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**BETWEEN THE VYATKA AND VOLGA IN THE WEST,
THE ISHIM AND IRTYSH IN THE EAST:
HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION OF THE OLD BELIEF.
MATERIALS FOR AN ATLAS OF OLD BELIEVERS**

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The data presented in this paper are based on the results of research carried out for twenty years by the Laboratory of Archaeographic Investigations of the Institute of Russian culture attached to Ural State University in Ekaterinburg). The Laboratory specializes in Field Archaeography, i.e., in finding, collecting and studying artifacts of the written Cyrillic culture in their natural surroundings, i.e., primarily among Old Believers. From the beginning, these activities were complex, including not only investigations of the manuscript tradition, but other aspects of the spirituality and mentality of Old Believers, such as music, folklore, rites and mythological, painting, and etc. The history of the Old Belief, its socioeconomic status and activities and material culture were also included.⁶¹

Data on the history and present status of the Old Faith were obtained on field trips. Field diaries, snapshots and audiotapes were labeled with the name of soglasiye (agreement), specifying subject and geographical card files.

Geographical areas for the investigations of the Ekaterinburg Archaeographic Center stretches from the Vyatka River in the west to the Volga River southwest of the Ishim River in the east. It covers the territories of the Kirovskaya, Samarskaya, a portion of Saratovskaya and Permskaya regions, Udmurtia and Bashkiria (Bashkortostan), as well as the Sverdlovskaya, Chelyabinskaya, Kurganskaya and

⁶¹Some preliminary conclusions on the results obtained by Urals research and their colleagues from other archaeographic centers of Russia may be found in the collective work *Historiography of the Social Ideas of the pre-Revolutionary Urals*. (Sverdlovsk, 1988) Specifically, see articles by Baidin, Shashkova, Mudrova, Pochinskaya, Mosina, Krivova, Soboleva, and Kazantseva. [NOTE: all citations are translated titles, original text in Russian - editor]

Tyumen'skaya regions of Russia. The same area was also separately or jointly investigated by research groups from the Library of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Moscow University, Perm Regional Museum, Perm State Library, Perm State University and the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Novosibirsk)⁶².

The Numerical Strength of the Old Believers

Authorities have never known the exact number of Old Believers. Before 1917 the lack information could be attributed to both the inadequacies of the systems of confessional, fiscal and police registration, as well as the absence of distinct boundaries between the Old Believers and the rest of the population.⁶³ Sometimes the Orthodox population at large was at fault. Even the comparatively thorough administrative statistics at the end of the nineteenth century (i.e., the materials of the first Russia census of 1897), was thought to understate the number of Old Believers in Russia by about ten-fold. Secretary of the Permi Consistory Court Vrutsevich estimated that the ten-time increase in official local numbers of Old Believers in 1880 amounted to about 91,000. At that time the Permsky region comprised the territory of contemporary Permskaya, Sverdlovskaya and the northern part of Chelyabinskaya. Old Believers were thought to constitute about a million or more of a two million population of the Permskaya region.⁶⁴ This assessment might be viewed as an exaggeration. In pre-revolutionary Russia during the golden age of the Old Belief when the movement enjoyed the greatest amount of freedom, the Old Believer portion of the population in the Permskaya region was less than that. In his report to Emperor Alexander I, the Governor of the Permskaya region, who was visiting the Urals in 1824, reported that

⁶²For the chronologies of the investigations in the region done from 1968 to 1980 by Moscow State University, see "Russian Written and Oral Traditions and Spiritual Culture," *On the Materials of Archaeographic Expeditions of Moscow State University in 1966-1980 11*, Moscow, 1982, pp. 31, 37-39. Also see the choronologies of the research carried out by the Urals State University in 1974-1986. The latter may be found in *The Books of the Old Urals*. Sverdlovsk, 1986, pp. 234-239.

⁶³Pokrovsky, N. N. "Organization of the Inventory of Old Believers in Siberia in the 18th century, *Russian Population of the Pomorye region and Siberia: Period of Feudalism*, Moscow, 1973, pp. 381-406.

⁶⁴Boretsky, L. (Prugavin A.S.) *Two million or Twenty Million?* Saint Petersburg, 1902.

the Beglopovtsy (fugitive priestly) and *Bezpopovtsy* (priestless) were very few in number during that period. They constituted approximately one-fifth of the half million population of the region.⁶⁵ This figure is also confirmed by contemporary Old Belief statistical data in the Governor's report. In the neighboring region the relative numbers of the Old Believers were smaller. In the Soviet period when religion was persecuted, the statistics of the Old Belief were incomplete. Moreover, one must remember the more than three hundred years of persecution and harassment the Old Believers experienced. Only until recently three registered Old Belief praying facilities, two chapels, and an Avstrijskaja church were registered in the Sverdlovskaya region. At the same time, dozens of praying facilities functioned in common dwelling houses. Local authorities in the villages, settlements and cities were, of course, aware of their existence, but preferred not to make it public. As long as these praying houses and the communities associated with them were not registered, they did not "exist." Today the number of registered communities has increased but, in our opinion, they are still less than double the official number. Most of the functioning communities still prefer not to be formally recognized. Therefore, the general number of Old Believers of different agreements on the territory under discussion could be assessed to comprise several dozens of thousands of people. This is provided we count not only Old Believers by origin, but also those who in fact identify themselves as full-time active members of Old Belief communities.

As far back as in the 1650's and 1660's, the Urals and Siberia were places of exile for prominent ideologists of the Old Rite. Archpriest Avvakum, Priest Lazar⁶⁶, Patriarchal sub-deacon Phedor Trophimov, and others were included. In the first half of the 1660's there was a small organization of Old Believers in the city of Tobolsk which united representatives of white and black clergy, and exiled Old Believers. The members of this organization maintained contacts with others of their persuasion in the city of Tyumen⁶⁷. After they organized an antichurch public gathering in Tobolsk in

⁶⁵Vrutsevich "Schism in the Permsky Region." *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, 1883, N6.

⁶⁶"Studies on the Permian Schism in the Beginning of the Reign of Emperor Nikolay," from the archives of Nechaev S.D. "Brotherly Word," 1893, Vol. 1, p.550.

⁶⁷Pikhoya, R.G. "Socio-Political Ideas of the Ural working people: the end of the 17th - 18th

1665, some participants of the organization and the principal ideologists of the schism were exiled to Pustozersk.

It was, however, not before the second half of the 1670's that the Old Belief movement had acquired a general and noted character. The agricultural development of the forest-steppe zone on the territories of the basin of the Iset', Miass, Tobol, Ishim and areas further east, coincided in the second part of the sixteenth century with the Tsar's decrees on arresting the fugitives, increasing taxes and prohibiting relocation to new arable lands. The military attitude worsened also. For example, local kazak (cossacks) military divisions were reorganized into regular military units. All these prohibitions could not help but hurt the economic interests of the population of the Urals and Western Siberia. Relations between the *chernoshoshnaya* (rabble) peasantry and the state that had been developing for dozens of years were ruined in one generation. Under those conditions, adherence to the Old Faith by the Zauralye population (eastern slopes of the Urals) was thought to be natural by both the taxed and assessed population.

Interestingly, Old Belief ideas did not become popular in the Urals before the second part of the seventeenth century. Old Belief communities appeared later, along with agricultural, industrial and hunting colonization.

It is well known that until the 1720's the migration of the population to the Urals was predominantly from the regions north of Russia, i.e., from Pomorye (maritime area). With its economic and social organization, the rabble peasantry from the Pomorye region brought its cultural institutions to the east. These were undergoing certain changes in the process of colonization. Results of the latest studies show that relations between religious units (monasteries, in particular) and peasantry in the Urals did not fit the category of "exploiters/exploited" but rather a type of symbiosis. It is difficult to overstate the role of the Dalmatovsky Uspensky monastery and the Troitskaya zaimka (small settlement) of the Kondinsky monastery located on the Iset' River as Old Believer centers. It was the increased importance in the role of these

centuries," Sverdlovsk, 1987, pp. 30-60. See also Baidin, V. I., and Shashkov, A. T. "Historico-Cultural Traditions of the Zauralye Population in the 17th-19th Centuries," *Artifacts of Literature and Written Culture of the Zauralye Peasantry*. Sverdlovsk, 1991, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 9-28.

religious centers in the course of migration that accounts for the fact that the Old Belief in its priestly variation was predominant at that moment in the east. The European north of Russia was the headquarters of the priestless agreements of the Old Faith.

The priestless version of the Old Belief was popular in the stety zone of the South Urals and Western Siberia, the regions of Priuralye (western slopes of the Urals), and the northern territories where the Russian colonization began in the beginning of the 18th century. Despite the fact that as far back as 1710-1730's the then all-Russia center of the *Pomorsky* agreement and Vyg as a center of the Bezpopovtsy managed to create a network of strongholds from the P.rikamye (belonging to the Kama basin) regions to the Altay. The original Bezpopovtsy agreements of the Old Belief have always been and still are very few north of the cities of Kiriv, Izhevsk, Tselyabink and Kurgan.

The *Beglopopovtsy* center was located in the forest region beyond the Volga, on the river of Kerzhenets, not far from the city of Nizhny Novgorod. Soon after local officials (in the early 1720's) raised it to the ground, the *Popovtsy* (priestly) agreement was widely supported. As a result, tens of thousands of people moved eastward. Plant and factory owners interested in ensuring their growing enterprises with labor assisted the persecuted Old Believers both personally and through their managers. This policy made the administrators of state plants more tolerant towards Old Believers.

Local Names of the Old Believers

There was a great influx of people from the Kerzhenets area. All the Old Believers who settled in the mining industrial regions of the Urals (Sverdlovskaya and Permskaya regions, southeast of the Kirovskaya and north of the Chelyabinskaya regions, middle part of Udmurtia), were referred to as *Kerzhacks*. Often there was no distinction between agreements made. The same name was transferred to the Altay where Old Believers helped create the Kolyvano-Voskresenskiye works. In the agricultural areas of the Zauralye Old Believers are called "Dvoyedany" (paying twice) because they had to pay the double taxes ordered by Peter the Great. Though double

taxation was eliminated in 1782, Old Believers had to pay twice all the same. One tax was levied by the local administration, another by the clergy of the official church. In mountain and forest districts the Old Believers were called “Kalugury” and “*Kalugery*” (from the Greek *kalogeros* meaning monk or hermit).

The first adherents to the Beguny (fugitives) branch of the Old Belief appeared at the end of the nineteenth century. (Beguny was on the Kolva River and a tributary of the Kama.) They settled in forest huts, and were labeled *Skrytniki* (those hiding away). The Beguny who settled in the Krasnouphimsky district of the Sverdlovsky region were called “Lipane,” as they rejected regular icons and allowed only crosses carved upon lipovye (lime tree) boards. Lime tree was considered to be a “pure” tree that grows in forests thought to be inaccessible to the Antichrist.

As it was impossible for the whole community to become Beguny, or *Skrytniki*, an interesting code of behavior developed for those who remained in villages and needed to get in touch with local authorities. They paid their taxes, had their marriage ceremonies carried out in official state churches, and even pretended to pray for the Tsar. The principal task of such Old Believers was to support their wandering brothers in every possible way: to supply all their needs, to warn them about potential dangers, or to find them jobs at numerous Urals works. The wandering Old Believers (*Pustynniki*, or those living in isolation), *Beguny*, *Stranniki* (wanderers) were to take care of the spiritual purity of their brothers dwelling among the worldly sinners. They prayed to God for those who sponsored them. This remarkable conspiracy originated in the 1820s and is still going on. Many devices were devised to circumvent the reformed rites. Old men would burn themselves so they wouldn’t be buried by the reformed church; old women used to leave their homes to die elsewhere; and passports and names were changed or “lost.”

In central Bashkiriya there is an interesting, ethnically mixed (Mordva-Russian) but unilingual (Russian) group of Old Believers referred to as *Sidyaki* (those sitting). They are ancestors of Mordovian migrants who arrived at the end of the nineteenth century and, in all likelihood, brought the Old Belief with them. In their new whereabouts there were not enough people who knew how to conduct worship, so

they rejected religious services and limited their activities to reading ecclesiastical literature (i.e., the Gospels, St. John Chrysostom, and Acts). This enabled them to sit during services and accounted for their nickname.

Often the Old Believers themselves use the names above. But much more frequently they refer to themselves as *Istinno Pravoslavnye Khristiane* (True Believing Christians). Sometimes they add the name of their particular agreement, to emphasize their distinction from the laity of the official Russian Orthodox Church. There are also local names for separate parts of this or that agreement of the Old Belief. Usually these were associated with schisms inside certain agreements in local communities⁶⁸. Quite often, especially in the areas where the Old Belief was subjected to considerable disintegration, the Old Believers themselves are in a predicament as to how to identify their adherence to this or that agreement.

Returning to history: The liberalization of the state policy as regards raskol (schism) since the second half of the eighteenth century created favorable conditions for legalization, growth and social consolidation of the Old Belief communities of the Urals and Western Siberia. In the opinion of the clergy of the official Orthodox church, the Old Faith developed along trade routes.⁶⁹ The most influential city and representatives of the top industrial trade people headed plant communities. It was, however, not only they who played the lead roles in community life. The ideals of democratic religious organization and "cheap" church were attractive to followers of the Old Belief. The processes of propagating the belief and uniting the Old Belief forces were also greatly affected by the socio-historic peculiarities of various districts.

The relatively weakly integrated communities of the Uralo-Siberian Old Belief of the eighteenth century were replaced by those of the *Beglopopovtsy* Society of Old Believers of the Siberian region. Its center was in Ekaterinburg and was comprised of

⁶⁸For instance, Ionovtsy and Vasintsy of the *Philippovtsy* agreement of the lower-Vyatka, *Demintsy* and *Maksimovtsy* of the Pomortsy agreement of the upper-Kama. Also see Mosin, A.G. "Historic Compositions of the Old Believers of the Vyatka Region in the Second Half of the 19th through the Beginning of the 20th Century," *Socio-Political Ideas in the Pre-Revolutionary Urals*. Sverdlovsk, 1983, pp. 104-112; and Pozdeeva, I. V. "Index of Compositions", pp. 57-63.

⁶⁹Baidin, I.V. "Formation of Bourgeoisie Among State Peasantry of the Middle Ural in the Second half of the 18th century," *Ural Peasantry in the Epoch of Feudalism*. Sverdlovsk, 1988, pp. 78-87.

about 200,000 Old Believers of the Permskaya, Orenburgskaya, Tobolskaya and Tomskaya regions. This organization even claimed an autonomous position in the state structure of the Russian empire and was somewhat successful. From the start this Siberian Society of the Old Believers was radical. The Bezpopovtsy trend was represented by some of the peasants of the Zauralye region termed *Starikovshchina* (the Elders' affair). This term is sometimes used by those around Old Believers even today and it derives from the fact that all the sacraments, such as Baptism, receiving Communion, or chanting prayers to the departed, were administered by the chosen "skillful" old men. Generally speaking, *Starikovshchina* members acknowledged the necessity of the clergy and wished they could have "true" clergymen. But they had to reject the institution altogether due to their absence.

At that time Pomortsy and Phedoseevtsy who were settling in the Vyatka basin represented the true Bezpopovtsy communities in the region. They had been there since the second half of the eighteenth century, along with *Philippovtsy and Beguny (Stranniki)* who appeared not before the beginning of the next century. However, they failed to unite into strong organizational units. They were under the growing influence of such all-Russia or local *Bezpopovshchina* centers (as the *Phedoseevsky* Moscow Preobrazhensky Cemetery, or the Tumen'sky center). As a rule, *Bezpopovtsy* communities were relatively few and were comprised of several hundred Old Believers at most.

At the end of the 1830's-1840's, a new wave of harassment was initiated by Emperor Nickolay I. This resulted in the disappearance of fugitive priests. Under the effect of the internal contradictions and reorientation of economic priorities, the unified Beglopovovtsy organization of the Urals and Western Siberia disintegrated. And its remnants gave rise to a decentralized world of Chasovennye communities who nonetheless were well aware of their former unity.⁷⁰ In 1840 the Zauralye region, where the traditions of *Starikovshchina* were quite strong, such communities managed

⁷⁰Baidin, V. I. "New Sources on the Organization and Ideology of the Uralo-Siberian old Believers at the end of the 18th and the First Half of the 19th Century," *Siberian Source-Studies and Archaeography*.11 Novosibirsk, 1980, pp. 93-109.

to unite into an Old Believer organization⁷¹, which functioned until the 1920's. The origin of the name "Chasovennye," (known since the nineteenth century but firmly established a hundred years later), relates to the fact that chasovni (chapels] were used by members of these agreements as cult centers. It is the *Chasovennye* Old Believers that today are most numerous in the Urals and Siberia. They first moved to Siberia and the Far East. Then, as a result of twentieth century political reorganization in Russia, they got to South and North America through China. As far as one can judge, the oral information from Old Believers residing abroad and publications,⁷² indicate that the *Chasovennye* constitute the majority of the old Believer population there as well.

It is through *Beglopopovtsy* that the initially *Bezpopovtsy* trends of the local Old Belief was strengthened. The increase in the numerical strength of these agreements, especially of the *Pomortsy*, was primarily noticeable in Priuralye (in the neighborhood of the Vyatsky region, where *Pomorsky*, *Phedoseevsky* and *Philippovtsy* agreements were numerous). It was also probably noticeable in the southern Urals. A wider distribution of these agreements was undoubtedly hampered by the conservatism of the religious consciousness. It was much simpler for former *Beglopopovtsy* to become Chasovennye because they rejected some elements of their dogma and cult. They also retained their habitual ideas rather than turning to "pure" *Bezpopovtsy*. The ancient cultural traditions of some districts also played their role in the process.

As early as in the middle of the nineteenth century emissaries of the then newly emerged *Belokrinitzky* (*Avstriisky* [Austrian]) Old Believer metropolis began their activities. Propagating the ideas of this (probably best) organized Old Believer unit in the last dozen years of the Russian empire was not particularly successful. There were few *Avstriitsy* in the area.

In the middle of the nineteenth century representatives of the *Pomorsky*

⁷¹Baidin, V. I., Shashkov, A. T. "The Old Belief and the Manuscript Tradition of the Zauralye in the 17th to the Beginning of the 20th Centuries," *Artifacts of Literature and Written Tradition of the Zauralye Peasantry*. Ekaterinburg, 1993, pp. 16-32.

⁷²Morris, R. "Russians in America and at Home," *Folk Culture of the Permsky Region and its Relations*. (Proceedings of the Scientific Conference of February 21-24), 1989. 11 Perm, 1992, pp.185-189.

agreement started appearing in the settlements along the Kolva river, a tributary of the Kama, while by the end of the century it was the *Beguny (Skrytniki)* Old Believers that were most numerous. At the same time, a wave of Russian peasant migrants of the Phedoseevsky agreement (from the Vyatka) settled in the north of Bashkiriya. The resulting isolation among the local Muslim population resulted in their staunch preservation of the Old Faith. The area south of Upha proved to be a more attractive dwelling place for *Spasovtsy* (those who saved), *Pomortsy*, *Avstriitsy* and *Sidyaki*.

Up-to-date Distribution of the Old Believer Population

One can find an approximate distribution of the Old Believers in the region on the map attached. One symbol corresponding to a definite agreement denotes the presence of individuals, two symbols denote a group, and three symbols denote the existence of a communion conducting regular cult services. The information is far from being exhaustive, especially as regards the Permskaya region and the Volga basin. Moreover, the situation in some districts changes quickly, and it is quite difficult to monitor such a large area. Due to urbanization, Old Believers of practically all trends functioning on the territory moved to regional, republican and industrial centers. Sometimes the symbols denoting such agreements are placed inside a circle presenting a city, and sometimes around it.

The *Popovtsy* trend is represented by the *Belokrinitzky (Avstriiskiy)* agreement, which is subordinate to the Old Believer Moscow and all-Russia metropolis with its center at the Rogozhsky cemetery in Moscow. The local eparchy headquarter is located in the city of Samara (former Kuibyshev). Another branch of the *Popovtsy* agreement is represented by *Beglopopovtsy (Novozybkovtsy)*, who got the name by the city of Novozybkovo of the Tryansky region which houses the Archbishop of *Drevneprovoslavnykh Khristian* (Old Believer Christians, as they refer to themselves). The *Beglopopovtsy* church resumed its activities in 1923, after two bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church joined the Old Belief. As a result, the term “*Beglopopovtsy*” lost its former meaning and started being used by tradition. Some years ago a *Beglopopovtsy* Bishop Leonty of the village of Vanlkova of the Krasnovishersky district of the Permskaya region organized two new congregations

(eparchies) in Georgia and was elected Archbishop. One can only guess what the future has in store for this deviating branch of the *Novozybkovtsy* trend. *Bezpopovtsy* trends of the Old Belief are represented by *Chasovennye*, *Pomortsy*, *Phedoseevtsy*, *Philippovtsy*, *Spasovtsy*, *Sidyaki*, *Beguny (Stranniki)* and *Istinno-Pravoslavnye Khristiankiye Stranstvuyushchie (IPKHS)* (true-Orthodox wandering Christians). The latter organization is still conspiratorial, and its adherents are practically not detectable by common means of field archaeography. It was by sheer chance that we managed to spot three lower-level units of the IPKHS agreement on the territory of the Sverdlovsk region, and to contact them. Every such unit consists of one or two *kelya* (monastic cells) where *stranstvuyushchiye* (recluses) dwell with their *blagodeteli* (sponsors) who take care of them.

Non-Russian Old Believers

Besides the *Sidyaki* (those sitting) in Bashkiriya, who comprise not only Russian but also Mordovian ethnic components, the Old Belief has penetrated the non-Russian population in a number of other districts in the region. At the end of the eighteenth century in the Upper-Yazlva (a tributary of the Vishera in the northern part of the Kama basin), the appearance of Old Believer monks from the Nizhny-Tagil works coincided, with the agricultural development by Komi-Yazlventsy.⁷³ As a result, contemporary *Beglopovovtsy* in the villages along the northern bank of the Yazlva river, and along the Pud'va, (its left-hand tributary), are bilingual. At work they use Russian, and in daily usage they use Russian and the Yazlva dialect of Komi. As far back as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a Russian settlement appeared in the Yurlinsky district of the present-day Komi-Permian national area. Propagation of the Old Belief in this district resulted in its popularity among KomiPermians and, hence, in their bilingualism. Unfortunately, today the picture of the Old Belief in this area is significantly confused. And, finally, there are data on Udmurtia Old Believers (*Philippovovtsy* and *Pomortsy*) in the north of Udmurtia.

Distinctive qualities of the spiritual life of Old Believers

⁷³ Lytkin, V.I. "Komi-Yazlvensky Dialect," Moscow, 1961. Some researchers refer to this group as Komi-Permians.

As part of the national culture, the Old Believers culture is characterized by a number of specific qualities shared by all the agreements and regions. Examples are the process of incessant idealization, orientation towards polemic and opposition, intimacy with the folk culture, disposition to the daily requirements of life, and powerful creative abilities. An important point worth special consideration is the systematic character of the Old Believer culture, and the interrelation of its various types and genres. Written and oral folklore, painting, music and applied art have all been interrelated.

Oral folklore

Oral folklore among the Old Believer population has been evolving under constantly changing but conflicting conditions. On one hand, Old Believers were oriented towards their past. They strived to be aware of being followers of the elder bearers of the True Faith. This resulted in the conservation of ancient folklore items in the memory of the folklore bearers. However, censorship on the part of the agreement, combined with self-censorship, regulated the performance of folklore pieces. This fact, incidentally, created a number of specific problems for a collector, such as how to elucidate what prohibitions were imposed and what the attitude should be toward the performer of the piece. These problems are especially acute regarding the cult poetry that coincides with the Christian feasts, i.e., demonology, whose performance butts against the requirements of monotheism. For instance, the most conservative forces objected to the performance of rhythmic and satirical songs. During periods of the year associated with fasts it was forbidden to perform lyrical songs. And spiritual tribulations had to be expressed in the performance of the psalms and religious poetry. In this case a very complex process of recomprehension of literature pieces into oral--poetic genres is taking place. Life histories start being presented as fairy tales. Oral and written variations of religious poetry start interacting, incantations acquire a written form, and apocryphal texts turn into lucky charms curing all diseases. Sharing all these peculiarities, folklore preserves its regional and social variations (for instance, the distinct Ural cossack folklore). The problem of the degree of importance of belonging to this or that agreement is still open to discussion.

Written Tradition

Written tradition falls into the manuscript tradition and printed matter one. To assess the spiritual world of Old Believers it is important to look at the book repertoire and the attitude to the printed matter revealed through a system of notes and marginal signs. The book has always been a center of interest, a center of the universe, and a bearer of the truth. It is also an axis through which the sinful present is connected with the ideal pre-Nikon past by the laws of which the book was created. That is why the book has been subject to so much disputes, being used in all of them to prove the ultimate truth. That is also why the phenomenon of creating libraries in peasant homes is understandable. So is the preservation and accumulation of books for centuries by even illiterate Old Believers. As the book is the epicenter of discussions, the attitude to it can only be creative, which nevertheless does not exclude some elements of pedantry of a medieval type.

In the written tradition, the polemic trend of the spiritual culture resulted in the activation of the genre of epistolary disputes between adherents of different agreements within the Old Faith. This happened by analogy with the famous discussions between Old Believers and Nikon-supporters at the end of the seventeenth century. In the manuscript section of the Urals University there are materials on numerous councils (decrees, correspondence, disputes conducted by Old Believers of the Urals region from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries). These materials were being collected, bound and rewritten into separate collected works, which were widely read and formed a part of the written tradition.

Decentralization and relations with the folk epic tradition gave rise to a unique genre of the history of agreements. During the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries scribes were spinning famous *Rodosloviyall* (lineages) which comprised an all-Christian mythological history, a brief history of the origin of the Old Belief movement, and local legends of both historic and daily family character. It should be noted that the *Rodosloviya* of various agreements have elaborated their own historic concepts. The evolution of history is generally viewed as the conveyance of grace through Old Belief authorities since pre-Nikon times. The mechanism of conveyance

can be either the institute of the Elders, or disciples, or family kinship.⁷⁴

A unique phenomenon is the origination of a kind of a scientific approach i.e., historical studies, archive notes, and annotated bibliographies on disputes with selected citations and facts). The community members as highly respectful treated activities of the kind. The "scientific" variation of the lower strata folklore culture is undoubtedly a result of the Old Belief mentality.

One of the most interesting genres of Old Belief literature is the so-called vagabond-literature, or vagabondlegends, which describe the routes of the *Stranniki* or Beguny to the radiant kingdom of the Old Faith. Primitive maps were attached which were in full conformity with the traditions of the pilgrimage genre of the Orthodox church. The route on one such map starts in the Karelian Tuoppajdrvi, and continues through the Perm territories to Ekaterinburg in the Urals. It then goes through the Altay to finish in the mythical land of Belovodye (White Waters).

The Ural region can also boast of its own painting tradition called the Nevyanskaya school. The music culture is characterized by a variety of genres, as well as by a combination of ancient tunes and their folklore interpretation. The Old Belief culture has contributed much to the preservation of an in-depth relation between the new and ancient cultures.

Conclusion

The current state of the Old Belief and the degree of preservation of its unique culture were determined by a number of factors. The diversity of the natural, climatic and socioeconomic conditions of the districts involved numerous things. Along with colonization, migration and cultural traditions of the population, is the political history of Russia, the history of the Old Belief itself, and that of the evolution of social ideas. The evolution of the culture, along with its ethno-cultural contacts, all played important roles in the preservation of its unique culture.

⁷⁴Soboleva, L. S., and Pikhoya, R.G. "Tsar Secretary Ignaty Vorontsov and Donskoy Kazak Ignaty Voronkov." (On the History of a recently found novel "*Rodosloviye* of the *Pomorsky*" [Belief in the Urals and in Siberia]).