

OLD-BELIEVERS IN RUSSIA: CULTURAL INTERACTION WITH SOUTH-WESTERN EUROPE

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Abstract: The paper is centred around the culture of old believers from Saratov region in light of their cultural connections and interactions with their brothers in faith from South-Western regions of Europe. Our research reveals the contacts between Saratov's old believers of the second half of the 18th and the 19th century and major old-believers' centres on the territory of modern Belarus, Moldova and Romania. The article is especially concentrated upon the processes of migration, cultural adaptation and interactions which were reflected in various aspects of old-believers' tradition such as monastery way of life, manuscript writing and singing practice. These cultural contacts greatly contributed to the establishment of traditions in Russian old-believers' centres situated on the territory of Saratov region, and namely Irghiz and Cheremshany old-believers' monasteries.

Keywords: Saratov region, old believers, Irghiz and Cheremshany monasteries, South-Western Europe, Vetka

Along the centuries-old history of its existence the old-believers' movement has embraced vast territories both in Russia and abroad. At present old-believers inhabit all the continents of the planet, whereas their communities exist in different regions of Russia, as well as in European (especially South-Western) countries, America, Australia etc. Sharing the same faith, old believers of different groupings and communities were bound to enter in socio-cultural relations and interact in the course of their existence. This paper looks more closely at the cultural contacts and interactions of the old believers from Saratov region with those from other territories in the second half of the 18th and the 19th century. These contacts were numerous – the fact that accounts for our attention to the contacts between Saratov's old believers and those living on the territory of modern Belarus, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine, since the religious and cultural ties between the old believers of these countries were especially strong.

An important stage in the development of the old-believers' tradition in Saratov region was the 1760s, when, with a view to occupying poorly populated territories of Transvolga, Catherine II issues a manifesto in which she promises the old believers who had previously migrated to allow them to freely perform liturgy in case they return. This led to the foundation of several old-believers' sketes along the river Bolshoy Irghiz (Volsk district of Saratov region) situated near old-believers' villages.

The major part of the old believers who came back to Russia arrived from Vetka – an island on the river Sozh, as well as a settlement found by old believers in 1685 near the city of Gomel (Belarus), named after the island. In what followed, the name Vetka was used for this whole vast region populated by old believers (Буфарт, Ушаков, 1996: 62). In the 18th century this territory was under the jurisdiction of Poland.

Old believers coming from Vetka laid the foundation for Irghiz monasteries that would later become world-famous. In 1762 they founded the following sketes: Avraamiev (from 1786 – Nizhne-Voskresensky monastery), Pakhomiev, Philaretov (in 1788 they were united and formed Nikolsky monastery), Isakiev (in 1774 and 1783; from 1783 it was called Verkhne-Uspensky, whereas in 1804 it became known as Preobrazhensky monastery), Margaritin (Matrona Matfeevna Ilyina – a nun, daughter of a merchant from Simbirsk region, according to Dubakin, Margarita from Vetka (Дубакин, 1882: 90) and Afanasin. The founders of three of the above-

named monasteries were old believers from Vetka: monk Avraamy who had lived in Vetka for several years “and, coming back to his native land together with 12 companions, occupied the so-called “Medvezhiy Gay” in 30 versts from Balakovo and Volga”, monk Pakhomy and monk Isaaky (Соколов, 1888: 38, 40). According to N.S. Sokolov, the major part of the inhabitants came to these monasteries from Saratov and other regions of Russia, as well as from Moldova (*Ibid.*: 238). Moreover, a number of local villages were also populated by old believers coming from abroad. For example, according to a famous 19th-century local historian A.F. Leopoldov, the whole village of Krivoluchye “consisted of old-believers coming from Polish borders (i.e. from Vetka)” (ГАСО¹. Fund 407. Op. 2. Yed. khr. 1774. L. 49 ob.). Other settlements founded by the old-believers returning to the Volga region from Vetka include the villages of Balakovo, Kamenka and Mechetnoye, which “was populated by up to 120 homesteads of the migrants from Vetka” (Дубакин, 1882: 84, 86).

In 1784 Irghiz monasteries issue a conciliar code, followed by a church discipline based on the example of Kerzh, Starodubye and Vetka settlements² in 1805. By a conciliar decree of 1783 and 1792 Irghiz monopolized the right to accept *fugitive* monks and, diminishing the influence of Starodubye, became the only centre that supplied other Russian old-believers’ communities with priests (Соколов, 1888: 79, 180). At the same time, the contacts between the old believers from Volga region with Southern Poland were never interrupted. Thus, in the late 18th century the father superior of the monastery, Serghiy (Yurshev), left Irghiz for Starodubye, where he became father superior of the Uspensky monastery of Edinoverie (*Common Faith*) in Belarus (*Ibid.*: 129).

In the early 19th century Irghiz monasteries convert to common faith, whereas their inhabitants are sent away according to their official place of residence. The lists of inhabitants of Irghiz common faith monasteries of 1843 demonstrate that the geography of their origins is impressive. Among the inhabitants of Spaso-Preobrazhensky and Nizhne-Voskresensky monasteries there were not only those coming from Saratov region and its neighbours, but also a number of old believers “from the Moldavian lands” (ГАСО. Fund 135. Op. 1. D. 9991. L. 1-5 ob., L. 51 ob. - 62 ob.); Sredne-Nikolsky convent was made up of 9 nuns, all of them coming from Maksakovsky common faith monastery of Chernihiv eparchy (Ukraine) (ГАСО. Fund 135. Op. 1. D. 9991. L. 75 ob.–79). Archive documents preserve separate names of the old believers coming to Irghiz from Moldova: “Ioann (Ivan Semyonov), aged 50, from Moldavia, literate, old believer converted into common faith, living in the monastery since 1839”; “Anatoly (Alimpy Fedoseev), aged 39, literate, from Moldavia, old believer converted into common faith in 1839, lived in Voskresensky monastery from 1840, living in Spasopreobrazhensky monastery since 1843” (ГАСО. F. 135. Op. 1. D. 9991. L. 5, 61).

The majority of Irghiz monks started looking for new places to inhabit and organize old-believers’ sketes. Thus, in the middle and the second half of the 19th century they found Cheremshany monasteries that soon assume the role Irghiz used to play. The founder of the biggest and the most influential “Verkhny” monastery was monk Serapion (Semyon Ignatyevich Abachin, originating from Saratov, 1823-1898) – an old-believers’ activist and a zealous advocate of his faith. During his life he traveled a lot, visiting old-believers’ sacred places, as well as countries such as Turkey, Romania, Austria etc. After this he settled in a homestead near Khvalynsk and the spring of Cheremshany, where he founded a monastery. In 1893 father Serapion was ordained archimandrite. By this time, monastery had been inhabited by up to 130 people (Полозова, 2016: 62–65). A great number of the inhabitants of Cheremshany monasteries were likely to have originated from “the Moldavian lands” – the fact pointed out in the second half of the 19th century by F.V. Livanov (Ливанов, 1870: 125, 131).

¹ State Archive of Saratov region.

² Kerzhnets – an old-believers’ centre in the province of Nizhny Novgorod, Starodubye – such centre in the province of Chernihiv (today’s territory of Bryansk region), settlement Rogozhskaya – a settlement of Moscow (Russian) old believers of the *popovtsy* grouping.

It is only natural that the migration of old-believers' population and the establishment of personal contacts with the representatives of the communities outside the borders of Russia contributed to building up cultural contacts and exerting influences. These cultural contacts were bound to be manifold: the exchange of manuscripts and printed books of pre-reform and old-believers' period, church utensils, communal rules (monastery regulations), singing traditions (migration of melodies) and, first and foremost, the spread of the polemic literature justifying the correctness of the religious doctrine of the old-believers' confession.

It is a well-known fact that in the course of their existence old believers were consistent in collecting old books; moreover, they did not always confine themselves to their confessional volumes. Collecting was characteristic of the monks of Irghiz monasteries who contributed to the acquisition of rare manuscripts and printed editions from the very first years of the existence of the monasteries. Thus, father superior of Verkhne-Preobrazhensky monastery, monk Siluan, "was a very educated man and a remarkable bibliophile. He collected... quite an impressive library of rare and valuable printed books and manuscripts and even catalogued them, judging by the numbering of the books made by his own hand. He knew Latin and had an organ" (Дубакин, 1882: 293–294). Collecting activity was continued in Cheremshany, where father Serapion also collected a big personal library.

It should be mentioned in this connection that the books brought to Volga region from other areas had various contents and origins: manuscripts, old print and new print, old- and new-believers' by origin; singing manuscripts were both neume (the most widespread ones used during liturgy) and five-line (rare copies in old-believers' monasteries). Among singing manuscripts there were not only Russian, but also volumes from Greece, Moldova and other countries. From the second half of the 18th century, when old-believers' typographies are established outside Russian borders, common faith monasteries from the Volga region get quite a few books from Warsaw, Vilnius, Grodno, Klinty, Pochaev and Suprasl. Irghiz, generically connected to the centre of Vetka-Starodubye, could hardly lack the attention of these old-believers' publishing houses. Books were purchased by Irghiz inhabitants due to the mediation of the old believers from Starodubye.

At the same time, the formation of rich libraries in Irghiz and Cheremshany monasteries was favoured by the active practice of creating new manuscripts meant for liturgy – both singing and non-singing. Almost all monasteries had their scriptorium where the work of copying liturgical books was conducted over a period of many years. Most of these manuscripts remained in the monasteries, whereas the rest were distributed among old-believers' parishes around Russia. With the course of time Irghiz and Cheremshany monasteries develop their own traditions of design.

At present we can hardly speak about the elaboration of an original style of manuscript design in Irghiz and Cheremshany monasteries. Taking into account a certain degree of conservatism of the old-believers' culture, it is difficult to imagine that they could create their own school with a new style of design over a less extended period of time. Furthermore, by the time of the foundation of the local scriptoria there had already existed the traditions of designing singing manuscripts of the *popovtsy* and *bespopovtsy* groupings. As we see it, Saratov's monasteries do not see the creation of a new style, but a gradual adaptation of various traditions of design of old-believers' manuscripts. At the same time, it can hardly be called a mechanical reproduction and copying of a certain style by local masters. Scribes from Irghiz and Cheremshany summarized the rich experience of the elaboration of singing volumes, creatively reviewed the most common styles of decoration and the most widespread melodies, thus contributing to the development of manuscript practice.

Master scribes were far from adopting all features of one tradition of design – they used to borrow a certain way of decoration. For example, Irghiz type of design does not wholly adopt the characteristic features of Vetka's writing, even though its traditions were extremely powerful here. In singing books from Irghiz we do not encounter such typical element of Vetka's design as

painting a delicate tracery of white dots and dashes against a dark background (black, wine red and blue in particular). At the same time, the way of writing initials in Irghiz manuscripts develops the traditions from Vetka. Furthermore, in some Irghiz and Cheremshany manuscripts we observe a combination of different styles. Thus, the design of Irghiz singing manuscript number 163 from Saratov collection of MSU³ is based on the use of grey and blue tints, as well as a dark yellow-green colour typical of the manuscripts originating from Vetka. The inventory card 163 in the MSU catalogue includes the following note: “close to the writing of elder Yevdokhim from Vetka”. At the same time, having studied a rich collection of Irghiz manuscripts kept in the Research Library of Saratov State Chernyshevsky University, we can state the fact that manuscript 163 from the Saratov collection of MSU is very close to Irghiz tradition of design: the presence of elaborate initials occupying the whole page, the type of headpieces, the depiction of a rod with a bird on its top, floral ornament and, finally, colourful patterns allow us to attribute the manuscript to Irghiz. On the other hand, the combination of the features of two traditions of design makes it possible to confirm the idea of the continuity of Vetka’s traditions in Irghiz manuscripts.

The Octoechos 165 from the Saratov collection of MSU is based on a contrasting combination of dark and light tones: purple, brown-orange, green, dark blue and light yellow, light green, carrot-red and light blue. Such revision of colour design of manuscripts that were not elaborated in line with monastery traditions also reflects the blending of Irghiz and Vetka types of decoration. Combining the elements of different styles of design was not typical exclusively of Irghiz and Cheremshany tradition of decoration. Thus, M.V. Bogomolova and N.A. Kobyak indicate an analogous combination of Guslitsk, Pomor and printed ornaments in the books from Vetka and Starodubye (Богомоллова, Кобяк, 1982: 163-164). At the same time, the examples adduced above confirm the idea of the creativity of the scribes from Irghiz and Cheremshany in developing the art of elaboration of singing manuscripts in the old-believers’ period.

Mastering Vetka’s design traditions in Irghiz monasteries seems to be logical; however, the practice of borrowing elements of manuscript decoration from the old believers of the *popovtsy* grouping by the *bespopovtsy* grouping is less obvious. This phenomenon is observed in two manuscripts created by old believers of the *bespopovtsy* grouping in the village of Samodurovka. As a typical design technique, the scribes used the decoration of the initial with numerous dots of (usually) purple colour. This technique might have presented a continuation of Vetka’s tradition where such dark dots were placed in headpieces inside the frame, whereas the scribes from Samodurovka used it to decorate the initial. Having analyzed the design traditions in Irghiz and Cheremshany, we can state the fact that in the course of time a lighter colour palette is established, with the tints becoming more transparent and pastoral.

The study of church singing traditions typical of Irghiz and Cheremshany monasteries also lead us to the idea of continuity. The most widespread singing styles and variants of melodies in Saratov monasteries were those common in South-Western Europe (first and foremost, Vetka). Thus, the most widespread and, probably, the favourite style of Irghiz singers was *demestvo*. It is the only style referred to in manuscripts and old-believers’ statements as “the most beautiful *demestvo*”, “angel-voiced”, “fair” singing etc. An increased interest in the stylistics of *demestvo* shown by Irghiz choir brothers must have been connected with Vetka’s singing traditions – the place that used to host the first inhabitants of Irghiz sketes. According to M.V. Bogomolova, *demestvo* actively develops in the villages in Vetka and Starodubye in the 18th century, with its repertoire significantly growing (Богомоллова, 1982: 70). Irghiz monasteries keep revising and developing the traditions of the *demestvo* singing – the fact reflected in local singing monuments. The general *demestvo* repertoire list of the monastery manuscripts includes 188 texts in which the most common ones are liturgical canticles, as well as the Hymn to the Theotokos and the Exaltation. Analyzing singing books from Vetka and Starodubye of the 17th-20th centuries, M.V.

³ The department of rare books and manuscripts of the Research Library of Moscow State Lomonosov Univeristy

Bogomolova finds 15 examples of *stolp demestvo* and mentions the trend to reduce it in the manuscripts of the 19th century (*Ibid.*: 69). In Irghiz monasteries *demestvo* singing was not only preserved in its best and representative examples – it also got a new impetus for the development. It can be stated that at the end of 18th and in the 19th century Irghiz, along with Vetka and Starodubye, was one of the largest singing centres where the traditions of *demestvo* singing were gradually and actively developed. Having disappeared from the singing practice of the dominant church, *demestvo* singing is reborn in the old-believers' culture, establishing a rich repertoire of *demestvo* compositions. Irghiz was the place where new *demestvo* singing monuments were created in large numbers; various melodies were fixed and reputable *demestvo* manuals were elaborated. This is what brings Irghiz to the fore as compared to other old-believers' singing centres of the 19th-century Russia, where the traditions of *demestvo* singing were not developed so actively. Accepting the heritage of Vetka's culture, Irghiz singers revised it in a creative way. We can assume that it is due to Irghiz traditions that old believers of all groupings name *demestvo* as one of the most common and favourite chants even at present. Therefore, at the end of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century Irghiz monasteries were an important centre of the development of *demestvo* singing. The creative process of the elaboration of *demestvo* singing books and new versions of *demestvo* canticles had, to a large extent, a practical role.

Interestingly enough, the parallels between Vetka and Irghiz can also be traced in another singing style – *put'* singing. Thus, in the collection of singing manuscripts from Vetka and Starodubye of the 19th and the 20th century one remarks the same number of texts recorded in the *put'* chant; the same phenomenon can be found in Irghiz manuscripts – 32 canticles (*Ibid.*: 71). The repertoire list of *Vetka's put'* largely coincides with the Irghiz one – the fact that, on the one hand, characterizes old-believers' traditionalism and, on the other hand, reveals the continuity of Vetka's singing principles in the case of Irghiz inhabitants. Singing practice of the monastery choir brothers reflects the common way of the development of old-believers' singing culture from the second half of the 18th until the beginning of the 20th century, inheriting, first and foremost, traditions of church singing of the old-believers' settlements from Vetka. Old-believers tried to record local performing traditions that had settled in the monasteries, as well as to adapt some of their famous post-reform *demestvo* melodies. At the same time, Irghiz editions may reflect a significant transformation of the protograph or the creation of an original intonation material, as well as renew it to a certain extent, adapting it to the local performing tradition.

Local variants of *demestvo* widely spread in old-believers' monasteries were later preserved in the common-faith period, in some cases acquiring a new sounding (for example, the Cherubic Hymn in *demestvo*). It follows from what has just been said that the old believers from Irghiz common-faith monasteries aspired to preserve and develop local singing traditions established in the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century.

In conclusion, in this article we have examined the contacts of Saratov's old believers with their brothers in faith living on the territories of Eastern Poland, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. We have also traced the influence of old-believers' traditions from South-Eastern Europe on the Volga region. The analyses of the archive documents, historical testimonies, the traditions of manuscript design and the melodies included in the old-believers' singing manuscripts reveals that Irghiz and Cheremshany monasteries consistently preserved and developed the traditions of Vetka and Starodubye – the greatest old-believers' centres that in the 18th and the 19th centuries were outside Russia's borders. Moreover, we have to mention in this connection that the residence of the archiereus of the *belokrinitsey* grouping – the one to which belonged Cheremshany monasteries – was situated in Belaya Krinitsa on the territory of Austria-Hungary, now the territory of Ukraine. Thus, the contacts between the old believers of the Volga region and those from the above mentioned countries were quite active and concerned a vast sphere of life and activities of old believers: social and economic ties (trade which presented the

occupation of the majority of the old-believers' population); creation of new polemical volumes and leading theological disputes *in absentia* – the ones that accounted for the confessional specificity of old believers; spreading of manuscripts and printed editions of liturgical books etc. These contacts were indirectly reflected in the sphere of the traditions of manuscript design (first and foremost, singing manuscripts), as well as the continuity of singing traditions.

The study of the traditions of various groupings of old believers demonstrates that, despite the preservation mechanism typical of the old-believers' culture in general, the old-believers' readiness for renewal and active communication with other communities and confessions varies in different old-believers' groupings. Thus, the *popovtsy* grouping is more open to the communication with the world and the authorities, their community being not so closed. In addition, one of the possible motives for the introduction of new chants is the factor of close historical ties between the old believers of the *popovtsy* grouping and the frontier territories, as well as other European countries. New melodies could enter more easily in the singing traditions of these groupings. At the same time, the followers of the *bespopovtsy* grouping intentionally limit themselves in contacts with the adherents of other faiths and are far more conservative in every respect.

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