

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****LABORATORY OF MIRACLES: RUSSIAN OLD BELIEVERS AND
RELICS OF NOVGOROD**

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Abstract

In the article from the position of the actor-network theory are viewed interactions between representatives of the Russian anti-church movement (Old Believers) and the revered church relics of Novgorod in the 18th-19th centuries. It is concluded that the network of Novgorod shrines was involved in the formation of the ideology or Russian church dissent. The desire to find the grace or the old pre-reform church as an ally and to confirm the succession of it was reflected in the cultural orientation of the Old Believers to Novgorod. The miraculousness of objects testified to the effectiveness of the old church rites and forced the Old Believers to create relics secondary to the network of shrines (icons, wall posters called “lubok”). The peculiarities of the sacred landscape of Novgorod also manifested in the increased veneration of Novgorod saints and shrines, the widespread being of written works dedicated to them, and even an attempt to steal some of the relics. This allows me to call Novgorod a kind of laboratory, where the Old Believers studied the power of the grace of the pre-reform church, using objects with supernatural power as instruments, which in turn had influenced on the researchers themselves. The findings are based on a published Old Believers sources of the 18th-19th centuries, as well as an objects from the collection of the Novgorod State Museum, first introduced into the scientific circulation.

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Keywords: Actor-network theory, old believers, pilgrimage, relics, shrines, Veliky Novgorod



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1. Introduction

Studying the history of religious communities, such as the direction of Old Believers that emerged in the 17th century, the researcher is faced with the problem of classifying non-human actor who are present in one way or another in the religious doctrine and largely determine the behavior and motivation of believers. The set of methods developed by cultural and historical anthropology allows us to see in them a reflection of mythological thinking, the laws of society or nature. Such approaches are forced to put the researcher in the position of an interpreter, proceeding from the notion of the exceptional correctness of modern views of reality, largely depriving the investigated of the “right to vote”. These words are especially relevant when studying “active things” - shrines and relics that played an important role in the religious debate between Old Believers and representatives of the state church.

2. Problem Statement

The Church schism of the 17th century laid the foundation for the independent existence of the Old Believers' movement as an oppositional official church. The initial stage of development of the Old Believers has been studied relatively well, but this applies primarily to centers remote from large nodes of the state administrative network (Vygovskaya Pustyn, Kerzhenets). The social and cultural mechanisms of the origin and development of Old Believer communities in large cities (Novgorod, Moscow) and adjacent territories remain poorly studied, where the Old Believer community was not formed on the basis of the development of a new space in the form of separate colonies, but was formed mostly from the indigenous local population. It is obvious that both variants of the formation of Old Believer communities involve different strategies for constructing and maintaining identity. Local shrines play an important role in this.

3. Research Questions

In this work, grace and shrines (relics) are considered as the actors in the reality of traditional Orthodox believers of the 18th – 19th centuries. It is necessary to establish what place sacred objects occupied in the formation of the Old Believers. An important task is to demonstrate how the Old Believers, initially deprived of their own church institutions, tried to win over to their side an important ally - divine grace, which was in the sacred objects, relics of Novgorod.

4. Purpose of the Study

Studying the issue of the relationship between Old Believers and shrines significantly expands the understanding of the impact of existing network infrastructures on self-organized communities. An analysis of this issue is also able to give a more complete picture of the features of the Old Believer movement in large cities and adjacent territories at an early stage of the formation of centers of the old faith. The study undertaken by us partially answers the question of how the Old Believers, who did not have a single center and stable institutions at the turn of the 17th-18th centuries, even under the conditions of strict control of the church and secular authorities, still managed to defend their identity and maintain it throughout the next centuries, taking the grace of the pre-reform church as unspoken allies.

5. Research Methods

It is based on the methodology of the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour, transferred to the study of the history of culture. In general terms, it proclaims the irreducibility of anything to another (Latour, 2015, 2017). In the study of the history and anthropology of religion, this thought will mean that when we speak of miracle, grace, holiness, etc., we will have in mind precisely these objects, and not their possible social or natural referents. An equally important part of the ANT toolkit, arising from the above provision, is the inclusion of inanimate objects in the network of interaction actors, whether they are natural phenomena or derivatives of human activity (eg, infrastructure). The criterion of reality in this case is the balance of forces and the ability of some actants to attract others to their side. This means that if a particular object in the eyes of believers has a mystical power, the union with which must be sought, then the power of the object's influence can already be considered real. An understanding of the worldview positions of people of the past will not be complete if one does not recognize their reality as their right to actual existence. This approach in modern anthropology is called “multinaturalism” (Shalaginov & Serzhan, 2019).

When studying the interaction of Old Believers and shrines of Novgorod, I also used an analysis of the available texts of Old Believer works of the 17th-19th centuries, as well as handwritten collections, wall papers and icons stored in the funds of the Novgorod Museum-Reserve and introduced into scientific circulation for the first time.

6. Findings

6.1. The power of grace and the network of shrines

The power of a shrine lies in its ability to produce miracles. In the Orthodox tradition, it refers to the facts of individual or mass healings, for the production of which believers undertake a kind of appropriation of the power of a sacred object, be it an icon or the relics of saints (Antonov, 2018). The same need predetermined a kind of differentiation of holy places, which was based on the geographical principle of their reach. In search of healings from diseases, they turned mainly to local shrines. The most important role in the production of the miracle was played by tactile contact with a holy object, which could be, in addition to the relics of saints and relics associated with their lives, also bells, church door brackets, plaster from the monastery gates, etc. (Popov, 1903). The remains of the saints buried in the church were considered participants in the Eucharist, the veils from their reliquaries participated in the cult activities of the liturgy. The task of producing a miracle at the grassroots level gave rise to a phenomenon that Shchepanskaya (1995) calls a “crisis network” (p. 117). This is a system of stable relationships of statuses (pilgrims, keepers, etc.), as well as symbolic and material objects, which the researcher attributes to symbolic attributes (vows, holy place, etc.).

A revolution in the practice of producing a miracle took place in the second half of the 19th century due to the emergence of rail networks. The former inaccessibility of shrines was eliminated by new technical means, which led to the spread of mass travel to holy places and the phenomenon of parish pilgrimages (Greene, 2012). It is important to note that the state church, having assessed new infrastructural

opportunities, sought to use their power in order to strengthen its faith and fight against “non-Orthodox sects and denominations” (Greene, 2012, pp. 250, 256).

Thus, local shrines formed a chain of interactions around them, which included both people (pilgrims, priests, etc.) and material objects (monastic complexes, relics, road network, etc.). In addition to the general religious and cultural meanings that formed the status of a shrine, it also had an extremely simple task, which we could call the production of a miracle in the form of healings using a certain mechanism. This mechanism, for its part, dictated the conditions, frequency and intensity of visiting holy places, formed their hierarchy in the minds of believers, creating a network that functioned according to its own laws.

The key node of the network of Novgorod shrines was the St. Sophia Cathedral. It contained many items endowed with supernatural properties (Krasnyanskij, 1876; Slavin, 1858). The surrounding monasteries possessed no less set of sacred artifacts. The Antoniev Monastery kept relics associated with the name of its founder Anthony the Roman (Krasnyanskij, 1876; Makarij (Mirolyubov), 1860; Makarov, 1984). They were attributed the healing properties described in the “Praiseworthy word” to the monk. The chains of Euthymius of Novgorod, which were originally kept in the Vyazhishchi Monastery along with his relics, but later transferred to the St. Sophia Cathedral (Tikhomirov, 1891), possessed a serious miraculous power in the eyes of believers. In the Khutynsky monastery, in addition to the relics of the Monk Varlaam, his chains and elements of vestments were used (Krasnyanskij, 1876). Relics participated in sacred rites - in ancient times they were “drained” from them, crayfish with the bodies of Anthony the Roman and Jacob Borovichsky were worn with religious processions (Krasnyanskij, 1876).

The network of Novgorodian holy places split and branched out into many less noticeable local points of attraction. Almost every monastery or parish church had its own revered shrines. Thus, from this perspective, Novgorod appears before us as a kind of agglomeration of holy places, united by practices in which numerous pilgrims, wanderers, clergymen and, finally, the relics themselves took part. The latter played a significant role in the formation of the entire network of holy places, acting, in fact, as actors (actants) of social ties. Moreover, ecclesiastical and folk mythologies endowed objects with the most direct ability to act, ascribing it to the manifestation of higher divine powers. In this case, inanimate shrines were seen as a vehicle for receiving the grace of healing, and grace itself was a valuable ally in ensuring the existence of church institutions.

6.2. Old Believers and grace: in search of union

Shrines and relics from the beginning of the schism of the Russian Church in the 17th century took a worthy place in the relationship between the Old Believers and the state church. The Old Believer identity was based on the “sacred” pre-reform past (Gur'yanova, 2017), and the dead bodies of the glorified saints actively participated in the struggle for the authority of Russian holiness of past centuries. In 1678, Patriarch Joachim decanonized princess Anna Kashinskaya, for, according to rumors, the hand of her relics was folded into a two-fingered blessing. Rumors began to spread by clergymen who had direct contact with the remains even during the canonization of the princess (1650) (Golubinskij, 1903). It is difficult to say what was primary in their argumentation - the “schismatic” beliefs that influenced the interpretation of the relics, or the relics themselves, the two-footed addition of which influenced the beliefs of the Old Believers. This

dialectical dichotomy is always relevant when we talk about Old Believer references to relics in polemics with the “Nikonians”.

Later, large spiritual centers of the old faith, which in turn claimed the role of new holy places, began to take care of the accumulation of relics (primarily icons and books) within their walls (Plaksina, 2016; Yukhimenko, 2002). This acquisition of grace, among other things, was also quite practical. For example, at the Old Believers Council of 1765, the possibility of ordaining a “true” bishop with the hand of the relics of one of the ancient saint metropolitans was seriously discussed (Melnikov-Pechorskij, 2014). Also indicative are the attempts of the Old Believers-priests at any cost to acquire the relics of the martyrs used in the consecration of antimenses (Novikov, 1902). Another motive for acquiring the shrine was the desire to free it from the hands of the non-believers. In literary sources, similar subjects are found already in the beloved Old Believers “Povest o belom klobuke (The Tale of the White Klobuk)”, as well as the legend about the “miraculous finding” of the icon of the Mother of God of Tikhvin on Red Field in Novgorod (Ya, 1899). This literary standard also worked in practice. For example, the Merchant-Old Believer Maltsev in the 18th century. bought the old “Uchitelnoye Evangeliye (Teaching Gospel)” from the Königsberg academician, because he considered that this “much-loved beads” in the house of the Gentile was “not in respect” (Pozdeeva, 1988, pp. 235-243).

Finally, constructing their closed structure of authenticity (Berger, 2019), the Old Believers could not help but think about creating a network of shrines, alternative to the one that was forced to be in the hands of the state church (Yukhimenko, 2002). The worship of relics in “Nikonian” churches necessarily led to confusion with the non-believers, at least for a while. The question of whether it is possible to worship and “kiss” the relics and miraculous icons in churches of other religions was considered at Old Believer cathedrals. This problem is still relevant for Old Believers (Mozhno li..., 2019).

Numerous relics of the Novgorod north soon came to the attention of Old Believer theologians, forming strategies for solving certain complex issues of relations between the official church and various trends within the anti-church movement. The “Otvét vkrátce Soloveckogo monastýrya... (Answer to the Brief Solovetsky Monastery ...)”, written by the monk Gerontius in the 1660s, contains a reference to the “Povest o belom klobuke (The Tale of the White Klobuk)”, a relic kept in St. Sophia Cathedral, which symbolized the transition of the fullness of grace from Rome to Constantinople, and then to Russia (Gerontius, 2006). Elsewhere in the work, the hood is placed on a par with the Novgorod Saint Anthony the Roman, who was also transferred from heretical Rome to Novgorod by “God's beckoning”. All these shrines, including the relics of the martyrs and the particles of the Lord's cross, were gathered together in the “Russkuyu zemlyu na vozveshcheniye zhe istinnyye nasheya pravoslavnyya very (Russian land for the proclamation of our true Orthodox faith)” (Gerontius, 2006). It is quite possible that Gerontius was based solely on literary works that discursively shaped the religious and philosophical mythologeme of the “Tretiy Rim (Third Rome)” (Melnikov, 2017). His brother in the monastery, the monk Ignatius, also demonstrated awareness of the composition of Novgorod relics. He mentions the miraculous crosses over the tomb of Anthony the Roman as proof of the truth of the old faith (Ignatius, 2000).

Perhaps the most systematic work with the shrines was started by Andrei Denisov, the cinearch of the Vygovskaya Old Believer Hermitage, who came from the family of the Novgorod princes Myshetsky. In 1723, under the direct supervision of Andrei, the apologetic work “Pomorskiye otvety” (Pomor Answers)

was compiled, the purpose of which was to protect the old faith and the Vygovskaya Hermitage from the attacks of the “Nikonians”. In this work, he recorded the following shrines of the Novgorod Sophia Cathedral as allies: the icon of Peter and Paul, according to legend, brought by Prince Vladimir from Korsun; the image of “Fatherland” with the praying Archbishop John of Novgorod, “on the right side of the ambon, on the pillar”; the image of John the Baptist in the John's side-altar; the staff of Nikita of Novgorod, “like his shrine”; the miraculous “Korsunskiy” cross. The meticulous Vygov Cinoviarch managed to visit other Novgorod monasteries and churches. He refers to the images of the Iberian “to Valdai”, the Vydropsuzhskaya and Tikhvin Mother of God. Andrei also mentions “the many-sided image of St. Nicholas in Nové Grad, a round house, like there are courtyards in Yaroslavl”. He also marked the crosses “over the grave of the Monk Anthony”, which “miraculously” passed to Russia. Andrei Denisov's special attention was paid to the lesser-known Novgorod shrines - the “Ryaditskiy” image of the Mother of God in the Troitskaya Church, the image of the Virgin “in the Voskresenskiy Monastery na Krasnom pole”, “the image of the Savior, transferred from Korsun” to c. Fedor Stratilat (Yukhimenko, 2019). A similar work with Novgorod shrines was also carried out by the compilers of another apologetic work of the beginning. XVIII century, which is “Diakonovy otvety” (Deacon's Answers) (Yukhimenko, 2019).

Mentions of individual relics in the above-mentioned works are cited as proof of the truth of the two-fingered, eight-pointed cross, etc. At the same time, Andrei Denisov constantly emphasizes the miraculous and supernatural of these objects, therefore it would be wrong to reduce the author's work only to the source study of the truth of the Old Believers. Grace, broadcast through artifacts, is an invisible ally that ensures the truth of the popless church and the effectiveness of its rituals.

Concern about union with grace could also lead to a radical change in the point of view of one of the parties in a long-standing dispute. So, between the Fedoseevsk and Pomor directions of the Old Believers, there were a number of fundamental disagreements, dictated in turn by the local characteristics of cult practices. The Fedoseevites, whose teachings originated in Novgorod, in contrast to the Pomors, recognized the worship of crosses with a “Pilate's title” - the inscription “I.H.I.I.” on the top bar. The controversy on this issue stretched out for almost a century (Maltsev, 2006). An unexpected solution to the problem followed in 1771. One of the leaders of the Moscow Fedoseevites, Ilya Kovylin, while passing through Novgorod, decided to personally verify the legality of writing “titles”. For these purposes, he examined one of the most revered shrines of the city. There were the miraculous crosses, kept in the chapel of the Miraculous Cross on the bridge over the Volkhov. After undertaking a small investigation, Kovylin found out that the cross and the inscriptions on it were renewed in 1684. After the discovery of the “forgery”, the Moscow Fedoseevites rejected the initial position of their consent (Yukhimenko, 2019).

An example of how the topic of shrines influenced the Old Believer written tradition can be seen in the large-scale work of collecting materials about locally venerated saints, carried out in the Old Believer environment (Romanova, 2016). Novgorod was no exception, as can be seen from the example of the author's collection of troparia, kontakion and prayers, probably compiled by a Novgorod Old Believer in the middle of the 18th century. (NGM KP 30056/136. KR-236). The collection includes a multi-page enumeration of the saints in the form of a prayer address to them, prayer, as well as troparia and kontakion for holidays and various saints, of which more than 80 are from Novgorod, whose relics were kept in nearby cathedrals. Some of the texts are grouped according to the “resting” of the saints to whom they are

dedicated. For example, the author of the collection lists in a row the saints Prince Vladimir Yaroslavich and his mother Anna, the virgin Glyceria, Mstislav Rostislavich, Prince Theodore and Mstislav Mstislavich (fol. 23), whose relics could be seen in the St. Sophia Cathedral. Other individual locally revered saints, glorified almost exclusively thanks to miracles that occurred from their remains, are also mentioned, these are Jacob Borovichsky (fol. 213-213 v.), John and Jacob Menyushsky (fol. 217 v. - 218), Nikita, Cyril, Nikifor, Clement and Isaac Sokolnitsky (fol. 204 v.-205) and others. It is curious that the Old Believer author, in whose collection there was no place for a single “new believer” saint, nevertheless included in it the troparia of the transfer of the relics of Jacob Borovichsky and Alexander Nevsky (fol. 288 v.-289), which were committed after the beginning of the church reform, moreover, by the worst enemies of the Old Believers - Patriarch Nikon and Emperor Peter I.

The inclusion of various legends about local shrines in the Old Believers' collections maintained a direct connection with their increased local veneration and continued the Old Russian tradition. For example, the compiler of the collection of the early 19th century, which belonged to the Tikhvin Fedoseevskaya community (NGM KP 30056/219. KR-252), also included in it the “Pokhvalnoye slovo (Praise of Honor)” to the icon of the Sign of the Virgin (fol. 88 v.-101). In another collection compiled by the Fedoseevsky monk Cyprian in the 1890s. (NGM KP 38189. KR-439), a rarer legend “O tserkvi premudrosti Bozhii Sofii izhe v Velikom Nove Grade (About the Church of the Wisdom of God Sophia of the ilk in Veliky Novaya Grad)” (fol. 107-107 v.) is placed. The work describes the miracle that occurred during the creation of the fresco of the Savior Pantokrator in the dome of St. Sophia Cathedral.

As we said earlier, the control of the state church over the shrine could not suit the Old Believers, whose leaders strove for independence from the official church structures. In my opinion, the numerous icons of Russian miracle workers, created in the Old Believers' environment, were, among other things, a kind of “cast” of their holy places. The subtle connection between the glorification of the saints and the location of their remains and relics is reflected, for example, in the establishment of the Novgorod archbishop Euthymius II in the middle of the 15th century celebration of the Novgorod rulers and princes buried in the St. Sophia Cathedral (Pivovarova, 2011). The peculiarities of the emergence of the celebration are reflected in the late iconographic tradition, according to which these saints were depicted side by side.

With the development of the pilgrim infrastructure, stronger links appeared between the local shrine and its graphic explications. For example, in the second half of the 19th century. index tables “Kratkoye skazaniye o svyatykh ugodnikakh pochivayushchikh i o chudotvornykh ikonakh. imeyushchikhsya v Novgorodskom Sofiyskom sobore i v drugikh khramakh i obitelyakh novgorodskikh (A short story about the holy saints of the repose and about the miraculous icons available in the Novgorod Sophia Cathedral and in other churches and monasteries of Novgorod)” (OPI NGOMZ, n.d., F. 11. O. 1. D. 141), which served as a kind of simulation of shrines and were a relic that pilgrims brought with them from travel. The popular prints had almost the same miraculous properties as the original. In particular, the ability to drive away evil spirits was attributed to the Novgorod hagiographic cycle (Voronina, 1993). The Old Believers, obviously, were not alien to such tendencies. This is evidenced by the wall sheet “Opisaniye novgorodskikh chudotvortsev (Description of the Novgorod miracle workers)” of the late 19th century (NGM KP 25987/46. GK 4204849). This is a drawing made in ink and watercolors in an inept imitation of the painted popular prints created in the Vygovskaya desert. In the form of separate medallions inscribed in the

branches of a tree, information about the saints is presented, which necessarily includes information about where his relics rest, sometimes the distance in versts from the city to their location is indicated. The image is clearly oriented towards the topographic context: the “top” of the tree is crowned by 7 saints, whose relics could be seen in the St. Sophia Cathedral. Most of the saints, whose remains were kept in monasteries remote from Novgorod, are grouped on the left side of the image, while on the right are mainly saints and shrines within the Torgovaya and Sofia side, as well as nearby settlements. Probably, the anonymous author-Old Believer, composing his popular print or his photograph, was guided by common printed index tables for pilgrims, translating them into the pictorial language adopted in the Old Believers.

However, the desire of the Old Believers to take the shrine as an allies was not limited to its figurative reproduction for honoring. Attempts in the literal sense of the word to take possession of Novgorod relics are interesting. A. Kruglov describes an episode about how an unknown person in the 1880s. for a reward from the Old Believers he tried to steal the chains of Varlaam Khutynsky, which were worshiped by pilgrims (Kruglov, 1890).

7. Conclusion

Thus, we see that the sacred artifacts that literally “inhabited” the temples and monastic complexes of the Novgorod land were an instrument for producing miracles and a repository of grace, for an alliance with which various religious movements competed. The revered shrines in the literal sense of the word influenced the choice of the initial position of the opponents of the church reform of Patriarch Nikon. The desire to master the grace of the pre-reform church, expressed in the study of the shrine, the creation of secondary relics and their emphasized veneration, for a long time predetermined the orientation of the Old Believers towards the Novgorod church traditions.

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