

FROM THE COMPILER

The idea of making a selection of articles devoted to the religious practices of modern townfolk occurred to me after the Tenth Congress of the Ethnographers and Anthropologists of Russia, which took place in Moscow in July 2013. The overall theme of the congress, as announced by its organisers, took in various processes taking place in modern Russian towns, although in fact the congress dealt with towns outside Russia as well. This is not surprising. In the modern world it is in the towns that the most complex and diverse processes are taking place: the growth of the urban population, often due to economic migration, the increased ethnic and religious fragmentation of that population, the changes in the functions of many traditional urban spaces, and so forth. These phenomena and processes, and many others, have been subjects studied by the anthropology of the town outside our country for a long time (e.g. [Barnes, Code 1977]). Nowadays urban anthropology has got over the period of ‘fashionability’, and become a perfectly respectable academic sub-discipline. In the USSR urban ethnography, as it was then called (and, on the whole, justifiably so), also evolved quite successfully: it is sufficient to point to the works on the ethnography of Petersburg–Leningrad, particularly those

Elena Nosenko-Shtein

Institute of Oriental Studies,
Russian Academy of Sciences,
Moscow, Russia
nosenko1@gmail.com

by N. V. Yukhneva [Yukhneva 1982; 1984; Etnografiya Peterburga-Leningrada 1987]. Over the last ten or fifteen years a further series of interesting works on urban anthropology has appeared, claiming successfully to have made theoretical sense of certain processes underway in our country (e.g. [Shchepanskaya 2003; Trubina 2011]).

One of the most interesting and in my view most topical problems confronting the inhabitants of many cities (obviously, not only big cities and not only in Russia) are the various 'religious renaissances' — the dissemination of religions, denominations and cults new to the region in question, and also related changes in the urban landscape and the functions of various urban spaces, the emergence of new urban subcultures, the formation of new lifestyles, changes in the identity of various groups of urban dwellers and much else.

Therefore at the congress section on 'Traditional and New Religions of Modern Russian Townsfolk (Faith, Practice, Identity)', headed by A. S. Agadzhanian and myself, we were hoping to hear the results of research conducted at the point where urban anthropology and the anthropology of religion meet. When the topic was announced it was met with great interest: we received over eighty proposals, of which we selected just over twenty. Thematically they covered many religions and religious practices in the post-Soviet area: the resurgence of Orthodoxy and the problems it encounters in the cities of Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus; the spread of Catholicism in certain regions of Russia, including previously 'non-Catholic' urban populations; attempts to plant certain Protestant tendencies; the problems of the spread of Islam and the changes in the identity of urban Muslims; a specific 'renaissance of Judaism' in certain Russian towns, including those in which there is only a small Jewish community; attempts to spread Buddhism; and, finally, an enthusiasm for paganism and nature-worship, and likewise of esoteric cults and mysticism amongst certain groups of young city dwellers.

Not all the papers read at the section were of a particularly high quality, but I chose a few which, in my opinion, provide the most interesting reflection of the basic tendencies in the modern post-Soviet city. The editors of *Antropologicheskij forum* then made their own choice, narrowing down the selection of articles to four. These are N. V. Shlikhta's on the identity of the clergy and faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church in the post-war USSR, M. A. Safarov's on various religious practices of the Tatars of Moscow today, mine on changes in the functions of traditional urban spaces for the Jewish inhabitants of modern Russian cities, and finally V. A. Shnirelman's work on recent eschatological expectations and their reflection in Christianity and esoteric currents in our country. These works, somewhat disparate at first sight, are united by their common theme: they show the serious problems of 'traditional' (Orthodox Christia-

nity, Islam, Judaism) and ‘non-traditional’ doctrines in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, and also ‘cross-sections’ of the functioning of religion in the modern city.

References

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