

**T. B. Shchepanskaya, *Kultura dorogi v russkoi miforitualnoi traditsii XIX–XX vv.* [The Journey in Russian Rituals and Myths of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries]. Series Traditsionnaya dukhovnaya kultura slavyan: Sovremennye issledovaniya. Moscow: Indrik, 2003. 528 pp.**  
 Reviewed by Mikhail Lurye

## THE ROAD WITH NO VERGES

This monograph, written by a St Petersburg ethnographer well-known for her studies of different subjects,<sup>1</sup> deals, true to its title, with the place of the journey in Russian traditional culture. The theme is understood in the broadest sense, including material culture, verbal texts, ritual actions, social states, human relationships and status, various types of social group and community folkloric texts and personages, popular beliefs and omens, forms of religious practice, ethical norms and rules, customs — in a word, everything associated with the act of moving from one place to another. Taking the subject of journeys — which Shchepanskaya herself describes as ‘a separate and specific sphere of folk tradition’ — so widely has allowed the author to cite and analyse a striking quantity and variety of texts and pieces of information. This includes not only folklore (from proverbs to folk epics), and rituals (e.g. those accompa-

<sup>1</sup> Including a 1993 study of youth culture. [Editor].

nying the departure of recruits into the army, moving house, weddings, Christmas mumming and many others) and items of material culture (e.g. the traveller's accoutrements — staffs, shoes, etc. — and forms of transport), but geographical and historical information, statistics, and stories about travelling, right through to the memoirs of actual travellers. As a result, before the reader's eyes is reconstructed an entire cultural world, where everything has its particular place in the system. One senses that exactly this was the author's intention.

Shchepanskaya's book includes both new material, and material from published studies on the symbolism of the journey and youth culture with which specialist readers will already be familiar. She re-introduces the idea of a 'crisis network' (a system of sacralised cultural positions between which information is communicated in times of crisis), once more analyses 'fear' as a social phenomenon (i.e. as a regulatory mechanism in traditional folk culture), and discusses such as issues as the belief that the traveller was a person endowed with higher knowledge, or the interpretation of 'primal symbolism' (i.e. the generative semantics of objects with holes, hollows, and gaps in them) — etc.

In a short review of the present kind, it is impossible to do justice to the complex and ramified discussion in this large-scale monograph. But it is notable that any unity in the book is at the methodological level, given the wide-ranging nature of the phenomena studied, and the quantity of 'sidelines' that is followed up. As Shchepanskaya puts it in the Introduction, 'Elements of signification within the culture of journeys are treated here as ways of programming social relations and norms, that is, as a system of cultural codes' (p. 10). In Shchepanskaya's view, journeys, and everything linked with them, are to be assigned beyond the boundaries of normative mythic structures: they lie outside the conventions of self-description of 'settled culture, they are deemed not to belong to this' (pp. 33–4). Thus, they lie outside the sign-system relating to the ordinary world, while creating an alternative system that is equally well-developed and significant. This system is bound up with its own set of priorities, concepts and laws, which, although 'unwritten' in the verbal sense, in fact lie buried deep within cultural memory, being activated the moment that a person lives his or her home settlement (and the domain of the individual home) and sets off on a journey. And, as Shchepanskaya demonstrates, the journey in a symbolic sense always begins long before a person departs in the physical sense — here, leaving parties and rituals are crucial — and does not end when the person gets back, but only after she or he has gone through the rituals marking transition from the status of a traveller. This tripartite schema of departure, journey proper, and return is reflected in the three-part organisation of the book ('Leav-

ing', 'Travelling', 'Returning'), which is, in the end, circular in its impact. 'Thus,' Shchepanskaya writes on one of the last pages of her book, 'we have got back now to the point where analysis of the journey began' (p. 472).

In Shchepanskaya's conception, the symbols and beliefs that cause the traveller and settled society to elide some forms of behaviour and espouse others are to be understood as powerful levers, working to manipulate the behaviour and perceptions of the traveller over long distances. At a microscopic level, much of the study is concerned, one way or another, with the demonstration of means and mechanisms by which this social regulation is achieved. It is in this light that the semantics of objects, rituals, and texts is analysed. As a result, Shchepanskaya comes to a rather paradoxical conclusion. As she states at the end of the book, 'the basic mechanism of direction and coercion in the culture of the journey is the codification, the symbolic expression, of what is undefined, poorly understood [...] Anomie itself becomes the method of social direction. The absence of norms is curbed by the actualisation of norms [...] Yet having demonstrated itself, the "will to power" then ebbs.' (p. 480).

The book does, it has to be said, raise some points of criticism or dispute along the way, and — in harmony with the conventions of the reviewing genre — the main emphasis here will be on these. Since I am not an ethnographer, I will concentrate primarily on my points of disagreement with Shchepanskaya as to the interpretation of verbal texts, i.e., the material from folklore, popular linguistics, and contemporary urban culture.

It is primarily Shchepanskaya's interpretative strategies that provoke my doubts: the logic of argumentation here often strikes me as faulty. Let me cite an example from Shchepanskaya's chapter on travelling accoutrements (p. 134):

The central significance of the staff is connected with violent self-assertion: the verb *batozhit* means 'to punish, to hit with a stick, to club'. In proverbs, a stick figures as a weapon in beatings and punishments.

*I whack her with the stick and she whacks me with the brick!*

*The stick that's red beats till you're dead, the stick that's white won't give you a fight.*

We observe how violence is transformed into control, and how the stick becomes a symbol of power:

*There's no learning without the stick [=Spare the rod and spoil the child]*

*You exercise your will, we feel the stick for good or ill; we get beaten till we're sore, and listen to you both after and before.*

*We work beneath the stick.*

*A soldier who doesn't fear the rod is no good to man or God.*

*Our regiment has no sense in't: the one who first grabs hold of the stick, be he wise or a fool, is the one to rule*

[Dal 1993: 3: 13].

Note that not one of the cited texts deals with forms of communication that are specific to the journey; a staff for walking has somehow turned into a stick for beating. Try replacing 'stick' by 'staff' in any of the above examples, and you'll end up with a nonsense. The point is not the practical impossibility of striking or beating someone with a staff, but the impossibility of the equation at the level of semantics.

The reasons why I have dwelt on this section of Shchepanskaya's text are far from accidental. Concern is provoked not so much because some of the arguments seem 'far fetched' (more or less any study in the humanities might be open to such criticism), but by the methods of analysis used and the justification for the deductions that are drawn. At the end of this chapter, the following summary is set out. 'The symbolism of the staff as a weapon, a sign of power, is linked both with destructive communicative programmes (violence, beating) and with constructive social forces (dominance, power)' (p. 135). Further, at the end of the chapter on collecting money to fund journeys, after some discussion of the phallic symbolism of the accoutrements of travel, we read: 'The blocking of creative programmes before departure occurred alongside the activation of communicative programmes of destruction, and to all intents and purposes symbolised such destruction, i.e. a fusion of communicative and reproductive codes was to be observed (p. 150).' I must say that I personally have difficulty in grasping the heuristic value of such formulations, though this is purely my opinion and is no doubt traceable to overall differences in approach and in disciplinary orientation. And there is no particular need for us to worry about the fact that the 'constructional' function of travel accoutrements seems to have got forgotten in this conclusion to the chapter. The main problem is that Shchepanskaya's concluding generalisations here, like much else in the book, are underpinned by nothing more than a chain of associative links (whether spelled out in the interpretation or simply implied). In the present case, the chain runs as follows: road/staff staff/stick stick/beating beating/violence violence/destruction. A sort of semantic game of dominoes results. In the end, anything could be linked with anything and interpreted in any way at all.

Thus, meanings of one kind or another are assigned to the texts being studied with a high degree of freedom, and through these to ethnographic realia. So, in the chapter dealing with the feminine/maternal symbolism of the home and the work done in the house we read, 'Many riddles and sayings represent the process of working flax, spinning, weaving and so on in terms of coition, pregnancy, or childbirth.' In support of this, numerous riddles of the familiar type are cited:

*Under a tub a lad was tugging a lass (answer: a flax beetle)*

or:

*Skinny little girl,  
Tiny little hole,  
Five are holding it,  
Five are poking away,  
Two are having a good stare (answer: threading a needle).*

The deduction drawn is as follows: 'Domestic space is saturated with maternity symbols, with references to birth — the origin of life. Many domestic tasks (largely those carried out by women — men's work tended to be connected with the world outside the home) rehearsed the reproductive programmes that were encoded into the instruments of domestic work (the stove, the kvas barrel, the loom)' (p. 47). A hundred pages later, in a chapter under the title, 'The Sexualisation of Travel Accoutrements', six more texts of erotic riddles are cited. They take the same pattern as the earlier ones, for instance:

*Black on top, red underneath,  
Thrusting in there is great (answer: a galosh).*

*On top: that's for posh folk,  
From behind — for anyone.  
Young men get it whenever they want,  
Old men whenever they can keep erect (answer: riding a truck).*

Then follows the interpretive gloss: 'Note that in relation to travel accoutrements and means of transport, the metaphor of coition is used, i.e. a masculine kind of metaphorical procedure, tabooed as far as women are concerned' (pp. 148–9). So the needle that is being 'held by five men and poked by another five' is a feminine symbol, because it 'symbolises the female sexual organs' (p. 47), but the galosh, associated with the phrase, 'thrusting in there is great', is a masculine symbol? As a matter of fact, of the five 'maternal' riddles cited in the first passage, four represent coition, one pregnancy, and not a single one childbirth.

As well as noting that Shchepanskaya assigns to objects significances that are diametrically opposed to each other while making reference

to formulae that are identical in terms of structure and content, I would also emphasise that, in my view, the texts cited should not in any case be regarded as illustrating how particular objects or phenomena are ‘marked’ in a sexual sense in the first place. If one reads through material of this kind in quantity (as in the riddles in the compendium *Russkii eroticheski folklor* [Russian Erotic Folklore]<sup>1</sup> — to which, as a matter of fact, Shchepanskaya herself also makes reference — one quickly realises that not just domestic and travel-linked objects are rife with genital or coital connotations so far as riddles are concerned, but also grains and crops (hemp, oats), trees (apples, bird-cherries), vegetables (beets, potatoes), berries (raspberries, cranberries), structures of the built environment (wells, mills, swings), and objects of the most diverse kinds — sweets with fillings inside, envelopes — as well as body parts (noses, eyelashes, eyelids) and actions of all kinds (putting in one’s ear-rings)<sup>2</sup> and so on and so on. And this does not apply only to riddles: if one includes *chastushkas*, folk tales with a sexual content, ritual texts and other verbal forms exploiting symbolism of this kind, one can see at a single glance that the sphere of eroticised metaphors in folklore includes almost all aspects of material reality, and that emphasising some of these when trying to push a particular argument is not legitimate.

As Shchepanskaya puts it herself, when introducing the concepts ‘the journey text’ and ‘journey discourse’, she is approaching works of verbal folklore (and verbal texts not drawn from the world of folklore) ‘from a position of social pragmatism’, ‘as hugely important means for the social construction of behaviour and of interpersonal relations’ (p. 16). The assumption underlying such an approach is that a work of folklore expresses a certain world-view (‘model of the world’), acting as a repository for and at the same time a source of knowledge, and that it may be summoned forth, ‘called to account’, resorted to for information. In the last analysis, it is held to influence behaviour in real-life situations, and especially with regard to the process of travel, on the one hand, and with regard to those who are ‘departing’, ‘on their way’, or ‘arriving back’, on the other. I’ll leave aside the recent lively debates among folklorists, anthropologists, linguists and psychologists about the ontological status of the concept ‘world picture’, and the extent to which it is meaningful or useful. There are many different possible opinions here, and every specialist in the field has a perfect right to evolve his or her own. But when Shchepanskaya analyses concrete texts, she pays more or less no attention to their specifics in terms of genre, or to the differences in function and reception that are linked with

<sup>1</sup> A. L. Toporkov (ed.), *Russkii eroticheski fol’klor. Pesni. Obryady i obryadovyi folklor* [Russian Erotic Folklore: Songs, Rituals, and Ritual Texts]. Moscow, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> I.e. the type used for pierced ears, where a prong goes in the small hole. [Editor].

such specifics, or the concomitant differences in possible ‘spheres of influence’, where attitudes to the world, alongside behaviour and communication programmes and norms, are shaped. Interpretation is limited to the ‘bald content’ of the text — a limitation that would be tolerable in a work of journalism, or a philosophical essay, but not in an ethnographic study. *Bylichkas* and proverbs, *bytovye rasskazy* and ballads are all perceived as similarly useful sources for the reconstruction of a ‘journey text’ (which Shchepanskaya names, p. 16, as one of her aims), though it is perfectly clear that these are very diverse kinds of verbal material, which vary considerably in terms of their didactic content, and that all such formulaic texts (even proverbs, despite their regulatory ambitions) are considerably less socially forceful in their impact than memorates, which often played the role of *exempla* in the postulation of this or that taboo or prescription (the last point is, as a matter of fact, one that Shchepanskaya herself recognises).

Even where genre characteristics are acknowledged, this is often not done to cogent effect. Thus, when arguing for the idea of the ‘semiotic invisibility’ of the road, its disposition beyond ‘the borders of the world as it is generally accepted to be — as constructed in the self-descriptions of settled culture’, Shchepanskaya in the first instance relies on the widely-used formula from spells, ‘I stand, the servant of God, blessing myself, and walk, crossing myself... etc.’ Here, she argues, ‘the road is not even described, it is simply signified as a “blank space”, i.e., something without characteristics, a gap between the beginning and the end of the journey’. She goes on to reinforce her argument by the statement that ‘the “invisibility” of the road is attested, in this particular case, by the spell, and specialists regard this genre as especially important in terms of cultural modelling, as particularly clearly setting out the traditional view of world structure’ (p. 33). Shchepanskaya’s failure to cite any concrete secondary discussions makes it hard to argue with this assertion, but it is fair to say that the ‘view of world structure’ in spells, with the magic stone Alatyry and Buyan Island<sup>1</sup> at the centre, is decidedly idiosyncratic. Certainly, within Russian culture, such a world view is not expressed anywhere else. One has to conclude that it has in fact remarkably *little* in common with the prevailing ‘cultural modelling’ in nineteenth- and twentieth-century peasant culture — even if one accepts that the phrase ‘prevailing “cultural modelling”’ is appropriate to start with.

A word on Shchepanskaya’s use of quotations: When one reads this book — and the spread of material in it, as mentioned before, is

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<sup>1</sup> Alatyry — a magic white stone (the word is generally thought to be a corruption of ‘altar’); Buyan: a mysterious island (cf. Tyr Brasil of Irish legend). Both are frequently mentioned in Russian traditional spells. [Editor].

extremely large — one sometimes has the impression of being urged to look for the first time at phenomena that are in fact long familiar or being told in detail about something that one knows about perfectly well in any case. Thus, when discussing the conceptual universe of the discourse of social regulation, Shchepanskaya painstakingly sifts through mythological tales, demonic beliefs, and the prohibitions linked with these, and also the prescriptions current in traditional culture. Yet she does not even mention V. N. Zinovyev's collection, which contains a large amount of closely similar material, or — what is more important — his index of mythological tales,<sup>1</sup> which provides a general description for almost all the substantive motifs current in folk demonology that she examines and integrates into her analytical structures. In the chapters about the wood-demon and other mythological personages there are no references to the studies in this area by E. E. Levkievskaya,<sup>2</sup> despite the fact that the approach to describing 'lower mythology' that the latter outlined, according to which the main differentiating feature of a figure is not his or her name, but his or her associated functions, could usefully have been cited to support the conclusions drawn by Shchepanskaya. And neither in the text of the discussion, nor in the voluminous bibliography, is room found for M. M. Gromyko's 1986 monograph on behaviour norms in the Russian peasantry,<sup>3</sup> which examines in detail (and very often on the basis of the same material) many of the socio-cultural phenomena that are also discussed by Shchepanskaya — in particular, various types of marginal social behaviour, linked with 'departure': e.g. *strannichestvo*, *chernichestvo*.<sup>4</sup> In her reflections on the communicational character of many journey-linked rites, and on the fact that these are addressed to some mythological authority controlling people's behaviour on journeys, as personified in the images of the wood-demon and other such demonic forces, Shchepanskaya would have been well-advised to mention the work of E. S. Novik,<sup>5</sup> who developed the theory of the dialogic structure of ritual texts with reference to material from Siberia. One has rather the impression that much of the work done by modern scholars

<sup>1</sup> V. P. Zinovyev, 'Ukazatel syuzhetov-motivov bylichek i byvalshchin' [Subject and Motif Index to *Bylichkas* and *Byvalshchinas*] // V. P. Zinovyev, *Mifologicheskie rasskazy russkogo naseleniya Vostochnoi Sibiri*. Novosibirsk, 1987. Pp. 305–20.

<sup>2</sup> E. E. Levkievskaya, 'Mifologicheskii personazh: sootnoshenie imeni i obraza' [The Mythical Personage: the Relations of Names and Images] // *Slavyanskije etyudy: Sbornik k yubileyu S. M. Tolstoj*. Moscow, 1999. Pp. 243–58.

<sup>3</sup> M. M. Gromyko. *Traditsionnye normy povedeniya i formy obshcheniya russkikh krestyan XIX v.* [Traditional Behaviour Norms and Social Relations in the Nineteenth-Century Russian Peasantry]. Moscow, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> Both words apply to culturally specific forms of religiously-coloured peregrination, approaching permanent pilgrimage. [Editor].

<sup>5</sup> E. S. Novik, 'Arkhaischeskie verovaniya v svete mezhlchnostnoi kommunikatsii' [Archaic Beliefs in the Light of Inter-Personal Communication] // *Istoriko-etnograficheskie issledovaniya po fol'kloru: Sb. Statei pamyati S. A. Tokareva*. Ed. V. Ya. Petrukhin. Moscow, 1994. Pp. 110–63.



working on the same phenomena of folk culture as Shchepanskaya has simply ‘vanished from the field of view and discourse’ that she explores — rather as the journey (in her argument) disappeared from the traditional model of the world itself.

The place of recent urban material in the book cries out for separate commentary. This material consists of interviews with representatives of groups from the youth sub-culture and with other inhabitants of the modern city, of memoirs by residents of St Petersburg, and of answers to a questionnaire posted by the author herself on the Internet. The very presence of this material, and the prominent use of it, in a study that is by and large dedicated to traditional peasant culture, has a certain piquancy, but can hardly be termed intellectually illegitimate, given that Shchepanskaya herself accords these sections of the book a supplementary and comparative role. And many of the observations here are perfectly convincing — for instance, the remarks on the similarity of travellers in the past and those of today, on the signifying role of clothes, on the compensation of material resources by communicative resources, on the insistence on the minimalisation of the accoutrements used, on the importance of symbolic asexuality, and on the renunciation of personal possessions, the suspension of ordinary sexual taboos, and so on.

In a range of cases, though, the status of these contemporary materials and the purpose of their inclusion in the general discussion here seems hard to follow, or even inappropriate. Some parts of chapters (for instance, on keeping warm while on the road) are based almost entirely on contemporary material, as a result of which it is impossible to grasp how the insights offered here relate to those offered in the analysis of material from traditional peasant culture. Indeed, a sense of inner protest rises in the reader exactly as often as Shchepanskaya either points to, or hints (through meaningful silences) at the direct dependence on tradition of the ‘journey text’ in modern culture, and youth sub-culture in particular. Thus, analysing memory-objects, and talking about the domestic and integrative symbolism of ‘the hearth and fire attributes’, Shchepanskaya moves from the ‘coals<sup>1</sup> taken from one’s own stove, soot, and “resin” that were used to draw crosses on the doors of temporary accommodation, which marked off the place a person was staying and also turned a strange place into a familiar one’, more or less immediately to the modern tradition, according to which ‘in temporary accommodation, or at bus-stops, travellers will use ash from the top of a match or cigarette-smoke to etch crosses, and will sometimes write their names and the names of the towns or villages

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<sup>1</sup> Not literally, coals: solid lumps of wood or other fuel left over from burning in the stove. [Editor].

they come from, or the places where they are studying. “Mikhail and Sashok. SPTU–21 Cherepovets 96”.<sup>1</sup> ‘The meaning is the same,’ Shchepanskaya explains: ‘the symbolic appropriation of the foreign land — no man’s land — of the road, the marking of this with signs from one’s own home, among which fire also belongs’ (pp. 112–13). I think, though, that the scope and the socio-cultural domain of any signifier is limited, and only time or the caprice of academic commentators can expand the boundaries of this. It seems to be the latter force that is at work in the interpretations offered here. The inscription ‘SPTU–21’ is no accident, but an indicative example of how the tradition of on-the-road graffiti now works, operating exclusively among teenagers, its upper limit the moment when students enter the higher years at university, or when recruits get demobilised from the army. Should one really ignore the fact that for many modern teenagers, especially those from cities (as for many other city-dwellers, independent of age), not only traditional stoves, but even gas ones, are something known only at second hand, so that fire, smoke, coal and soot can be associated with home only somewhere in the distant backyards of cultural memory, which is now dominated by a completely different set of associations, created and supported by the conditions of modern cultural production? (The same can be said about the protective function of the cross as a schematic representation of two intersecting lines — as distinct from the cross as a symbol of Christian cult, viz. the baptismal cross, etc.) As a matter of fact, even this observation doesn’t carry much weight with regard to the example in hand. The central point is that matches and cigarettes are unlikely in any respect to be semiotised as fire or soot in modern youth culture — they are, one may suppose, cultural signs in their own right. And they stand, in all probability, not for domestic (integrative) culture, but for its exact opposite — the anonymous and recreational semantics of the road itself.

I should again emphasise that I see nothing wrong in the comparison of ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’, ‘peasant’ and ‘urban’ cultural texts; such comparisons often provoke very Shchepanskaya to very interesting observations. But it seems sense to bear in mind that the journey-associated significances that are of central importance to modern city-dwellers (and all the more so if these city-dwellers happen to belong to a ‘travelling’ subculture or profession) have been more or less stable for two hundred years. This is traceable to the world-view and semiotic system of the Romantic movement, which — notwithstanding its many historical fluctuations and variations — was dominated by Western European elite culture. It is precisely the

<sup>1</sup> Secondary-Professional Technical College, an educational institution offering vocational training in manual occupations. Russian schools and other educational establishments go under numbers, not names, so this is SPTU no. 21 in the given area. [Editor].

Romantic view of the journey, at least at the level of signifiers, that is cultivated by roller-bladers, bikers, hitch-hikers, and (to judge by their established passion for ‘Russian Chanson’),<sup>1</sup> truck-drivers, tourists, geologists, pot-holers and ethnographers going off on field trips, as is eloquently demonstrated by many of the recent examples cited by Shchepanskaya. The modern attitude to travel, and the symbols associated with the process, are not derived from the annals of traditional peasant culture, but from the school literature syllabus, popular songs, the cinema and so on. And *bylichkas* and proverbs can hardly be considered a genetically and typologically adequate cultural context for the study of the contemporary ‘journey text’.

Some final comments. As I have said, Shchepanskaya’s study includes an enormously wide range of phenomena and texts from traditional culture, and this without doubt gives the book weight and authority. All the phenomena referred to — magic, the honouring of sacred places, demonic beliefs, the relations inside social groups and of one social group with another, the forms of ritual and festival behaviour, the traditions of marginal sub-cultural communities or whatever else — are analysed exclusively with reference to travel, which is reasonable enough, given the theme of the book. But at the same time, all other contexts are blocked out (to use the kind of language Shchepanskaya herself espouses), which creates an illusory specificity, a sense that this or that fact has exclusive significance with regard to ‘the journey text’. Thus, almost the whole system of popular demonology and the forms of behaviour in the natural world associated with this are subordinated to the opposition of ‘home’ and ‘travel’. What is more, the examples and analytical passages motivating such a connection sometimes strike me as unconvincing. For example, the prohibition on eating, excreting and sleeping on a woodland path, which in folk belief stemmed from the danger of annoying the wood-demon, is more or less reduced to the status of just another prohibition on satisfying one’s natural needs while on a journey (pp. 200–5), and is interpreted as one of a class of ‘vital restrictions’, which were ‘experienced not in terms of the activities of an individual organism, but as the *interaction* with a partner, albeit of a virtual kind’ (p. 206). Here Shchepanskaya is silent about the fact that in domestic space a similar level of regulatory rules obtained, driven here explicitly by reference to the need to placate resident demons — the house demon, the courtyard demon, the bathhouse demon and so on. So exactly the same conclusions could be drawn about experience within the house, and more broadly, about the traditional world-view in the broadest sense (the so-called ‘mythic consciousness’).

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<sup>1</sup> A radio station especially favoured by long-distance drivers: it has a repertoire of prison songs etc. (the most popular author is Mikhail Krug). [Editor].

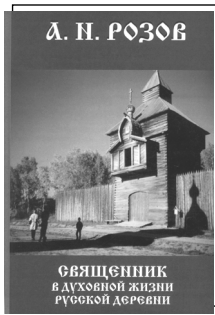
In just the same way, much of what is said about the structure and specific character of the activities of travellers' societies (the fraternities of beggars, *stranniki*, beggars, and outlaws: pp. 231–41 etc.) would be equally relevant to any sub-cultural group united by professional characteristics, including ones leading a wholly settled way of life — thieves' gangs in towns, craftsmen's guilds, artists' clubs and so on.

It is sometimes not at all clear why various facts and observations supporting the author's argument should be linked with the road situation, with the figure of the 'traveller' or the 'new arrival'. Thus, in the chapter on sorcerers, an anecdote is cited about how 'a certain P., well-known for his activities as a sorcerer, is supposed to have made a man impotent and started living with the man's wife himself' (p. 401). We should note that there is nothing at all here to indicate that the sorcerer concerned was not a local. However, Shchepanskaya follows up this vignette with an assertion about how 'a series of unhappy events in the village, and especially the stranger's excursions into reproductive biology, led to the stranger's being accused of sorcery' [ibid.]. In itself, this conclusion might be fair enough — but how have we got to a discussion about strangers? How exactly has P., and along with him sorcerers generally, got to be a 'traveller'? Were there really no local people, leading a fully settled life, who turned to sorcery? Were none of these capable of ruining people's married lives, robbing husbands of their manhood, and wives of their ability to produce children? Might not what is said here apply equally well to them? So the point is that the man was a sorcerer, and not that he was an outsider? Then why does the word 'stranger' occur twice in a single short sentence? This is not argumentation so much as incantation. In similar examples of 'intuitive leaps', shepherds are classed among journeying folk, and even blacksmiths are called 'regular travellers' (p. 213).

Such 'intuitive leaps' in interpretation are especially obvious when Shchepanskaya talks about linguistic material. For instance, in the chapter called 'The Life Path', she illustrates the analogy between human ontogeny and a journey that is so persistent in different cultures by reference to a swathe of clichés: children *run* and *walk*, lovers *walk out*, teenagers *skulk* down the street, she's gone and got married, he's *gone off* to the army, a pregnant woman is *going along well*, she's *off* to her maternity leave, he's *gone off* to work, *gone into* retirement and so on. These are all grouped as 'journey terminology' (pp. 62–63). But it is not in fact clear what the idea of the journey is doing here and what these examples actually demonstrate, except that the verb *to go* is multi-valent and that verbs of motion are one of the most frequently-used and active groups of lexemes (*time flies*, *the rain's coming down*, *the clock's not going*, *to go to the lavatory*, *to go off one's head*). And in addition, one should not ignore the

specifics of the formation of metaphors and metonymies, and baldly link cultural and linguistic stereotypes without bearing in mind the many complex factors involved.

The vector of Shchepanskaya's analysis resembles the point of a compass — whichever way the dial is held, the arrow still points to magnetic North. In this case, the irresistible pole is the semantic field path-way-road-journey. All culturally constructive binary oppositions — ours/not ours, human/non-human — are reduced to a single governing binary opposition, home/journey, which comes — by default — to seem the central dichotomy in the whole of traditional culture.



A. N. Rozov, *Svyashchennik v dukhovnoi zhizni russkoi derevni* [The Priest in the Spiritual Life of the Russian Village]. St Petersburg: Aleteiya, 2003. 254 pp.<sup>1</sup>

*Reviewed by Veronika Makarova*

## THE LIFE OF THE ORTHODOX PASTOR

It would be hard to miss that the study of different aspects of religious life has recently begun occupying a more and more serious place in the study of 'the people'. But all the same, despite the variety of issues now under consideration, the role of the parish priest in village life has so far not attracted special analysis. The various excursions in the theme have got no further than indicating how ripe for consideration the subject is and emphasising that detailed consideration is long overdue. From this point of view, A. N. Rozov's new book is therefore an eagerly waited and most timely response to the crying need for a serious assessment of the place of the priest in the cultural and religious world of the Russian village.

<sup>1</sup> The author did not respond to an invitation to vet the text of this review. [Editor].

The author intends his book to be a study of ‘the role of the village pastor in the life of the Russian village’. And in fact the priest interests A. N. Rozov above all as a guardian of the spiritual foundations of Orthodox belief, as a disseminator of Christianity at the local level and as a tireless campaigner for the purity of faith. It is no accident that when Rozov specifies the aims of his monograph, he emphasises that he is dealing with the role of the *genuine* priest. Yet the author’s efforts to be objective also mean that he fails to perform the essential task of indicating whose concepts of what is genuine and ideal are of most pressing interest. And this failure to distinguish between different points of view at the beginning in turn leads to a whole range of slippages and false deductions.

One indisputable strength of the work is the employment of sources that have not so far been much used by scholars. Above all, Rozov makes use of church journalism (articles and notes from the journals *Rukovodstvo dlya selskikh pastyrei* [A Guide for Village Pastors] and *Tserkovnyi vestnik* [The Church Herald], which contain valuable material about peasant Christianity and about peasant life in general).

The period that Rozov studies runs from the Emancipation of the Serfs (1861) to the 1917 Revolution — but some parts of the discussion (e.g. material on the relations between priests and local landowners) have required him to cite earlier sources as well. And, while emphasising village culture, Rozov also on numerous occasions cites material from ethnographical work done in cities.

In Chapter 1 — ‘The Priest and His Peasant Parishioners’ — Rozov puts forward reasons why attitudes to the priest or the priestly office (these two concepts are used interchangeably) could vary, enumerates the basic duties of the priest and the difficulties that could arise in pastoral work, notes the particularities of the conditions in village and city parishes, cites examples of ‘genuine pastors’, notes factors influencing levels of religiosity among peasants, and offers the reader a selection of ‘folk prejudices’ with regard to the clergy and to church rituals.

One of the basic assumptions underlying Rozov’s description of social relations in the parish is that the priest and the peasantry were bound together by special ties. However, I would emphasise, by contrast, that the specific character of the era Rozov is addressing, a character which defined many things in parish life and therefore demands particular attention from scholars, lay in the opposite direction — in a marked ‘cultural gulf’ between the clergy and ordinary parishioners. The ‘new’ type of priest with his ‘enlightened’ attitudes to old traditions and customs is a striking illustration of this. By the late nineteenth century, village priests — who were more and more likely to have received a good education — had a fundamentally different attitude to peasant ways from the one that their

ancestors had absorbed from their childhood. It is accordingly not surprising that it was precisely in post-Emancipation Russia that a critical attitude to ‘superstitions’ and to religious traditions lying beyond the control of the church started to become widespread among rank-and-file clergy (as manifested for instance in the arguments about the conventions of church singing). However, the lack of consideration of this theme has an obvious reason: Rozov’s list of the reasons for mutual understanding across the status barrier makes clear that he attaches no particular importance to the existence of ‘cultural dialogue’.

Unfortunately, no attempt is made to isolate and analyse the characteristics of ‘genuine’ pastors. What is more, the inventory of examples from the lives of ‘genuine’ servants of the Church (who for some reason best known to the author include a village teacher), raises a pressing question: why should peasants have taken such very different attitudes to such wonderful priests? One pastor had to live twenty-five years in his village before gaining the trust of his parishioners, and another had to take a suit to the diocesan court in order to win authority. Does this maybe indicate the fact that a priest who seemed ideal in terms of the requirements set down in the Gospels and propagated in seminaries might still not have fitted peasant concepts of a *dobryi batyushka*?<sup>1</sup> What, other than different views of the appropriate norms for the priest’s behaviour could explain why ‘far from ideal’ priests were able to win over their parishioners, while ‘ideal’ priests left them cold? Yet Rozov does not separate these two points of view, simply extrapolating peasant perceptions from official church perceptions. His only explanation for the diversity of attitudes to the clergy lies in references to *depth of faith* and *degrees of religiosity* — one need hardly emphasise that, as analytical categories, these terms are not very productive (how are these qualities to be measured? Where does Christian self-consciousness fit in? etc. etc.)

In the section of the book devoted to the particularities of attitudes to Orthodoxy in the peasantry, Rozov is strikingly unsystematic in defining his scholarly perspective. On the one hand, the author respectfully cites A. A. Panchenko and seems inclined to take peasant concepts of faith and alternative religious perceptions seriously, but on the other he takes on trust observations about peasants’ illiteracy in religious terms and about the survival of pagan beliefs. All manifestations of peasant belief that do not fit official Christianity are glibly classed by him as ‘superstitions’, and interpreted as the result of religious ignorance. Anything non-canonical is interpreted as pagan. Instead of trying to explain the reasons why peasants

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<sup>1</sup> A decent, kind, good father (*batyushka*) is a popular form of address to a priest. [Editor].

themselves regarded certain actions and customs in a given way, Rozov generally contents himself with a reference to how ill-informed the peasants were and details of what their beliefs ‘actually’ signified. No genuinely original or productive ideas (especially with reference to the way the clergy was regarded) are ever evolved. For instance, Rozov notes that in certain ritual situations the priest could be regarded as a material embodiment of Divine power and as a prophet, a seer. Yet the practice of requesting priests to say prayers that were not included in the *Trebnik*<sup>1</sup> is, in my view, testimony of a broader view of the priest’s professional capacities than Rozov acknowledges, rather than of superstitious attitudes to the clergy.

In Chapter 2 — ‘Clergy-Landowner Relations’ — Rozov states that his aims as follows: ‘to analyse the role of the village priest in the life of the local landowning gentleman, on the one hand, and on the other, the role of the landowner in the ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical activities of the pastor’. He enumerates various reasons why the landed gentry had a hostile attitude to the clergy, describes the etiquette of relations between the priest and the landowner, and lists the different contexts where contact might occur outside the church. Yet the section of the chapter which is apparently intended to deal with ‘positive’ examples of relations between the two sides is in fact mostly devoted to instances of conflict. However, Rozov does make one interesting observation (though this unfortunately is never explained in detail): fervent piety and love of the church could co-exist among landowners with a contemptuous or even tyrannical attitude to priests.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 3 — ‘Folkloric and Ethnographic Elements in Russian Sermons for the Village Population in the late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’ — evolves the idea that the sermonising tradition flourished in the period under study, and provides an outline of how sermons were received in the rural population, and a survey of the main themes in sermons of the day (based exclusively on published sources).

In Rozov’s view, the existence of a large number of published homilies and the increased emphasis on preaching as an essential part of the ministry at diocesan level testifies to a blossoming of the homiletic art in post-Emancipation Russia. But is the nature of high-level church politics with regard to the sermon really an indication of what the rank-and-file clergy thought?

<sup>1</sup> *Trebnik*: the book of occasional offices, which included prayers for domestic rites such as dedicating a new house. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> The status of the clergy in Russian society was quite different from that of the English clergy at the same date. No younger son from a gentleman’s family would have been encouraged to think that the priestly role was a suitable career. The clergy was essentially a ‘caste’, or separate social estate, of its own. [Editor].



The chapter includes some extremely interesting and at times puzzling examples of the peasantry's ambivalent attitudes to the sermon; the diversity of reactions is such that to label them generally as 'liking' or 'disliking' would be simplistic. This section of Rozov's book is one of the most stimulating, since it contains a good many more questions than answers. But unfortunately, here too Rozov's valuable observations (e.g. on the special nature of the attention paid by the peasantry to sermons they could not understand, and on the importance of the priest's observations for the peasant in their own right) are left without analytical commentary. That said, Rozov's insistence on the importance of including sermons in the study of traditional culture seems well-founded.

A special section is devoted to the themes of sermons, organised in such a way that it is more like an index than a discussion. A sort of panorama including the ethnographical content of sermons and examples of moralising statement on the part of the priest is set out. The section does succeed in convincing the reader that sermons are a rich source of information about popular customs, rituals, superstitions, omens and prejudices. But Rozov's other two conclusions do not really seem to flow from the material included.

Chapter 4 — 'Christmas and Easter Religious Carol-Singing as Examples of the Conventions of Church Singing' is distinguished from the other chapters by its substantial size, by the sequentiality of argumentation and the clarity of the discussion, but creates the impression of a separate study devoted to issues of its own and cut off from the general issues raised elsewhere in the monograph. The question of the role of the priest in calendar rituals generally is pushed into the background by the concentration on these two rituals in particular.

In the first section, devoted to Christmas carol-singing, Rozov has the following aims (which are more or less satisfied); to characterise the main types of carol-singer; to catalogue the central features of the ritual; and to compare religious carol-singing with secular carol-singing (mumming) and with house-to-house visits in the urban milieu on Sundays, to establish the different phases in 'Christmas house-to-house processions'. Rozov does not limit himself here to a discussion of rural carol-singing alone. The classification extends to all the very different types of practice found both in the town and in the country. Having distinguished three different basic type of religious carol-singing, Rozov then pauses to characterise each in turn.

While recognising that 'from the eighteenth century at the latest' 'the Christmas procession was both a virtuous ecclesiastical ritual and a source of income for the village clergy', Rozov gives his chief attention to the first function of the procession, which he considers

fundamental, and is far less concerned with the second, which is in his view secondary, peripheral, and detrimental to the primary function of the procession. Evidence from the nineteenth century of denigratory attitudes to visits by the clergy and of ‘mercantile interests’ on the part of priests themselves lead him to argue for the erosion in a number of provinces (he does not specify which) of the ritual’s primary function. I on the other hand would argue that it is more productive to see the priest’s role in calendar rituals as an indissoluble fusion of good intentions and ‘selfish’ motives.

In the section on Easter carol-singing, Rozov constructs a kind of ‘base template’, which assembles as completely as possible all the variant details of this ritual. Different aspects — the preparation for carol-singing, the preferred times for the Easter procession, who took part in the procession, the order (i.e. how the participants were lined up), the route round the parish, and the effect of the carol-singing — are dwelled on in turn. In Rozov’s view, Easter processions, like Christmas ones, in time lost their original (purely Christian) meaning and ‘became a degrading hunt for financial contributions’. The significance of carol-singing in village life after Emancipation is evaluated by the use of loaded terms such as ‘degeneration’ and ‘regression’. Less predictable, however, is another observation of Rozov’s, that a person’s part in processions was intimately linked with his or her role in the local economy (not that one would necessarily agree with the rider here, ‘more closely linked than other extra-ecclesiastical rituals’).

In Chapter 5 — ‘The Image of the Priest in Russian Literature as Evaluated by Church Critics’ — Rozov scrutinises literary works centring on the figure of a priest, invariably positively presented, and on the reception of these among church critics. Rozov’s interest is, in his own words, ‘the role of the priest in peasant life as understood by writers and church critics’. To put it another way, he is concerned with whether such church critics considered literary representations to reflect reality (i.e., their own ideas about reality), and how far the literary image of the ‘ideal’ pastor reflected churchmen’s own view of the ideal.

In Rozov’s view, church critics set little store by the ability of secular writers to ‘reflect the life of the clergy objectively’ and often spurned the positive images of the priest that were offered as unconvincing. What this seems to amount to is a recognition on Rozov’s part that secular literature simply expressed the author’s own world-view, and that ideals of priestly behaviour could vary from group to group. The mystery is why Rozov should then also hold the view that literature reflects reality and be prepared to cite belles-lettres as a reliable source for studying clergy life and parish life more generally (see e.g. Chapter 4). Once again, it seems that the attempt to reflect the life

of the 'genuine' parish priest 'objectively' has led Rozov to construct an invented image of his own.

In general, I feel that *The Priest in the Spiritual Life of the Russian Village* suffers from Rozov's over-identification with Orthodox tradition, which has impeded him from analysing the material in a sufficiently detached and — where necessary — critical way. In turn, this major fault has spawned a host of others, above all a naïve trust in the primary sources used. At times, no sense of distance between Rozov and his material is evident, and the author enters into a kind of free dialogue with his subject matter. Rather than being the objects of an academic study, priests turn into something resembling intellectual colleagues, whose own ability to evaluate the situation critically is taken for granted. What is more, Rozov himself, apparently seduced by the delights of the homiletic position, constantly moralises. Some sections of the book essentially ventriloquise the sources sighted, and it is almost impossible to distinguish quotation or paraphrase from the running analysis. The constant use of the terminology espoused in the sources themselves adds to the confusion.

Rozov's enthusiasm for the subject also means that the book is painfully subjective in tone. The author's sense of affront and pain on behalf of the priests about whom he is writing provokes him into defending them against their backward parishioners, against the capricious and tyrannical authorities, and against the false imaginings of writers. It is no accident that the description of 'false' beliefs is accompanied by denunciations of the 'ignorance' of the peasantry, and that, instead of explaining the reasons behind such beliefs, Rozov simply establishes what the peasants 'should' have thought. The study has quite a heavy ideological freight, as is evident in its surges of religious sentiment and out-of-place pronouncements on the principles of virtue.

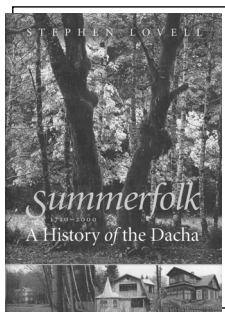
What is more, Rozov's engagement with extant secondary literature is woefully inadequate. To be sure, the Introduction contains a resume of this literature, but it has made more or less no impact on the study itself. Hence, the book is essentially cut off from previous scholarly work in this area. Yet some of the ideas that Rozov sets out have a long pedigree — indeed, to be honest, some of them are now rather dated.

The book is also strikingly unanalytical in character. Description often replaces assessment, and the reader often has the impression that the material is simply being left to speak for itself. The sources cited are short on analytical commentary, but they often seem much richer and more interesting than the formulations that they are being cited to illustrate. Rozov's conclusions are often simplistic, banal, and sentimental. Often they consist of resonant formulations that on scrutiny turn out not to mean very much at all.

There are also problems with Rozov's use of quotations. On the one hand, much of the material cited does not seem very useful, consisting of sonorous generalities and pomposities, a feature that increases the impression that this is a work of propagandistic journalism, rather than of scholarship. But on the other hand, there is a marked shortage of actual quotations, as opposed to paraphrases and extracts from various sermons and moral tracts.

The book is also rather badly written, with many clumsy turns of phrase and unclear formulations that make the author's drift hard to follow.

Unfortunately, therefore, one has to conclude that many issues to do with the role of the village priest in the life of the parish have not been properly addressed here; further work in this area remains a crying need.



S. Lovell. *Summerfolk. A History of the Dacha, 1710–2000*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003. xvii + 260 pp.<sup>1</sup>  
Reviewed by Ilya Utekhin

## DACHA READING

A book like this would be ideal summer reading for a Russian intellectual at the dacha, in the hope that there would be enough time left over from the usual pastimes — bathing, walks in the woods, and (among those who have their own dachas) DIY — to wallow in the plethora of quotations and references, and the ambitions of a study that aims at ground-breaking status. This book by Stephen Lovell, who trained at the Universities of Cambridge and London, and has held positions at St John's College, Oxford, and

<sup>1</sup> The author did not respond to an invitation to vet the translation of this review. [Editor].

King's College, London, acquaints readers with the social history and the place in Russian culture of a phenomenon with which every Russian is familiar at the practical level. Were this book to be translated into Russian and published here (which I am sure will happen sooner or later), it would be certain to appear in a large print-run. This meticulous foreigner has not only grasped that the dacha lies at the heart of Russian life as a specific cultural and social phenomenon, and that it reveals much about society in a larger sense, but has done extensive research and produced an elegantly-written book with abundant and varied illustrative material.

The appearance of the book is timely. The dacha and dacha culture have been crying out for sociological, anthropological or historical study, above all analysis based on the recent past. However, this book is more of a generalising study, sketching the contours of the phenomenon from its origins to the present, than an analysis rooted in a particular discipline as narrowly conceived.

Lovell employs an extremely broad range of sources: historical works, memoirs, belles-lettres, journalism, technical works, archival records, and his own interviews and interviews carried out by a Russian colleague. Chapters Six and Seven also draw on texts that Lovell collected by means of organising a newspaper competition for the best stories about dacha life, with a money prize offered as a 'carrot' to the participants.

The result is that a broad panorama of extra-urban life in the areas surrounding Moscow and Petersburg emerges, with fleeting appearances — as sources and as subjects — by many notable figures from the history of Russian literature: Chekhov, Blok, Tsvetaeva, Pasternak. Literature, indeed, occupies a significant place in the book: this is as much a study of the dacha of discourse as of the dacha in real life. The disciplinary affinities of the book might with equal justice be termed social history, cultural history, and 'cultural studies'. The narrative is organised chronologically: each chapter is devoted to a specific historical era that Lovell considers forms a separate phase in the history of the dacha (though he recognises that such periodisation has a certain artificiality); however, chapters 3 and 4 are both devoted to the period from the mid nineteenth century to the 1917 Revolution, with chapter 3 taking more of a sociological and geographical approach, and chapter 4 a culturological one.

The first chapter, 'Prehistory', deals with the etymology of the term dacha and the concept underlying this: Lovell sees the start date for the dacha phenomenon as 1710, when courtiers were allowed to settle plots not just between Sadovaya and the Fontanka, but on the Peterhof Road. Already in the eighteenth century, the word dacha was coming to mean not so much a plot of land, but a residence where the upper strata of Russian society could disport themselves in the sum-

mer months. Chapter 2 is devoted to the mid nineteenth century. The meaning of its title — ‘Between City and Court: The Middle Third of the Nineteenth Century’ — becomes clear towards the end: the burgeoning dacha culture in the suburbs of the capital was independent of membership of the court, and indeed of membership of the gentry estate. The symbolic moment marking the start of the new era was 1837, when the building of the railway to Tsarskoe Selo and Pavlovsk was completed. With reference, in the main, to the journalism of the period, Lovell demonstrates that in the 1840s, dachas in the new sense were starting to appear — summer residences for city-dwellers, including rented premises. One has just to think of E. Grebenka’s sketch devoted to the Petersburg Side in *Fiziologiya Peterburga* [Physiological Sketches of St Petersburg] to have a clear picture of the new kind of dacha resident, someone with a modest income — such people more or less immediately became favourite subjects of humorous articles in newspapers and magazines. The tastes of denizens of St Petersburg and Moscow who did not have the social status and wealth to espouse aristocratic pursuits, and who were not attracted by popular entertainments such as those on offer at traditional fairs, fed the new exurban culture of leisure and relaxation.

Chapter 3, ‘The Late Imperial Dacha Boom’, treats the subject of how the term ‘dacha’ was understood, of where dachas were located, what they looked like, how much they cost — in short, it is a general, sensible but rather brisk survey of the economic and social aspects of the subject. As a matter of fact, the theme treated in this chapter (like those of the other chapters) could well be the subject of a separate book in its own right. The title of the fourth chapter, ‘Between Arcadia and Suburbia: The Dacha as a Cultural Space, 1860–1917’, once more plays on the word ‘between’; this — as may well have been the author’s intention — suggests the dacha’s relationship with the urban middle class (indeed, the idea that the phenomenon of the dacha is linked with the ‘middle class’ lifestyle is a thread running through the book). The flowering of the dacha occurred just as the gentleman’s country estate, in its traditional form, was going into decline. In order to give examples of ‘dacha discourse’ and illustrations of dacha lifestyle Lovell refers constantly to literary texts — Dostoevsky’s *Idiot*, various works by Chekhov, Goncharov’s *Oblomov*, Lev Tolstoy, Gleb Uspensky, and so on — right up to Sasha Chorny. At the dacha, neighbours from the same layer of Russian society would get together in groups to spend their leisure time in company (cf. the popularity of amateur theatricals); and dacha-dwellers had a penchant for new technology as well (cf. the popularity of the bicycle).

In Chapter 5 (‘The Making of the Soviet Dacha, 1917–1941’), Lovell, among other things, raises the question of whether one can see a conscious link between the dachas described in Chekhov’s stories and those of the Soviet elite in the 1930s. On the whole, he

seems to think the answer is yes. Indeed, he is generally of the opinion that it is useful, in the study of Soviet society — and especially within the framework of a specific theme, such as the dacha — to carry out cross-period analysis and to distinguish traditional elements from those that were the result of modernisation (which latter may, for their part, take ‘neo-traditional’ forms).<sup>1</sup> Lovell is especially interested in the reasons why the dacha survived as a social phenomenon, having weathered the storms of revolution and civil war. The dacha in the early Soviet era was, on the one hand, an elite phenomenon, yet at the same time, the only form of immovable property that was accessible to many people from outside the elite (in contrast to the exclusively state-owned living space in Soviet cities themselves).

Chapter 6, ‘Between Consumption and Ownership: Exurban Life, 1941–1986’, concerns the spread of the dacha phenomenon and the rise of the *priusadebnyi uchastok* [exurban allotment], which went some way towards turning the dacha from a place of leisure to one characterised by the performance of manual work (vegetable gardening). During the Second World War, vegetable gardening became a mass phenomenon — in order to survive, people grew their own food. Later, this survival strategy received top-level sanction from the Soviet government. A dacha acquired when its owner entered a dacha-building cooperative or (later on) a vegetable gardening society, often turned into a liability in the Khrushchev era, since it was ‘personal property’, and the era was characterised by heightened regulation of such property under the banner of the struggle with extortion and illegal earnings. Lovell vividly illustrates the situation with materials from newspapers and magazines and from statutes of the day. One might add that the dacha, as a form of supplementary residence, was officially counted as part of a family’s general allocation of living space, along with the family’s room in a communal apartment (or separate flat), which led to a good many contretemps along the route to ‘improvement in living space’. I myself have seen written denunciations in archives from outraged citizens demanding that their neighbours’ affairs be investigated — which could initiate a range of measures, right up to the level of confiscation of the flat just allocated to a family which had concealed its access to extra living space out at the dacha.

Lovell’s observations on the links between dacha culture and the development of the leisure sphere are continued into this era as well — for instance, the introduction of a five-day working week with two consecutive days of rest is mentioned as a background factor in the mass development of the dacha. The evolution of the dacha

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<sup>1</sup> Among notable publications of the recent past allying this kind of approach to interesting sociological and demographical evidence is A. Vishnevsky. *Serp i rubl: Konservativnaya modernizatsiya v SSSR*. [The Sickle and the Rouble]. Moscow, 1998.

concept in the late Soviet era is defined for him by the fact that allotments with buildings on them (cf. the ‘temporary structure’, *vremyanka*, photographed on p. 196), and dachas as such start to get fused into a single concept. But whatever form the dacha takes, they are important for Lovell as somewhere where personal initiative could be exercised, where some Soviet citizens invested their emotional energy and did everything themselves, since, in his words, ‘dachas (of whatever type) were a rare opportunity for Soviet citizens to enjoy de facto private ownership of immovable property’ (p. 199; cf. *ibid.*, ‘the owner of a dacha was a person “who knew how to live”.’)

Lovell sums up his observations on the development of the dacha in the post-war period by noting the changes in people’s relationship to the soil, to personal property, to leisure, to consumption and to the idea of the home (p. 208). Real-life dacha-dwellers leafing through this book might well pause for thought at this point and consider their attitudes to the home, and that of their neighbours: if they really do have a sense of home, then where does it come from? Is it maybe in fact true to say that a feeling of ownership really does play some part in this?

Chapter 7 (‘Post-Soviet Suburbanisation?’) considers the dacha settlements of today’s Russia. A new phase of evolution for the dacha is linked with the process of development of the suburbs as permanent places of residence, a development that began in the 1980s and which smoothed over the sharp divide between urban and rural life that had been the result of the Soviet politics of urbanisation.<sup>1</sup> The characteristic features of the era are the growing role played by out-of-town allotments in the family food budget, on the one hand, and the arrival of ‘new Russian’ mansions in dacha settlements on the other. Suburbanisation in Russia is distinct from Western in terms of the dynamics behind it and the forms that it takes, but is now no longer subject to the same level of bureaucratic control, and is actively giving birth to its own subculture (right up to the level of special magazines and newspapers and television programmes for dacha-dwellers and allotment visitors). But all the same, the abundance of allotments, contrary to some expectations, has not turned the outskirts of Russian cities into suburbs of the kind to be found, say, in America; for many, attachment to the dacha or allotment is rooted in the fact that this is, once more, simply a means of survival.

Lovell’s conclusion, alongside comments on how the dacha (and the time-honoured intelligentsia way of life associated with it) was represented in Nikita Mikhalkov’s film *Burnt by the Sun*, includes

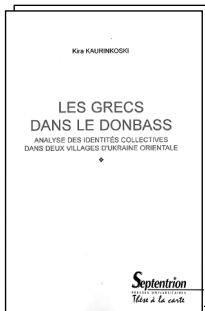
<sup>1</sup> On the democratic and geographical aspects of this process, see T. Nefedova. ‘Rossiiskie prigorody. Gorozhane v selskoi mestnosti’ [Russian Exurbia: City Dwellers in a Rural Setting] // *Gorod i derevnya v Evropeiskoi Rossii: sto let peremen*. Moscow, 2001. Pp. 374–99.



an interesting comment related to the general discussion of ‘middle class’ identity in Russia: the city population which might be considered to belong to the ‘middle class’ lacked a unifying sense of self-consciousness and other features that would have consolidated it as a social stratum. It has accordingly been united above all over the last century and a half by its mode of living (p. 236).

The book is richly illustrated with pictures of dachas, plans of dachas, and cartoons dating from different eras; all have informative captions. There is a glossary dealing with terms unlikely to be familiar to readers who know no Russian, including words such as *fligel*, *gulyanye*, *meshchanin*, *progulka*, and *vremyanka*.

Perhaps only a Russian dacha-dweller is likely to find the task of surveying the dacha from the time of its origins, with reference to social, economic and geographical considerations, unduly ambitious. At any rate, this British specialist, who has obviously been inspired by his own visit to Russian dacha settlements, took his courage in both hands. The book is not especially innovative in a methodological sense, with quite a lot of the analysis depending on ready-made categories whose effectiveness is not examined (‘consumption’, ‘property’, ‘privacy’, ‘sociability’). But it draws a striking broad-brush picture that is both convincing and provokes further thoughts and questions. Which — I’m sure you’ll agree — is exactly what one would hope for from any serious reading one has time for at the dacha.



K. Kaurinkoski. *Les Grecs dans le Donbass. Analyse des identités collectives dans deux villages d'Ukraine orientale*. Série Thèses à la carte. Paris: Septentrion/Université de Provence, 1997. 556 pp. Reviewed by Vlada Baranova and Kseniya Viktorova

## NATIONAL IDENTITY ON THE SHORES OF THE AZOV SEA

Kira Kaurinkoski's case-study of collective identities in Eastern Ukraine was originally written as a doctoral thesis (*doctorat du troisième cycle*) under the supervision of Professor C. Bromb-

erger at the Université de Provence. The Donbass (Donetsk province of Ukraine) is inhabited by the so-called Marioupolis or Azov Sea Greeks, who in turn are divided into two groups — those who speak Greek (the Roumeoi, or Greco-Hellenes), and those who speak Turkic languages (the Urums, or Greco-Tatars).<sup>1</sup> The appearance of a book about this relatively understudied group of Greeks is an event in itself, and the book is also impressive in terms of its evidential base, which mostly draws on the author's fieldwork in 1993–4 and 1997, but which also includes census returns, archival materials, etc.

Alongside two introductory sections, the book has six further chapters, two grouped in Part One and four in Part Two, a conclusion, a bibliography, and several Appendices (the Declaration on Minority Rights of Ukraine, a number of biographical sketches, copies of epitaphs from the village cemetery in Sartana, genealogical tables of different Greek families, and a glossary of Greek, Russian, and Ukrainian words used in the text). Every chapter has a short introduction setting out the questions under discussion, and a generalising conclusion.

The Introduction (pp. 14–51) contains a short historical sketch of national policies in the USSR and in Ukraine since independence, and an outline of Kaurinkoski's own theoretical and methodological position, as well as her first impressions of the region under study. A rather surprising and disturbing feature is the amount of detail about informants that is provided, right down to full names, relations, place of work, etc., which of course means that they can readily be identified. It is not clear what is gained by the provision of such information, and why Kaurinkoski decided to depart from the generally accepted — and, in terms of professional ethics, preferable — system of allowing informants to remain anonymous.

A second introductory chapter, 'Ukraine, the Donbass and the Azov Shore' (pp. 55 — 90) gives an outline of the major events in the history of this region and of its ethnic makeup, and also contains preliminary descriptions of the settlements where fieldwork was carried out: a Greco-Tatar village (Staryi Krym), a Greco-Hellene village (Sartana), and a Ukrainian village (Talakovka). All three places are located at close quarters in the Marioupolis district of the Donetsk province. The choice of location for the study is attractive

<sup>1</sup> The uninitiated reader might well wonder how ethnoi not of Hellenic origin could be described as 'Greek' in the first place. However, from the point of view of the administration of the Roman Empire, the Urums and the Roumeoi were a single group — of Crimean Christians at first, and later of Marioupolis Greeks; the Soviet administration regarded both groups as 'Greeks', lumping them together with Pontic Greeks, Caucasus Greeks and so on; such persistent classification from outside could hardly fail to have an impact on self-identification in the groups themselves.

in that both Greek villages have a long history of involvement with the movement for Greek self-definition. Sartana was a centre for Roumeic literature in the 1930s, and again from the end of the 1980s, and both there and in Saryi Krym, there is active work in local history and with folksong and dance groups (cf. the Roumeic group ‘Samotsvety Sartany’ [Jewels of Sartana], set up in 1930 r., and the Urum group ‘Bir Taifa’ [One Family] in Saryi Krym). At the time of writing, Sartana and Saryi Krym were also particularly active centres for the teaching of modern Greek.

Kaurinkoski’s focus is on the significance of ethnic identity for the self-consciousness of these groups, and the markers of ethnicity that allow this identity to be constructed and acted out. She also deals with the development of ethnic self-consciousness in the post-Soviet era. She herself formulates the purpose of the study in terms of a series of questions: ‘Who are the Donbass Greeks? How do they live? What beliefs do they hold? What are the foundations and principles of their culture? How do they regard “the other” and who is that “other”?’ (p. 38).

A strength of the book is the orderly presentation of the material and the lucid presentation of the analysis. Part One, ‘Cultural and Historical Factors Behind Ethnic Difference’ describes various aspects of the current ethnographical and sociological situation in the Donbass, while Part Two, ‘Representation and Ethnic Self-Affirmation’ (‘Les Soubassements historico-culturelles des différences’) deals with the construction of identity.

The first chapter of Part One, ‘The Material Expression of Cultural Difference’ (pp. 91–155) contains a comparative description of the housing, diet and clothing of the Ukrainians, Russians and Greeks of South-East Ukraine. On the basis of this analysis of material culture, it is possible, Kaurinkoski argues, to see that the boundaries between the different ethnic groups are being eroded. She observes that until the 1930s Greeks used to surround their houses with stone walls (*zahata*, ζαγάτα p. 95), and Russians and Ukrainians with wooden fences, but modern Marioupolis Greeks do not build *zahata* walls (they too construct fences), while Russians and Ukrainians now make their fences out of brick and concrete as well as wood. In earlier times, Greeks used to heat their porches, while Slavs did not (p. 98). Differences in terms of costume are also disappearing: Greek women used to wear a headdress called the *periphhtar*,<sup>1</sup> Russian

<sup>1</sup> *Periphhtar* — sic. (not *periphtharos*). The lack of contact with Modern Greek, and with Greek dialects, for at least two centuries, as against the intensive contact with Crimean Tatar, and then with Russian, has generated significant differences between Roumeic and related idioms, both at the level of lexis — which now includes about 30 per cent material of Turkic origin and a great many borrowings from Russian — and of underlying structure. From the phonetic point of view, Roumeic includes both Northern and Southern Greek features, and analytism is

women one called the *kokoshnik*, and Ukrainians an *ochipok* or *korablik* (p. 126), but now everyone is dressed ‘city fashion’.

The traditional food of the Greeks, Russians, and Ukrainians is *chebureki*, *pelmeni*, and *vareniki* respectively,<sup>1</sup> but now all three groups eat all three foods (pp. 135–137). Culinary traditions began fusing in the 1950s (Kaurinkoski does not make clear whence this date is derived, any more than the other dates cited — the 1930s, the early twentieth century, after the Second World War). This argument in favour of cultural convergence is no doubt the reason why, in later sections of the discussion, Kaurinkoski stops bothering to make clear which group she is referring to, leaving the reader to wonder whether she has the Greeks, Ukrainians, or Russians in mind, and simply generalises about the everyday diet and festival food served on Soviet and religious holidays right across the Donbass.

Indeed, despite the book’s title, much space is devoted to the Russians and Ukrainians, as well as the Greeks. This broad approach has many advantages: the book has a great deal of useful commentary about modern Ukraine, alongside a detailed description of the Ukrainian settlement of Talakovka (despite the reference to ‘two’ villages in the book’s title), which provides the basis for an analysis of Greek and Ukrainian culture in comparative perspective. But sometimes the drive to include as much material as possible and to describe all three ethnic groups makes the text slightly superficial, or fosters the inclusion of unnecessary information (e.g., the existence of Black Earth regions in Ukraine (p. 62), or the fact that the population of Severnaya Bukovina is 70 per cent Ukrainian (p. 65), or statistical data about ethnic minorities in Ukraine generally (p. 69), a recipe for *pelmeni* (p. 135), and so on and so on.) What is more, one sometimes has the feeling that the author’s lack of first-hand experience leads her to take as ‘Greek’ customs that are widespread in the post-Soviet world. It can hardly be argued that the celebration of ‘Soviet’ holidays and singing of Pioneer songs<sup>2</sup> are specific to the Greeks of the Azov Sea region.

Kaurinkoski draws the conclusion that ‘the standardisation and homogenisation of life that was brought about by the Soviet regime

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much more highly developed than in Modern Greek. See further T. N. Chernysheva. *Novogrecheskii govor sel Primorskogo (Urzuf) i Yalta (Istoricheskii ocherk i morfologiya glagola)* [The Modern Greek Dialects of Primorskoe Village (Urzuf) and Yalta (A Historical Sketch and Morphology of the Verbal System)]. Kiev, 1958; Πάππου-Ζουραβλιόβα Ατ. 3 Ταυρορουμαικη διαλεκτος των Ελληνων της Αζοφικης στη Νοτιοανατολικη Ουκρανια (περιοχη της Μαρπουπολης) // Αρχειον Ποντου τ. 46. Athens, 1995.

<sup>1</sup> I.e. different types of filled dough parcel (*vareniki* and *pelmeni* are boiled). [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> I.e. songs associated with the Pioneer organisation, the junior wing of the Komsomol (Young Communist) movement. Almost all children between 10 and 14 were members of the Pioneers by the post-Stalin era. [Editor].

led to the erosion of the most significant ethnic markers in different areas of material culture. With few exceptions, most Greeks in the Donbass wear the same clothes as their Russian and Ukrainian neighbours, live in similar houses, and eat the same food. It is only in the details where one can find differences' (p. 155). This assertion is unarguable, but the question then arises of how significant these details might be. It has to be recognised that the traditional costume of the Azov Sea Greeks (for instance, the women's outfit of baggy trousers, shirt, and *periphtar*), had already fallen out of use by the early twentieth century, and does not seem to be known to contemporary Greeks in this community at all. It therefore cannot be described as an ethnic marker, any more than heated porches can. At the same time, much importance is attached to household items such as the *trapéz'* (a low round table) and the *sofá* (a broad low couch made of earth and wood to be found in the kitchen), as to traditional dishes such as *shmush* and *shurpa*, which (despite their non-Greek names), are, in the eyes of Azov Greeks themselves, identifiers of Greek everyday life.

Chapter 2, 'Religious and Ritual Practices' (pp. 157–241) describes the situation of the church and the attitude to religion in the USSR, and the religious and ritual practices of the Donbass Greeks. Kaurinkoski observes that the proportions of religious believers among the Greeks are lower than among the Ukrainians and Russians. But in all three groups it is elderly women who are most inclined to observe religious rites, and young people who are least inclined. Kaurinkoski regards Communism as just one belief system among many, distinguished by its own pair of 'foundation myths', relating in this case to 1917 and 1945, and embodying Communist ideals and values. She looks in detail at the *Panair*<sup>1</sup> as a striking example of fusion of tradition (or *créolisation* to use her word). Once a religious and community festival, it then became a state, Soviet, festival, but in 1996 once again took on a form and content reflecting those it originally had.

Chapter 3, 'Everyday Practices and Social Behaviour' (pp. 242–307) examines the role of the head of household (who takes all the important decisions and represents the family in dealings with the outside world). This role is often filled by a woman, especially if her husband happens to be a Slav or not from her home village, but in theory is considered male. The feeling of family solidarity among the Greeks is especially highly developed; in Greek families, the gender

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<sup>1</sup> The term is derived from *Panagia* (i.e. a medallion bearing the representation of a saint or of the Mother of God), according to some commentators. However, there are also other views of its etymology. It is applied among the Azov Greeks to the festival celebrating the day of the saint to whom the local church is dedicated: so, St Demetrios's Day would be the *Panair* of a village where the church was dedicated to St Demetrios, etc.

divide is sharper than in Slav families, and godparents also play a stronger role. However, the number of mixed marriages in fact makes it hard to say whether a family is actually ‘Greek’, ‘Russian’, or ‘Ukrainian’ in terms of its overall character.

Kaurinkoski’s informants themselves declared that ethnic differences were of no importance, but at the same time such differences do have weight in everyday contact: for instance, work colleagues from the same ethnic group tend to have closer social relations, though non-work time is spent collectively. However, Kaurinkoski’s general conclusion is that for young people, ethnic differences do not count for much.

In Chapter 4, ‘The Linguistic Situation’ (pp. 308–364), the situation of Russian in the Eastern Ukraine is analysed, and Kaurinkoski analyses the likelihood of whether Russian may be given equal rights with Ukrainian. The author also notes that at the end of the 1980s study of modern Greek became popular, and also of ‘local dialects, which vary from settlement to settlement and have almost no written tradition’. Here one has to disagree. As a matter of fact, there was *discussion* of the possibility that local dialects might be taught in the early 1990s, but such discussion never in fact came to anything. A major obstacle lay precisely in the variety of dialects, as well as in the reluctance to use the Cyrillic alphabet for teaching purposes.<sup>1</sup> The one, exceptional, case where such a dialect was in fact taught was an optional course on the Urum language in Staryi Krym.

Kaurinkoski, in her ethnographical and sociolinguistic analysis, fails to draw distinctions between Turkophone and Hellenophone Greeks, only occasionally even using the terms ‘Greco-Tatar’ and ‘Greco-Hellene’, and speaks of the two groups as though they were one, although in fact members of these groups themselves have a fairly clear sense of their own distinctiveness, and each group has a different attitude to its own language. The linguistic divide is only addressed in one short section, ‘Greco-Hellenes and Greco-Tatars’ (pp. 373–4), where Kaurinkoski observes simply that there are Greco-Hellene and Greco-Tatar settlements, and that the Greeks of both groups never fail to specify about themselves and others whether they are Greco-Tatars or Greco-Hellenes. Moreover, this section contains a significant error, in the assertion that ‘marriages between Greco-Hellenes and Greco-Tatars do not take place, even today, though both groups now speak Russian’ (p. 373). Such marriages are in fact recorded.

Kaurinkoski summarises local attitudes to language in the Azov

<sup>1</sup> A special version of the Cyrillic alphabet — adapted to the phonetic system of Roumeic — was developed at Kiev University in the 1970s.

Shore area thus: modern Greek stands for the future and links with Greece, local dialects for the past, history, village life; Ukrainian is associated with family and village life. With this last comment, one has to disagree: few Azov Greeks actually speak Ukrainian, and those who do take a very negative attitude to it. It is certainly not used for contacts within the family and hence can hardly be described as having family associations.

In Chapter 5, 'Concepts of the "Other" and of History' (pp. 365–426), Kaurinkoski observes that the opposition 'Greeks (=Greco-Hellenes + Greco-Tatars) / Russians (=Russians + Ukrainians)' lies at the root of the ethnic identity of the community under study. She adds that the reduction of ethnic diversity to the dichotomy 'ours/not ours' is characteristic for the construction of ethnic identity generally. In other respects too, the expression of identity depends on reductive binary oppositions: 'locals / outsiders', 'East Ukrainians / West Ukrainians'. The relationship to Russian is closely connected with surviving memories of the Revolution, the 1930s, and the Civil War. Kaurinkoski observes that Greeks are more negatively inclined to the Revolution than Slavs, and also deem themselves to have suffered more in the repressions of the 1930s. She considers that there are no particular differences, ethnically speaking, in attitudes to earlier historical eras, and that Greeks, like everyone else, are aware only of the history they learned in their Soviet schools. Here again, this seems not quite accurate. The situation, as of the present, has changed, probably under the influence of Greek nationalist societies, and all Azov Greeks are now well aware of their community's migration from the Crimea to the Azov area in the late eighteenth century, and the privileges for Greek settlers that went with it. Kaurinkoski confined her questions to what her Greek informants thought about recent history and various key figures from Russian and Ukrainian history (Khmelnitsky, Mazepa, Shevchenko, Gogol, Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev). But most of these figures are simply irrelevant for Donbass Greeks; indeed some (Mazepa, Gogol, Shevchenko) mean nothing to them at all. Hence, Kaurinkoski's commentary here consists of no more than biographical résumés and paraphrases of articles about Shevchenko etc. published in Ukrainian newspapers during the early 1990s. Nothing at all is said about the figures and events actually relevant to the oral tradition of the Azov Greeks and specific to precisely this culture (Patriarch Ignaty, Catherine II, Suvorov, or the migration from the Crimea to the Azov).

Chapter 6, 'The Affirmation and Recirculation of Identity' (Affirmation et revendications des identités") (pp. 427–95) addresses the issue of how the presentation of Greek ethnicity and concepts of this identity within the group go in line with alterations in the political situation. In Kaurinkoski's slick formulation, the Greeks went from

being a ‘no-hope nationality’ (*peuple sans perspective*) to a ‘trendy nationality’ (*nationalité à la mode*) (p. 427). In the Soviet period, many Greeks denied their own ethnic affinity and did all they could to be Russian. For Greeks, as for other Soviet peoples, perestroika ushered in a new era: it allowed them to organise their own societies, to develop their national culture, to foster links with mainland Greece. This situation is illustrated by Kaurinkoski with a long account of the activities of the Greek Society in Sartana in the 1930s and the 1990s. She comes to the conclusion that Greek self-consciousness is a good deal stronger than Russian and Ukrainian consciousness, at least in the region under discussion.

It is, however, essential to bear in mind that Kaurinkoski’s material is highly specific, which in turn affects the general validity of her conclusions. As we mentioned above, Sartana and Staryi Krym were good starting points for an investigation of this kind, yet the very factors that make these places attractive — closeness to the city and the active nature of the Greek national and cultural movement — also make them peculiar. Hence, Kaurinkoski’s attempts to extrapolate generalities from her observations of these two villages, and to draw inferences about the Azov region as a whole, seem rather risky — and particularly with regard to the linguistic situation. The materials collected in these two villages do not allow conclusions to be drawn about other Marioupolis Greek settlements. The linguistic situation in different Urum and Roumeic villages varies very widely, depending on the size of the settlement concerned, the relations between the Greek and non-Greek populations there, the location of the settlement (whether it is a seaside resort or a remote village in the interior), and on the level of activity by Greek societies locally, on whether or not modern Greek is taught in the school, and so on.

Another peculiarity of Kaurinkoski’s fieldwork was her concentration not just on ‘representative’ settlements, but on ‘representative’ informants. There were only thirty of the latter (which seems rather a thin source-base for such an ambitious study), and most of these were activists in the Greek nationalist movement, teachers, and other representatives of the cultural elite. Granted, this fact does not invalidate Kaurinkoski’s material and her analysis in their own right, but it does somewhat limit the extent to which the conclusions drawn may be generally applicable.

What does constitute a serious defect of the book is Kaurinkoski’s reluctance to draw a line between discourse and reality, between the comments made by informants and ethnographical data. This has the curious result that ethnic stereotyping (and auto-stereotyping) — the subject that is supposedly at the centre of interest here — partly escapes analytical attention. To give a typical example: In the chapter on material culture, Kaurinkoski states that ‘Greek *vareniki*’



are typical of the Azov Greeks' cuisine, and quotes an informant's comments about how to make them: 'Ukrainian *vareniki* — no, those are quite different... Greek *vareniki* aren't the same thing at all. Ours have thinner dough, and they're rounder. Ukrainians and Poles and Tatars, they make their *vareniki* bigger, mouse-sized, but ours are little and thin' (p. 135). We would argue (on the basis, above all, of our own fieldwork) that these comments should not be understood as a recipe for an actually existing 'national dish', but as an airing for a familiar stereotype common to all three cultures, along the lines: 'Greeks are neater and tidier, they take care over things, Greek women are good housekeepers and good cooks.' Sometimes Kaurinkoski's interpretation of informant statements as transparent throws up obvious contradictions: for instance, in one and the same chapter, we hear that 'Greek women always used to wear the *periphtar*' and on the other, 'people used only to wear the *periphtar* on holidays'. It is perfectly obvious that the *periphtar*, in the first case at least, is to be understood primarily as an ethnic marker and that another idea of significance in the communities being described underlies these comments: 'Greeks, Ukrainians, and Russians used to be different, but now everything's got mixed up.' Informants will often say that a lot of Greeks 'signed over as Russians', which is to say that they would try and put down 'Russian' instead of 'Greek' on their internal passports,<sup>1</sup> even if one or both parents were Greeks. Kaurinkoski accepts this as a historical fact, but in fact archival documentation from the 1940s through the 1960s does not bear the assertion out: in an absolute majority of cases, a child would simply be assigned its father's nationality.

Unfortunately, this is by no means the only case of an unduly trusting attitude to informants' comments in the book. Had Kaurinkoski been a little more critical with her sources, her conclusions might have looked rather different, and her assertion that ethnic differences are being eroded down to small details might not have been so categorical.

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<sup>1</sup> Until recently, the internal passports (identity cards) carried by all Soviet and post-Soviet citizens over the age of 16 included — alongside name, DOB, place of residence, marital status, etc. — the so-called 'Point 5': 'nationality'. This meant not Soviet nationality (officially known as 'citizenship') but ethnic identity: Russian, Jewish, Tatar, Uzbek, etc. Obviously, public labelling of ethnic identity in this way facilitated institutionalised discrimination. Children of ethnically mixed marriages (or informal unions) could choose which nationality to adopt at 16. There was, then, both the means and the motive, in theory, for those partly of Greek (or whatever other non-Russian) descent, to reassign themselves as 'Russian' (as happened — going by anecdote — in some Jewish-Russian mixed marriages in Russian cities, since a child registered as 'Russian' could avoid the quota limits imposed on numbers of Jewish children in schools, universities, etc.) Ironically, since the abolition of 'Point No. 5', protests have come from some minority ethnic groups, such as Bashkirs, who now — in a different political context — see the declaration of *nationalnost* positively, as a gesture of ethnic self-affirmation. [Editor].

Despite these — it has to be said, significant — criticisms of Kaurinkoski's book, though, the appearance of this study is definitely to be welcomed. To be sure, a fair number of studies of the Azov Greeks have appeared over the last fifteen or twenty years in both Russian and Ukrainian, but they have tended to go over and over the same ground, and to deal only with narrowly specific historical and ethnographical issues. *Les Grecs dans le Donbass* is distinguished from preceding work not just by its wider-ranging ambitions, but by the far greater sophistication, in theoretical terms, of the author's level of analysis.



E. A. Okladnikova. *Traditsionnye kul'tury Severnoi Ameriki kak tsivilizatsionnyi fenomen* [The Traditional Cultures of North America as a Civilisational Phenomenon]. St Petersburg: Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2003. 391 pp.  
Reviewed by Yuri Berezkin

## A SHIP OF FOOLS

The author of this monograph has included me in her list of acknowledgements, as someone who helped with the work in hand. I would be grateful for her kind attention, were I not afraid that it is entirely undeserved. Ms Okladnikova sent me a computer file of the book manuscript before it was published, and I did no more than inform her that the book was so riddled with errors that it was beyond my time and energy to correct them, and that it should on no account be published by a reputable academic press in its present condition. Imagine my shock, then, to see a totally unrevised text appear under the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences — and, what is more, packaged as a ‘course book for university-level students in “Ethnoculturology” and “Cultural Anthropology”’. The nature of the

errors in the book is frankly breathtaking. I entirely fail to understand how an ethnographer who has spent twenty-five years studying the peoples of North America can confuse the Ingalik (the Atapascans of the lower Yukon) and the Iglulik (an Inuit group in Canada). One might as soon expect a so-called expert on the peoples of Siberia not to know the difference between the Koryak and the Ket, or a Sinologist to confuse Tang and Shang.<sup>1</sup> Still, I might have been prepared to turn a blind eye to all this. After all, who really cares if the language of the Bella Coola belongs to the Salishan or Wakashan group (p. 133), whether the Eyak are Indians or Eskimos (p. 106), whether the Yuki live in Northern or in Southern California (p. 221), or whether the Adena culture dates from 500 BC or 500 AD (p.392)? After all, we're talking civilisational phenomena and ethnic identity here — don't bother me with facts. But by the time I read that the mud platforms of Cahokia were taller than the pyramid of Cheops, I'd just had enough. Only a person who doesn't know the first thing about the subject they have chosen to write on, or who is plain ignorant about everything, or who has got used to being able to say whatever they feel like and get away with it, could write such nonsense. There are other gems here too, some of which might have come straight out of *Satirikon* magazine.<sup>2</sup> First prize should probably be awarded to this statement: 'The classical period of Mayan history was followed by the beginning of the post-classical period' (p. 454).

So, does this 'course book on ethnoculturology' in fact contain any useful, undistorted information? Quite possibly — the trouble is, one needs to look at the primary sources to find out exactly what it might be. And if that's the case, what on earth is the point of this book in its own right? Even the list of further reading is problematic. About half the works cited are in English, but, with two exceptions (Black 1983; Jonaitis 1986), the list excludes works published over the last 30 years, other than those also listed in my own study dating from 2001.<sup>3</sup> More than a third of the works that do make Okladnikova's bibliography are not in fact held by libraries in the Russian Federation. To include material that is not available to students, while excluding material that is, looks frankly perverse. I have to say also

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<sup>1</sup> Or for a specialist in Russian literature not to know the difference between Aleksei K. Tolstoy and Aleksei N. Tolstoy, or Viktor Erofeev and Venedikt Erofeev. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> *Satirikon* (continued as *New Satirikon*) was a St Petersburg satirical magazine of the 1900s and 1910s, carrying material by Nadezhda Teffi and Arkady Averchenko, amongst others. Its wit was often directed against purveyors of pompous nonsense: see e.g. the spoof school textbook, *Vseobshchaya istoriya, obrabotannaya Satirikonom* [A History of the World, Adapted for Easy Use by Satirikon]. St Petersburg, 1911, a precursor of W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman's British classic *1066 and All That: A Memorable History of England*. London, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> *Most cherez okean. Zaselenie Novogo Sveta i mifologiya indeitsev i eskimosov Ameriki* [A Bridge Across the Ocean. The Settlement of the New World and the Mythology of the American Indians and Eskimos]. Lewiston — Queenston — Lampeter, 2001. Series 'Rossiiskie issledovaniya v gumanitarnykh naukakh', vol. 23.

that the discussion itself does not suggest that Okladnikova necessarily has a first-hand acquaintance with the works that she cites. For instance, the theoretical discussion placed in the Conclusion, and referring to Durkheim, Geertz and others (pp. 507–508), is simply a paraphrase of what I said in my 2001 study — with introduced mistakes, and without acknowledgement, it stands to reason. The continuation of the conclusion, however (pp. 509–519) is certainly the work of Okladnikova herself, and if readers want to get a flavour of the book, they could do no better than start from there.

Well, the tax-payers can hardly demand their money back, and the crazy dates and linguistic attributions in this study are, I'm afraid, likely to spread as fast as the latest computer virus. But can we see that this kind of horror story doesn't happen again? Clearly, it's going to be difficult, given that the existing formal controls — the Learned Council, the editorial board, the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences, have proved no use at all in this case. We've got much the same situation as with visa regulations — tightening them up creates hassles for honest people, and does nothing to stop delinquency in its tracks. Almost any manuscript will get positive readers' reports when it comes to it. One person will write nice things because they know and like the author, another person because they couldn't care less, and a third because they don't have the first idea about the subject in the first place. In any case, the 'civilisational phenomenon' is something of a unique case. The book 'passed through collegial discussions' when the former head of the Americas Section of the MAE was at death's door, and none of the other staff in the section were competent to draw attention to the sloppy practices so abundantly shown off in it. In any case, it wouldn't have behaved juniors to take a Doctor of Sciences to task. The Learned Council by its nature won't necessarily have representation from people who know about the settlement patterns of the Californian Indians, and it's doubtful whether anyone would have managed to wade through the book as far as the aforementioned pp. 509–19, which might have enlightened even a non-expert.

To be honest, I think that the best safeguard would be an informal system of control or mentoring. Every researcher employed by the Academy of Sciences has a kind of unwritten, but generally known, ranking in the profession. This ought to be the basis for decisions about how many pages of manuscripts members of the Learned Council read before they give up and turn on their televisions, about who the readers should be, and how many readers' reports should be solicited in the first place. And I'd also appeal to the common sense and public spirit of those among us who frankly aren't much good. This isn't just a personal issue. A book as bad as this (or an article, or a thesis — the genre is immaterial) is a nail in the coffin of scholarship, which, after all, is supposed to be about searching for

knowledge and disseminating it to the world. If scholarship goes to the dogs, it won't just be the incompetent that are out of a job.

I can only hope that the 'civilisational phenomenon' marks the end of an era in the history of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, and that from now on, we shall see a turn for the better.

*[CK]*