoting from documents or publications. This is how they are used in this article.

A FEW STATISTICS

A universal feature of research into the Old Believers is the incomplete nature of statistical accounting and the inability to obtain more or less accurate quantitative indicators for this group within the Russian population. The unwillingness of the Old Believers themselves to subscribe themselves to various statements, the incompetence of officials and representatives of the clergy, and sometimes their deliberate distortion of information, have turned official statistics on the 'schism' into an unreliable historical source. The task of quantifying the 'non-Russian' groups of Old Believers would appear to be all the more difficult.

The only mass statistical source available to researchers are the materials from the First All-Russian Population Census, 1897, which provided cross-tabulations by religion and native language. These tables enable us at least to localise such groups geographically, and to present their approximate (official) number. The Census materials therefore reveal the presence of almost 15,000 Old Believers whose native language was Mordovian, or to be precise, 14,831. The Mordvins are one of the most widely dispersed peoples, so the Old Believer groups were scattered over a fairly extensive territory and were present in almost all of the Ural and Volga provinces. The territorial borders of the provinces, of course, were neither confessional nor ethnic borders. Old Believer communities linked by a common ideology (the Old Believer accord) had robust and well-established contacts regardless of distance, especially since such contacts were maintained in settlements located close to each other. So the villages of Volsky (221 people), Khvalynsky (1,276 people), Kuznetsky (154 people) and Petrovsky (523 people), along with the counties in Saratov province (total 2,174 people) (Census 1904g: 82–97) formed a single "ethnic and confessional territory" with the villages of the "schism-stricken" Samara province – Buguruslan (1,780 people), Bugul'ma (136 people), Buzuluk (1,306 people), Nikolayevo (632 people), Samara (68 people), and Stavropol (129 people) counties (6,558 people in total) (Census 1904f: 60–77), along with the Sengiley (609 people) and Syzran (689 people) counties in Simbirsk province (Census 1904h: 64–75). The Mordovian Old Believer settlements in the Belebey (155 people) and Sterlitamak (1,149 people) counties in Ufa province (1,304 people in total) (Census 1904b: 42–57) were closely connected with Nizhny Novgorod province, their inhabitants had moved to

the Bashkir lands from the Lukoyanov district, and according to the Census materials there were 623 more Old Believers from Mordovia in this district (Census 1904c: 70–82). Settlers from the Samara province formed another Mordovian Old Believer cluster of settlements in the Orsk (577 people) and Orenburg (1,078 people) counties of Orenburg province (1,655 people in total) (Census 1904e: 58–71).

Groups of Komi-Permiyaks, among whom the Old Believers had spread, settled in Glazov (622 people) and Oryol (125) counties in Vyatka and Cherdyn districts in Perm province (1,971 people) (Census 1904d: 98–121). These groups had local names associated with their geographical location: the name 'Zyuzdinsky', 'zyuzdintsy', used for Permians living in Vyatka province, came from the River Syuzva, a tributary of the River Kama, while the River Yazva gave its name to the Permiyaks of Cherdyn district. In the same provinces, according to the Census materials, several Old Believers from the Cheremis (Mari), the Votyaks (Udmurts) and even the Tatars were identified (Census 1904a: 90–121).

Of course, the Census materials give us neither a complete picture of the Old Believers among the Finno-Ugric groups, nor a description of specific situations. Given that issues of faith in the Russian Empire were at the level of criminal offences, information about 'wrong' religious communities should really be sought in the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Now and again, in investigative cases relating to the 'schism', indications of the ethnicity of people who appeared before the court are found. For example, during an investigation dating to 1858 in Kazan province, one of the respondents identified himself:

> Mikhail Ivanov, 44 years old, from Mordovia, a baptised peasant from the village of Old Estebenkina. Since childhood, following the example of my late parents, I have adhered to the schismatic sect (Pomorskaya). Concealing this outwardly, I performed the rites of the Orthodox Church. (RSAAC a)

From such cases, curious facts about the "discovery of non-Orthodoxy" among the officially Orthodox emerge. For example, several families in the Russian-Chuvash village of Bolshaya Yunga (Pokrovskoye) in Kazan province who were listed as Orthodox "fell into schism" in 1850, although during the investigation it turned out that they had in fact been in the Old Faith since birth, "following the example of their parents" (RSAAC b). Similar cases were opened in the same province in the 1850s against peasants in the Chuvash-Mordovian Old Estebenkina (RSAAC c) and Mordovian-Russian Kaperdino (RSAAC d) villages, among others. This indicates that, firstly, the transition to the 'schism' was a phenomenon that was, if not numerous, then fairly common. Secondly, it was a completely conscious choice for neophytes, since detection would always entail punishment. The processes involved in the return of the 'schismatics' to the bosom of the official church could last a long time, as for example in the Mordovian village of Pomryaskino (Sterlitamak district, Ufa province) where, despite the "pastoral beliefs of the schismatics", they went on for three whole months, yet the villagers involved remained "adamant in their schism" (RSAAC e).

The Ural-Volga '*inorodtsy*s' had plenty of opportunity to become acquainted with the 'schismatic' creed. They settled in close proximity to each other, sometimes in a single settlement, although more often in neighbouring ones. Both were involved in mining, and both sold products from their farms in the local markets. Both were involved in various trades associated with waste disposal. There have always been everyday domestic and business contacts between him, and marriage unions are also known to have happened.

Their general position at the margins of the social hierarchy also brought the '*raskolnik*s' and the '*inorodtsy*' closer together. Additional incentive was also given by the conflict caused by the violent measures applied for the Christianisation of the '*inorodtsy*'. The ritual and everyday practice of official Orthodoxy was associated with state pressure, while at the same time the Old Believer missionaries, who also carried Christian teachings, but risked their personal safety, could not but arouse sympathy. For former 'pagans', or for the formally baptised, Old Believers could even be perceived as a symbol of gaining their own religious identity. As an example, the Muslim Chuvash replied to the missionary of the dominant church: "The Russians found the old faith long ago, and we want to be in the old one" (Malov 1892: 167).

Conversion to another faith is always individual, can be caused by a variety of personal reasons and life circumstances, and in the end, by spiritual search. In the reports written by Orthodox priests, there were often remarks that "the most zealous, and those with a more conscious concept of faith, fall away from the church into schism" (Ryazhev 1995: 167). They usually belonged to Mordovian groups, Christianised earlier than the rest of the 'foreigners'. Therefore, among the Mordovians of the Orenburg province, the most diverse currents of Christianity present at that time on the conditional market of religions were popular, including various versions of Old Belief, Molokanism, and Khlystovism (Kornishina 2008: 218). At the same time, those who found themselves involved in Old Belief took an active part in dogmatic disputes, and became successful missionaries themselves (Danilko 2020: 192).

Some private practices adopted in the Old Believers' community could also be socially attractive. Recent research by the American historian John Bushnell (2020) has revealed an interesting phenomenon which he called the "epidemic of celibacy". Comparing many statistical sources, he revealed the presence of an atypical number of unmarried women in a number of villages. What was more, the area of distribution of the phenomenon correlated with that of the Old Believer tradition. (Ibid.: 150–163) Unmarried women went to live in cells, where they were engaged in fulfilling duties (for instance, reading 40-day prayers for the dead, etc.), teaching children how to read and write, and making candles. Going to a cell and being separated from her family enabled a woman to gain social legitimisation of her status, to earn money, support her family, and in general be in the circle of normal society. Evidence of the existence of this phenomenon among "non-Russian Old Believers" can be found in archival sources (Ryazhev 1995: 131). During my field research, I was shown rooms in a house equipped for a cell and individual buildings on an estate that had previously been cells (FM 2010).

The Old Believers, who had extensive connections within their community, and who had forged successful strategies for socio-economic adaptation, provided other types

of mutual assistance and material support to the neophytes, in addition to spiritual care. Inclusion in the Old Believer communities could, on the one hand, lead to a certain degree of isolation for small family groups of neophytes within village society, although on the other hand it brought them into a system of new trade relations and industrial contacts, and into a wider social field in general.

At the same time, this entry into a wider social field resurrects the imperial discourse on ethno-confessional hierarchisation. The presence of Old Believers in the space of the intersection of a religious minority and an ethnic majority complicated their external perception in binary oppositions of majority–minority, friend–foe. Moreover, notwithstanding the proximity of the positions of the 'foreigners' and the 'dissenters', the latter occupied a higher level, being as they were socially protected in some situations. For example, as a study by Igor' Kuziner (2021: 64) shows, the exoticisation of marginal religious groups in the case of Old Believers did not take extreme forms of social rejection due to the fact that they belonged to the ethnic majority.

OLD/NEW FAITH AND "OLD BOOKS"

Any missionary activity involves, if not comprehensive knowledge, then at least a minimal familiarity with the language of the religious preaching of at least one of the interacting groups. The vast territory of the Ural-Volga region could present an equally vast variety of linguistic situations. It is no coincidence that most adherents of Old Belief at the end of the 19th century were to be found among the early Russified and Christianised Mordvins. During my field research, there were cases when the 'appropriation' of the originally Russian religious tradition manifested itself at a linguistic level. Thus, some 'Old Believer' terms were perceived as Mordovian and Russian synonyms were selected for them: "*Lestovka* is Mordovian, and in Russian *shchyotchiki* ['counters']; *Podruchniki* ['henchmen'] is a Mordovian word, in Russian its different somehow, I don't remember" (FM 2009a) and finally: "Here we are Old Believers of the Old Orthodox faith. 'Old Believers' faith' is what they say in Mordovian, and in Russian they say 'Ancient Orthodox'" (FM 2009b). Among the Permiyaks, the level of Russian language proficiency was lower, and researchers wrote about the need for intermediaries between Old Believer missionaries and local residents (Chagin 1997: 171).

Today, such a problem does not exist, and unfortunately the Russian language more often than not displaces Finno-Ugric languages from the social sphere. However, at the very beginning the linguistic aspect of the problem of interaction between Old Believers and Finno-Ugric groups had an additional dimension connected with the language of the religious canonical texts, for which a third language was used, namely, Church Slavonic.

In general, the concept of being bookish, or textual, that is to say, based on the written word, on its understanding and interpretation, has been fixed for the Old Believer community. In this regard, I would like to ask how the appeal of the Finno-groups to the Ancient Slavic literature and language of worship was expressed in their everyday religious practice. To date, in the field of research on "that which is written" in culture, entire scientific fields have been formed, such as classical archaeography, the sociology of reading, or the anthropology of literacy. Of all the possible theoretical frameworks,

that which is proposed by Brian Stock seems to me to be the most appropriate. For him, textual communities are

> groups of people whose social activity is centred around texts, or more precisely, around their interpretation. The text in question does not have to be written down, just as it is not necessary that the majority of those listening are actually literate (proficient in reading and writing)… The members of the group are connected to each other voluntarily; their interaction takes place around the equally understood meaning of the text. They should be able to hermeneutically jump from what the text says to what they think it means. As a result, the common understanding achieved (of the text) forms the basis for changing behaviour and way of thinking. (Stock 1983: 522)

This approach, applied by Stock to study mediaeval heretical movements, in addition to describing modern situations, enables us to consider them less directly than is customary in our scientific community, that is, without placing them on the assessment scale of literacy–illiteracy, or preservation–loss of tradition.

As field research has shown, the Old Believer book tradition spread among Finno-Ugric groups, becoming a familiar part of everyday religious practice. Some can read Church Slavonic texts, others prefer to use their secular interpretation. Often, as in Russian groups, the very fact of the presence and storage of ancient canonical books is important. Such books do not necessarily have specific names, being referred to in speech simply as "books", "old/ancient", "Slavic", "saints", etc. (FM 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2014). In interviews, respondents emphasise that books belong to one person or another, usually to deceased relatives who "knew how to read" and "strictly kept the faith" (FM 2013). The high social status of the former owners of the book also in turn raises the status of their modern keepers, whose belonging to the tradition takes on, as it were, additional legitimacy: "Our grandmother had these old books. She observed everything, fasts, all that. And now we can't read anymore." (FM 2013) Often their real existence is already in the past, they were once, and now they are not here, taken away, donated, or just gone somewhere: "Now there are none of those books, one was left, I took it to the church" (FM 2009a); "My daughter took those books, I don't know where they are now" (FM 2013); "Yes I don't even know where they are now, we kept them for a long time, and now I don't know" (FM 2009b). The property of the "old" books described here makes it possible to classify them, at least to a certain extent, into the category of imaginary, that is, existing only due to the act of their verbalisation (Mel'nikova 2011: 9). Their content is constructed by the community in accordance with its own worldview. As such, eschatological narratives are closely related to imaginary books. According to the interview respondents, the signs of the approaching end of the world that they find in the modern world were once described in books, which were read and retold to them by one of their older relatives: "Everyone wrote about this in the old books. That iron birds will fly. That women will dress like men. And there will be a lot of gold, but there will be no water." (FM 2014); "The final times will come. There will be a lot of gold, but there will be no water. My grandmother read this in the old Slavic books." (FM 2013) However, this very construction of the text and its interpretation are quite typical of Old Believer narratives.

It should be noted that today the identity of the Old Believers is more expressed in relation to everyday practices than to written texts. It is the observance of household prohibitions (food- and behaviour-related) that is in their view an indicator of the purity and rigour of their faith: "They observe the fasts of the Old Believers. There are a lot of things they can't do. There they are, the strong believers did not even drink tea. It's all from the books" (FM 2010); "And you have to dress properly, and follow everything. Clean dishes, and fasts." (FM 2010) The justification for such prohibitions is contained, as we know, in etiological legends the sources of which were various texts of apocryphal content included by folklorists in the corpus of the oral "people's Bible", which is wider in scope than the canonical version (Belova and Petrukhin 2004: 12). For example, the justification for the ban on smoking, or the need to cover up dishes against mice ("The mouse on Noah's ark chewed a hole and almost drowned everyone. You see the mouse is a bad animal, and the cat is a good one, it ate the mouse and saved everyone." [FM 2010]) Although the very need to comply with declared "strictures" does not, as we see, necessarily require rational explanations. For the purposes of folk logic, the universally accepted knowledge as to their correctness is sufficient, and the fallout from the logical chain of such an important link as actual text justification does not allow us to doubt the inviolability of the norm.

CONCLUSION

In this way, the perception on the part of the Volga peoples of various tendencies of the Old Believers significantly diversified the ethno-confessional mosaic of the population of the Ural-Volga region, complicating the region's interfaith and interethnic, as well as its intraethnic, interaction. The spread of the Old Believers was an important indicator of religious sentiment among the Finno-Ugrians.

In a space in which three languages (Church Slavonic, Russian, Mordovian/Permyak) actively functioned, different types of text continue to coexist, from the most 'canonical' Church Slavonic, preserved from the 19th century, to handwritten 20th-century collections and the latest printed publications. The spheres of their practical application are also varied. The first are increasingly becoming symbolic exhibits, moving ever closer to imaginary old books that embody the old faith as a whole, while the second are more often used for individual reading and the third are actively involved in collective practices. Nevertheless, texts of all categories are subject to constant interpretation and endowment with statuses and group markers, that is, those meanings around which textual communities of Old Believers unite.

NOTES

1 *Inorodtsy* is a Russian plural term so takes no plural s here; *raskolnik* is singular term, used here with a plural s.

SOURCES

FM: author's fieldwork material. The following interviews have been cited:
FM 2009a = Orenburg Region, Russian Federation.
FM 2009b = Orenburg Region, Russian Federation.
FM 2010 = Ulyanovsk Region, Russian Federation.
FM 2013 = Kirov Region, Russian Federation.
FM 2014 = Perm Territory, Russian Federation.
The Russian State Archive of Ancient Cases (*Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy arkhiv drevnikh aktov*):
RSAAC a = Fund 1431, inventory 1, case 1314, sheet 14.
RSAAC b = Fund 1431, inventory 1, case 1239, sheet 31.
RSAAC c = Fund 1431, inventory 1, case 1166.
RSAAC d = Fund 1431, inventory 1, case 1279.
RSAAC e = Fund 1431, inventory 2, case 4174, sheet 2.

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Census. 1904b. *Pervaya Vseobshchaya perepis' naseleniya Rossiyskoy imperii, 1897 god* XLV: *Ufimskaya guberniya*, edited by N. A. Troynitsky. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdaniye tsentral'nogo statisticheskogo komiteta Ministerstva vnutrennikh del. [1904. *Первая Всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи, 1897 год* XLV: Уфимская губерния, под ред. Н. А. Тройницкого. Санкт-Петербург: Издание центрального статистического комитета Министерства внутренних дел.]

Census. 1904c. *Pervaya Vseobshchaya perepis' naseleniya Rossiyskoy imperii, 1897 god* XXV: *Nizhegorodskaya guberniya*, edited by N. A. Troynitsky. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdaniye tsentral'nogo statisticheskogo komiteta Ministerstva vnutrennikh del. [1904. *Первая Всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи, 1897 год* XXV: Нижегородская губерния, под ред. Н. А. Тройницкого. Санкт-Петербург: Издание центрального статистического комитета Министерства внутренних дел.]

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