



**‘THE FIGHT BETWEEN ASEs AND DEVAS  
RUNS THROUGH OUR WHOLE EXISTENCE’:  
THE CONSPIROLOGICAL IMAGINARY  
OF NORTH OSSETIAN INTELLECTUALS AND THE SEARCH  
FOR MEANING IN NATIONAL HISTORY**

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**Abstract:** In the contemporary Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, just as in other segments of Russian society, inter-confessional arguments often take the form of conspiriological accusations against opponents. Every party — Orthodox activists, the Muslim community, and Ossetian ethnic religious revival projects — has its own conspiriological theories. The main ‘ideal types’ proposed in this context can be understood as a conspiracy of dishonest, politically motivated academicians (‘the historians’ plot’), a conspiracy of a sacerdotal corporation (‘the priests’ plot’) and ‘the plot of (Western) intelligence services’. The popularity of these narratives can be explained by the fact that in the communication sphere of North Ossetia, every phenomenon of social life is often explained by answering the question ‘who needs this?’ while overlooking any objective explanations based on general economic or political regularities, or a combination of them. In addition, in the Soviet tradition social life is interpreted as an overt series of consequences of the secret struggle between intelligence services and ‘our party’, who is not just a victim of the foreign enemy but also an active participant in the strife. These narratives and cognitive schemes can help to explain why such conspiracy theories appear, in which the hope for victory over secret enemies is not only presented as the triumph of revealed truth, but as a result of the effective work of ‘our’ secret societies and organizations.

However, in contemporary Russia there are other informational communities that have their own interpretative practices that form specific conspiracy narratives. Thus the mental habits of some conservative Christians (Orthodox believers as well as certain evangelicals) enable them to find building blocks for their conspiriological eschatology. In their narratives, there is no hope for the wisdom of good secret societies, but there is alarming inner readiness for the last trial prepared for the faithful at the Last Things.

**Keywords:** conspiracy theory, North Ossetia, Orthodoxy, religious traditionalism.

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## 'The Fight between *Ases* and *Devas* Runs through Our Whole Existence': The Conspirological Imaginary of North Ossetian Intellectuals and the Search for Meaning in National History<sup>1</sup>

In the contemporary Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, just as in other segments of Russian society, inter-confessional arguments often take the form of conspirological accusations against opponents. Every party — Orthodox activists, the Muslim community, and Ossetian ethnic religious revival projects — has its own conspiracy theories. The main 'ideal types' proposed in this context can be understood as a conspiracy of dishonest, politically motivated academicians ('the historians' plot'), a conspiracy of a sacerdotal corporation ('the priests' plot') and 'the plot of (Western) intelligence services'. The popularity of these narratives can be explained by the fact that in the communication sphere of North Ossetia, every phenomenon of social life is often explained by answering the question 'who needs this?' while overlooking any objective explanations based on general economic or political regularities, or a combination of them. In addition, in the Soviet tradition social life is interpreted as an overt series of consequences of the secret struggle between intelligence services and 'our party', who is not just a victim of the foreign enemy but also an active participant in the strife. These narratives and cognitive schemes can help to explain why such conspiracy theories appear, in which the hope for victory over secret enemies is not only presented as the triumph of revealed truth, but as a result of the effective work of 'our' secret societies and organizations.

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If you think no-one is subjecting you to psychological manipulation, then you're in the hands of a professional

*Popular internet joke*

At the end of 2012, in the course of the policy of breaking up large dioceses then being pursued by the leadership of the church, a new diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church was created in the republic of North Ossetia-Alania. It was named the Diocese of Vladikavkaz and Alania. The leadership of the new structure at once, and with great energy, set about creating the image of the Ossete people as natural bearers of an ancient Orthodox culture inherited from their ancestors the Alans, who had been converted to Christianity in the tenth century. Alongside this, the predominant

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direction in the representation of the work of Orthodox diocesan structures suggests that the church's basic activity in the republic is conducted in the field of the preservation of ethnic cultural (linguistic, architectural, literary, folkloric, and so on) heritage. Giving a brief outline of this aspect of the diocese's policy of self-representation, the diocesan secretary Fr Savva Gagloev remarks that 'The diocesan leadership has in effect announced a new church missionary strategy based on the principle of inculturation, that is the rooting of Orthodoxy in the local culture and overcoming the gap between the Christian religion and the culture of the local population' [Gagloev 2013: 92].<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted that not all the inhabitants of North Ossetia have given such initiatives (which are supported by the leadership of the republic) a warm welcome. The most consistent critics of the Orthodox Christian version of Ossete culture and spiritual heritage are the supporters of the creation (or restoration) of a special ethnic Ossete religion. They are sometimes called 'Rodnovery' [native believers], by analogy with East Slavonic religious traditionalists,<sup>2</sup> but in the republic itself they are called followers of *Uas Din* (Ossete *uas din*, 'holy faith'; one also finds the term *Iron din* 'Ossete faith' used in the same sense). Using an alternative variant of religious nationalism based on a combination of New Age ideology and the European 'New Right' ideology of preserving national cultures, they are highly critical of the attempts by Orthodox activists to 'get their hands on Ossete culture' and offer a view of Christianity in general and Orthodoxy in particular as a globalising project that presupposes a levelling out of any ethnic specificities of the 'subject peoples'. (It is to be understood that in this context globalism is seen as a source of absolute evil.) The ideal offered by this variant of religious traditionalism is the purification of everything Ossete from the 'external' deposit of Orthodoxy and the return of the Ossetes to their pre-Christian past and to the Indo-Aryan spiritual origins which predetermined the greatness of all modern civilisation, and which are placed in opposition to Middle Eastern religious doctrines, the most dangerous of which, in the eyes of the Ossete 'Native Faith' movement is Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Arguments from conspiracy narratives, that is, the theory of a secret conspiracy, are often used to explain the spread of Christianity among the Ossetes, and among the peoples of the world at large. For the sake of terminological clarity in the following discussion, I shall follow the American political scientist Daniel Hellinger in defining a conspiracy as collective behaviour characterised by three separate analytical

<sup>1</sup> For more on the policy of inculturation pursued by the Diocese of Vladikavkaz, see: [Shtyrkov 2015].

<sup>2</sup> Who are known as *starovery* or 'Old Believers'. [Eds.].

<sup>3</sup> For more on the ideology of Ossete national religious activism, see: [Shtyrkov 2012].

means that are at the same time mutually connected: (1) secrecy, (2) failure if discovered and (3) one or more of the following: the illegality of the conspirators' actions, a discrepancy between the real and publicly stated aims of the conspirators, and breaking the generally accepted ethical rules of behaviour [Hellinger 2003: 209].

So, according to this idea that Christian missionary work is conspiratorial in nature, the Christian Church is carrying out its secret plan in Ossetia, as it is in the world at large (but paying special attention to Ossetia). Or, to be more accurate, certain mysterious forces are, according to this view, using the Church to achieve their aims, but since the Church with its doctrine, practices and institutions has been specially created for this activity, it is appropriate to speak about the Church as such. Allegedly, the Church does not make its real aims public: it speaks of the salvation of the soul, of a reformation of morals, the achievement of world peace and the preservation of culture, but its real aim is the greatest possible political, and perhaps economic power. It conceals its real nature since, although it is a tool of the Jews, it declares its autonomy from Judaism and Jewishness. Finally, it acts deliberately and consistently (that is, the leaders of the conspiracy act in such a way, while the masses of simple folk whom they have deceived help to bring to life the wicked plans of their leaders without themselves being aware of them). But it will not be possible for the Church's plans to be achieved, and its activities will be fruitless, so long as people listen to the words of those who have understood the real meaning of what is happening.

This position is most consistently represented in the texts produced by Daurbek Makeev, one of the most active leaders of the North Ossetian religious traditionalists. His general line is this: the Bible formulates the task set before the people of Israel — to take possession of the lands and property of other peoples — and the method by which this goal is to be achieved — the corruption of the said peoples through the 'discrediting and perverting' of their traditional ethnic customs and beliefs. Christianity is for Makeev the main instrument for carrying out this project, which is already fully underway: 'They have already come to corrupt us' [Makeev 2007: 188].<sup>1</sup> In a later text Makeev designates this version of the understanding of world history as 'the Bible Project' [Makeev 2013], a term taken directly or indirectly from an author popular among Russian nationalists who conceals his identity under the pseudonym The Inner Predictor of the USSR (see, for example: ["Sad" rastet sam?'] 2009: 53). It is

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<sup>1</sup> To be fair, it should be said that the object of Daurbek Makeev's criticism is not Christianity in its entirety; he distinguishes, like Lev Tolstoy, between incorrect, Pauline Christianity, that is the doctrine of the Apostle Paul based on the teaching of the Gospels, and correct, 'spiritual' Christianity, connected with Aryan traditions (see, for example: [Makeev 2007: 71]). However, since practically all Christians alive today acknowledge the truth and divine inspiration of St Paul's writings, from this point of view they are alien to the true doctrine of Christ.

obvious that the conspiracy version of Christian history that Makeev applies to Ossetian realities is not a local invention. This sort of understanding of Christianity is widespread among conspiracy theorists of an 'ariosophic' tendency [Ivanov 1994; Bezverkhiiy 1998; Istarkhov 2000], who see the Christian religion as a specific product of Jewish social engineering which was 'exported to the Aryan world to enslave it through the preaching of humility, pacifism and a profane simplification of ancient wisdom' [Bagdasaryan 2000: 23].<sup>1</sup>

This is at present perhaps the version of the concept that might be called 'the conspiracy of priests' that is commonest in the Ossetian informational space. It gains an appearance of verisimilitude from the following circumstance. In the social imagination of modern man, religion is an extremely attractive field for the application of conspiracy theories. It (as a whole, if it is understood as a single phenomenon) or they (i.e. other religions, as perceived by a representative of a religious group who is persuaded that it alone is true and a means of grace) are seen as the only milieu in which the ill-intentioned deceivers who secretly manipulate people's consciousness exist. The simplest explanation for this would be the dissemination of the Marxist understanding of the nature of religion, and this is doubtless correct for post-Soviet society. The image of the cleric who helps the capitalist and the bureaucrat to manage the masses, which was a commonplace of Soviet anticlerical propaganda, is derived from a vulgarised Marxist understanding of the social function of religion. The Soviet roots of these ideas are revealed by the constant use by critics of 'traditional religions' of such metaphors as 'the opium of the people' and 'spiritual intoxication', but above all 'ideology', which in this context has the specifically Marxist significance of 'false consciousness'. I would remind the reader that in the Marxist tradition 'ideology' is used as a critical concept and does not simply mean a system of views on the world and society, but also a system of views which consistently distorts the real state of things in the eyes of the people, and which makes it possible to establish and maintain in society relations of dominance, subordination and exploitation. In this sense the term 'ideology' is applied by anticlerical constructs to mean the doctrinal systems of world religions, and above all Christianity. But, as we know, this sort of understanding of religious phenomena came into being long before Marx was born. Such ideas can be found in the works of European anticlerical polemicists (in the *Traité des trois imposteurs*, to look no further), and even earlier among critics of the Roman Catholic Church during the Reformation, who to a great extent set the standards for conspiracy narratives that have been transmitted to this day in societies that are historically Protestant, but

<sup>1</sup> On the idea of Christianity as a product of forces which aim to use it as a means to world domination, see: [Shnirelman 2002: 203; 2012: 22–4].

are rapidly becoming secularised (collaboration between the Roman Curia and the Jews, the ubiquity and all-powerfulness of the Jesuits or (less frequently) other Catholic orders, the carefully concealed truth about the real history of Christianity, and so on).<sup>1</sup>

Incidentally, the idea, popular among contemporary Ossetian religious traditionalists, that ‘the priests’ (Christian priests or Rabbis) have distorted the true teachings of Christ (in this case — Aryan Christianity) and concealed the divine knowledge, replacing it with a false ideology which keeps the naïve people in permanent obedience [Makeev 2002: 72–3; ‘Shkola’ 2011], goes back to the same period.<sup>2</sup>

Generally speaking, in order to understand the conditions in which information about Christianity as a conspiracy and the Church as a conspirator circulates, one must obtain a clear idea of how the society in question is structured.

The way I pose the question here follows in many respects earlier attempts to see in the conspiracy-theory style of thought not a cognitive or psychological pathology, but a variant of the norm based on everyday experience of communication and conceptualisation. In an attempt to make conspiracy theory less exotic, the American philosopher Lee Basham has written that it is quite natural for people to believe in the existence of a conspiracy, since ‘in our personal lives most all of us have encountered the existence of treacherous disloyalties, conspiratorial sexual infidelities, carefully crafted business betrayals, and life-crippling slanders that, insidiously, are sometimes never revealed to the victims’ [Basham 2001: 271]. Basham goes on to discuss the dark side of personal relationships. But I would like to move away from the everyday communicative practices in which the conspiracy narrative is crystallised, in order to understand the logic of the social imagination in which conspiracy theories occupy a more serious place than they do in my own. That is, unlike Basham I am prepared to admit that it is not only traumatic experience that produces a healthy distrust of external appearances in anybody, but the habits of interpreting and representing such experience that determine the degree to which a society is apt to produce stories of conspiracy.

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In the current discursive field of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, conspiracy-theory discussions in the spirit of ethno-nationalistic and geopolitical eschatology have become so com-

<sup>1</sup> On anti-Catholic conspiracy theories see, for example: [Cubitt 1993; Burke 2001; Nelson 2002; Marotti 2005: 42–53].

<sup>2</sup> The concept of Aryan Christianity echoes the idea that Jesus Christ and his eleven Apostles were ethnic Scythians (Alans) [Khamitsev, Balaev 1992: 4]. This hypothesis is familiar to many people in North Ossetia and may be the basis both for jokes and for perfectly serious discussions, as I have seen with my own eyes on several occasions.

monplace that often their authors do not bother to make their arguments explicit. Phrases about the new world order, somebody's secret bosses, or the cynical adepts of globalist ideology become the sort of clichéd metaphor that does not indicate the ontological status of the phenomenon to which it is applied, but only that the person responsible for applying it is out of sympathy with the phenomenon in question. Sometimes one has the impression that phrases constructed in this manner have become no more than a topos of polite discourse. There are quite a number of reasons for, or rather circumstances favourable to the wide extent and even trivialisation<sup>1</sup> of conspiracy discourse in North Ossetia (and indeed throughout the Northern Caucasus), but I shall indicate only two.

1. Unlike the average European society, Ossetian society is a social space which is held together (and at the same time divided) by family ties. This determines the common habit of explaining events and phenomena of social life by the origin of the people who take part in them and the clan they belong to, as well as looking for, and finding, supplementary information (from our point of view), to explain 'what is really happening', i.e. the submerged truth behind the events. The problem is that at the level of the republic these sources of supplementary information are more accessible, and the social space is denser, as a result of the narrowness of the socium's borders and the particular democratic character of post-traditional society. To put it simply, everyone has friends or relations who know people in the republic's leadership, power structures, etc.

A simple example: I discovered, during a conversation with several of my acquaintances (male lecturers in higher education) in one of the North Caucasian republics, that they knew how much one has to pay to become a public prosecutor, a police chief or a member of the state дума. I, like most of the people I know, living and working in St Petersburg, do not have such information and do not even believe that I could easily uncover it. One might suppose that my ignorance is due to the fact that I live in a big city, whereas smaller communities might be characterised by a level of information which is in principle

<sup>1</sup> I shall give a fairly typical example. On 21 October 2014, information agencies relayed the words of Ramzan Kadyrov, the President of the Chechen Republic, about the so-called Islamic State, against which US armed forces were at that time conducting military operations: 'I would ask that they should not be referred to as the Islamic State. They are *shaitans*, who only want to make more money. They are carrying out the instructions of the West and deliberately killing Muslims.' And later: 'They have been helped and are being helped by Western intelligence services. They give them everything they need. Where do these bandits get aeroplanes from, or the means fully to equip tens of thousands of people? Where do they get it all from? No question but that they are being helped by people in high positions.' 'This terrorist group is headed by agents of the intelligence services. The head of the group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was recruited by the CIA.' In this context Kadyrov proposed the following solution to the problem: 'Baghdadi must now take his mask off and say openly that he is a CIA agent, that he has been recruited. If he really thinks that he is a true Muslim, he must openly admit that he is killing his brothers in the faith, beg his fellow believers' pardon and disband his gang' ['Kadyrov' 2014].

higher than my own. Let us say, people who live in Novgorod Province, which has a population comparable to that of North Ossetia, would also have many sources of information about the mechanisms and bases of decisions taken in the milieu of the region's political and administrative elite. However, this is not altogether the case. Most modern urban communities are more atomised, and their members are convinced of the existence of an insurmountable informational barrier between the level of the ordinary resident's everyday life and the level at which socially significant decisions are taken. Roughly speaking, I have as much understanding or lack of understanding of the motives for the decisions taken by the President of the Russian Federation as I do of the considerations or circumstances that determine the decisions taken by the head of the management of the block of flats where I live. For this reason a resident of St Petersburg or Novgorod is much 'lazier and less curious' in this sphere than a resident, say, of Vladikavkaz.

The locally determined means of investigation of any situation in North Ossetia is the deep-rooted habit of asking the question 'Who needs that?' ('Who profits by it?'). It is so strong that it is much more usual and intellectually comfortable to construct one's own speculative explanation of the 'real' nature of political events (or to accept someone else's) than to give up on such perspectives with remarks like 'It won't do anyone any good' or 'It's some sort of game that they're playing, about which we know nothing and never will.' Whenever someone demonstrates this sort of attitude to important political events, there are two sorts of reaction that he might encounter on the part of his interlocutors, who are used to being more active in the collection and interpretation of socially significant information. (1) Why don't you use the available sources of information to find out what's really going on? (2) If, as you say, what is going on is not the result of anybody's secret plan, then the situation is much worse than it would otherwise be, because nobody is in control of it. In the latter case there is a sense of intellectual frustration in the conspiracy theorist's mind, which is resolved equally by a conspiracy theorist's argument: they are hiding the real 'undercurrent of events' from us, so that nobody will interfere with the course of events which only appear to be out of control.

2. An important role in the society which we are describing is played by the inertia of Soviet experience in the realm of imagining the rules which organise social space. 'Gladness that everything is in the safe hands' of 'competent organs' is quite often encountered, if not everywhere. The confidence that everything is supervised by the organisation of the 'Comrade Major' of the old Soviet joke<sup>1</sup> — an

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<sup>1</sup> This is a long and involved narrative joke in which a man who is tired of his two companions' constant flood of political jokes tells them the KGB may be listening. When they pooh-pooh this, he goes out of



invisible, but ubiquitous and omnipotent personage — rests upon the experience of living in a space which is organised in such a way that vitally important information cannot be publicly explicated. The means of collecting information and taking decisions are *naturally* inaccessible to everyone except the elite (we, mere mortals, see only the results of that activity), and consequently the elite of the elite are the professional dissemblers — the intelligence services. This supposes, among other things, that the real reasons for events will be deliberately camouflaged, and the wool pulled over the eyes of society. These mental habits are not, needless to say, specific to the social imagination of modern North Ossetian society, but I would concede the existence of certain nuances that give a particular colour in that society to thoughts and narratives about the actions of mysterious forces.

First. The existence of these forces and their activity are understood as something natural, not pathological. Real life is a game played by the intelligence services, rival clans, and big business.

Second. A society with a conservative mentality, paternalistically inclined and loyal to the Soviet past, can see certain advantages in this state of affairs. It is understood that 'they' are clever, tricky and ubiquitous, but 'ours' are also active. And 'ours' are strong and professional. Therefore, incidentally, the conspiracy narrative about enemy forces that is proposed by any particular individual or group is addressed not so much towards public opinion as to a mysterious locus 'up there' — in the sense that 'They'll sort it out up there.' In other words, in these conditions the conspiracy narrative is, reverting to Soviet terminology, a 'signal'.<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, conspiracy discourse based on this sort of conceptual foundation displays the following peculiarity, which is somewhat at odds with the 'classical' concept of conspiracy. As I have noted above, a conspiracy is a plan of action that cannot be accomplished if it is unmasked. Consequently, the conspiracy theorist must aim for as explicit and public a description as possible of this sinister plan, its aims and the people involved. However, in the variant of conspiracy theory that we are now discussing, we often encounter a modest reluctance to give a precise indication of the plotters ('You can see for yourselves who needs this'); the hearers are supposed to demonstrate their own powers of penetration and thereby confirm that they belong to the same informational and ideological field as the narrator. I have more than once found myself in a situation when my interlocutors, who had asserted that there was a hidden

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the room and asks the floor lady for some tea. He then returns, and in front of his friends, says into a socket on the wall, 'Three teas please, Comrade Major.' The teas immediately appear and there is an awkward silence. In the morning, the man awakes to find his companions gone. He asks the floor lady where they are. 'Last night, the KGB came and arrested them for telling political jokes.' 'So why not me?' 'The comrade major thought your joke with the tea was very funny.' [Eds.].

<sup>1</sup> 'Signals from below' was a standard phrase in the Stalin era referring to expressions of dissatisfaction 'up the line', including letters of complaint, denunciations of local bosses, etc. [Eds.].

meaning or someone's unacknowledged interests behind a particular action or phenomenon, reacted with surprise to my attempts to find out what and whom they had in mind.

Finally, the third mental habit is that of believing that any public utterance or even information policy as a whole always has an ideological purpose. We all know this logic as applied to the broadcasting policies of the media or to academic studies, behind which the man in the street discerns the carefully concealed real intentions, which do not correspond to the superficially visible informational or scientific goals. But in the present case this is what is important: in the post-Soviet national republics, both in circles that are perfectly loyal to the current regime and amongst more or less radical opposition activists, there is an idea of a sort of historiographical trauma of the Soviet period. One may see in this the inertia of the illusions of perestroika or the reverse — something like the consequences of the spread of the ideologeme of the Normanist<sup>1</sup> conspiracy (or, in a wider sense, 'a conspiracy of historians'). But one way or another, the thought that a particular ethnic unit has been deliberately deprived of its glorious historical past for the sake of the internationalist policies pursued by the USSR has become a commonplace.

There are two aspects to this thesis that are important for our discussion. In the first place, the concealed historical or cultural past is exclusively thought of as glorious, as a source of symbolic capital, which must certainly raise the status and the legitimacy of the political demands to the group to whom it belongs (and which, in turn, belongs to that past: 'What is it do with us? It is our past that dictates these demands, the shades of our forgotten ancestors oblige us to demand justice'). We have every reason to regard such constructs sceptically and ironically. As we know, national histories and cultures (epic poems, for example) were more likely to be constructed than destroyed in the USSR. But in the case of the Ossetes there is a historical undercurrent in favour of the concept of 'a conspiracy of historians', since in the final years of the USSR, after the anti-Ingush disturbances among the people in 1981, a policy of suppressing Ossete nationalism was pursued in the republic, which was expressed in the cultivation of an attitude of suspicion towards the historical basis of the greatness of the Ossete people, their Alan origins and so on. When in 1994 the word 'Alania' was included in the official name of the republic, many people saw this as a compensation for the historical trauma, a compensation which was especially valuable in the atmosphere of the official acknowledgement of the crimes committed by the state against other peoples of the North Caucasus.

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<sup>1</sup> Normanists — the name given to those historians who acknowledged the Scandinavian origin of the early mediaeval Russian ruling class, an unpalatable truth in both Imperial and Soviet Russia. [Transl.].

The general framework within which the motif of the 'conspiracy of historians' operates is widely distributed: the elites keep the common people in the dark in order to exploit them; they prevent them from appreciating the grandeur of their own history and thereby coming to an understanding of their real interests, potential and historical mission; the historians serve the interests of the elites by concealing information or distorting it (this is how consistent Marxists are inclined to understand the situation), and even by destroying sources (this version is classical in radical conspiracy theory). Quite recently, in conversation at table during a ritual meal (*kuvd*), I was told how the Germans had falsified the whole history of Russia, reducing it from a hundred thousand years to a few centuries. As evidence they cited the discovery by archaeologists in the Urals of ancient tungsten springs covered in Slavonic writing, and containing among other things the word *rotor*. The person who told me this story urged me, as a historian, to watch a television programme broadcast by RenTV. I found the required source without much difficulty. It was an edition of 'The Territory of Errors', a programme devoted to sensational discoveries in the field of alternative history (31 October 2014). One of the things of which this programme informed us was the archive, now destroyed by fire (arson?), of Lomonosov, who had fought for the honour of Russian history against the German academicians. The viewer was left to infer that the gaps in our knowledge of the great ancient history of our fatherland are to be explained by the events of the mid-eighteenth century.

A distrust of the historical narratives that everybody knows in the polemic between religions brings it to the point where the ideas of 'a conspiracy of historians' and 'a conspiracy of priests' combine, and religious activists play the part of intellectuals discovering new sources for the history of their people or reinterpreting them, and often rejecting those which are already known. In the process the warring parties readily and habitually accuse each other of working for unnamed bosses — that is, they have direct recourse to the arguments of conspiracy theory.

Khetag Morgoev, one of the theoreticians of the project to revive (or, to put it better, popularise) Ossetian ethnic religion, using the image of an information war (which, I suggest, may be regarded as a moderate variant of conspiracy theory), describes the Christian version of the Ossetes' religious past like this:

*We Ossetes have for several centuries been in a state of information war with all kinds of representatives of various religious systems that have been trying to subordinate us and make us an obedient tool (or weapon) in the achievement of their aims. As a conventional 'beginning' of this war we may take the Christian legends of the preaching in Scythia of a certain Judaeo-Christian preacher called Andrew, in Christian tradition Andrew*

*the first-called disciple of Jesus Christ, who is supposed to have got as far as Kiev (which at that time did not yet exist) [Morgoev 2011].*

He goes on to say that efforts to establish historical truth have encountered ‘very strong opposition from forces interested in our destruction as an ethnos’, and indicates the main interests and participants, and also the tactical goals of this campaign:

*In our time the Christian religion’s information war against the Ossetes takes various forms and expressions. The Church has its adepts, residents and, one must suppose, paid agents in the leadership system of the mass media themselves, and skilfully imposes and creates the illusion of the ‘benefit’ for the Ossetes of going over to Christian values and view of the world, but nowhere is it said that this world view contradicts the foundations of the Ossetian æghdaw and that it is being imposed in order to destroy it [Morgoev 2011].*

One leitmotif of this argument is the reminder that Christianity has a different ethnic origin (‘one of the sects of Judaism’) and the creation by Christians of ‘a false myth about the antiquity of their cult amongst our people’.

Tired of hearing arguments about the foreign origin of Christianity, which could not therefore offer anything good to the Ossetian people, one Orthodox polemicist put forward the following theory to explain the proponents of the Ossete ‘native faith’ and their Russian analogues:

*Amongst the Russian people neo-paganism has been gathering strength, based on the so-called ‘Slavo-Aryan Vedas’ and the Book of Veles. These Slavo-Aryan Vedas appeared quite recently. They are a compilation taken from the real Vedas, Scandinavian sagas, Templar legends and the Book of Mormon. The founders of this neo-paganism maintain that the texts were sent from heaven and written on a heavenly metal, which, needless to say, no one except the ‘elect’ has ever seen. Their second source — the Book of Veles — is also popular, though to anyone who knows basic linguistics it is obvious that it is a crude forgery from the beginning of the twentieth century.*

*Former members of these societies have told us that neo-pagans still do not have a common ideology, and therefore the only subject at their congresses is their antipathy towards Christianity, their rabid hatred for the historical religion of our country. But this lack of unity by no means prevents them from gathering strength, demanding equal rights and the recognition of a special place for their religion, which they call ‘the old original faith’. Something similar may be observed in the countries of Europe, where there is a ‘revival’ of Celtic paganism. What do you think, could these simultaneous processes be a matter of chance, a mere coincidence? No? Then let us proceed [Mamiev 2013: 137].*

The passage quoted actively asserts that native faith is a relatively new project brought into being through mystification and the abuse of

public trustfulness. Such arguments, it seems to me, should be treated as mirror images of their opponents' arguments. There follows a further mirror argument: ethnic religious traditionalism of the non-Christian sort is useful to foreign powers and is in practice their creation.

*Not long before his death John F. Kennedy revealed the existence of a monolithic structure which had the aim of reducing the peoples to servitude and achieving world dominance. This structure has not gone away since Kennedy's time. It has simply entangled the ruling elite of the Western world in its webs. Its goal is Russia. The Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation — it matters not what Russia has been called at any particular period of history. What matters is that the very existence of a strong, united Russia is diametrically opposed to the plans of the architects of the New Order. Russia, with its territory and resources, must be broken up and brought under control. The representatives of the Western establishment have often spoken directly about these aims.*

*But Russia cannot be conquered by military means. Neither Kaiser, nor Sultan, nor Führer was able to break it. Then a simple and effective method was invented in the West — destroy the country from within. They rehearsed it in 1905, and brought it about in 1917. Then they had a repeat performance in the 1980s — 1990s. <...>*

*But how do you undo a country from within? Very easily — you must play on its national and religious feelings. First you undermine the foundations of the titular nationality.<sup>1</sup> Remember all those attacks on Orthodoxy, those false denunciations of the clergy for all imaginable and unimaginable sins? Do you think those were chance events? Is it by chance that the internet is full of hatred for the current administration? All this is being done to cut the ground from under our feet, wash away the foundations and replace them with 'Western values'. It is not for nothing that the Rockefellers sponsored the so-called revival of 'Slavo-Aryan' paganism and one of its ideologists, Mr Levashov.<sup>2</sup> Do away with Orthodox consciousness, divide, disorganise, and add nicotine, beer and sex.*

*The deed is done: the nominal people is swept away and disunited. Carry on. Some states are very interested in cutting away our country's southern regions, the Caucasus and the Volga littoral. But anyone with a basic understanding of geopolitics knows that it is impossible to detach the Caucasus so long as Russia has an advance post in the South. Ossetia is such an advance post, ergo, this citadel must also be destroyed from within.*

*Here they have used the same 'traditional revival' method. You study the people, you slip them the right idea, and the rest does itself. There will be people who accept the idea and with the very best intentions start to develop*

<sup>1</sup> 'Nationality' in the Soviet sense — i.e. the hegemonic ethnic group that lends its name to the republic (Russians in the Russian Federation). [Eds.].

<sup>2</sup> Nikolai Levashov (1961–2012) was one of the most prominent neo-pagans of the post-Soviet era, an occultist and faith healer. [Eds.].

*it and elaborate it. A new ideology is born. Better still if it does not take shape as a monolith, but splits into several parts — the people will be even more divided. You must agree that it is a very subtle and strong move. One can only applaud its foreign inventors* [Mamiev 2013: 137–38].

And although German Mamiev, who offered his version of the world conspiracy to the readers of a popular literary journal in North Ossetia, got a ‘symmetrical answer’ from his opponents,<sup>1</sup> his ability to create a ‘patriotic’ Orthodox narrative about Ossetia and the Ossetes is symptomatic. What he said, as my observations show, was heard in the milieu of Orthodox activists and included in their grand narrative of Orthodoxy as the natural religion of the Ossetian people, for the time being as a reasonable proposition. This is how an acquaintance of mine in Vladikavkaz expressed this thought: ‘If I were the [Western] intelligence services, and wanted to detach the Caucasus from Russia, I would finance the Ossetian pagans.’

However, if we regard the ethnic religious project as a form of new religious practice (I am not trying to suggest that we are necessarily dealing with an invention, but I do perceive in these phenomena a search for new meanings in traditional practices), then such initiatives must naturally be interpreted by some of our contemporaries according to the paradigm of dangerous new cults.

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The thought that new religious currents and practices (New Age, new paganism, etc.) are an organic and essential part of a global conspiracy

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<sup>1</sup> Written by the aforementioned Khetag Morgoev. The material was published under the heading ‘Resonance’ in the same journal, *Daryal*, and included *inter alia* the following argument:

*The author suggests that I, and at the same time to all those Ossetes who want to remain who they are and not, by some misunderstanding, add to the 75 % (of non-Hindus), follow and carry out the conspiracy against Russia with the aim of its collapse. We, it turns out, are that product, about which the author says, ‘One can only applaud its foreign inventors.’ That is, by our foolish (read: criminal) actions we are preventing the Ossetes from uniting around the banner of Orthodoxy, and this can lead to the collapse of Russia, since we are its advance post in the South. I admit that Mr Mamiev may not like the evaluations that I have expressed in my work, and they may not fit into his picture of the world, but why should I lie? Certainly not for the sake of the ratings!*

*I would like to remind the author that unlike Christians, and Orthodox Christians in particular, followers of the traditional faith have no other, more precious and sacred land than Ossetia, the Caucasus and Russia. Unlike the Orthodox we do not seek spiritual strength in hot and distant lands with their Orthodox holy places, and do not set off on pilgrimage there to fill the purses of their owners. We do not receive spiritual support — nor, on occasion, directives and valuable instructions — from there. For us Ossetia is the centre of the earth, the centre of our ambitions, the centre of our spiritual life. Just as Russia is for the Russians, and not Palestine. It is the Christians who, speaking of ‘the Holy Land’, do not mean the land of their birth.*

*Nevertheless I do not deny the existence of a ‘monolithic structure’: at the root of the principle of ambition and action lies the Biblical concept of God. The author should look for paradigms of the conspiracy against Russia amongst those who follow the ideology quite clearly set out in the ‘book of books’. Read the Bible. I will allow myself to fill out the author’s picture of his conspiracy theory by examples from the relations between the state and people of Russia and the organisation now known as the Russian Orthodox Church. The church has always profited from the calamities that have befallen the people, and found a common language and interests, be it with conquerors or simply with the swindlers of privatisation* [Morgoev 2014: 235–6].

against Christianity and all mankind took shape in the fecund milieu for such ideas of conservative American Evangelicals in the 1980s [Hexham 1992: 154–5; Pike 2001: 243, note 30]. One of the most influential books in this field was Constance Cumbeys' *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow*. In this book paganism as a whole and new paganism in particular is seen as a source of inspiration and practice for the New Age movement [Cumbeys 1983: 91, 101, 111, 146]. The mention of paganism in the context of the unmasking of the New Age conspiracy quickly became a commonplace. Another opponent of the New Age headed a paragraph in his book 'The Pagan Attack on Christianity', and writes there: 'Among the many New Age teachers who openly spout venom against Christians are those who practice witchcraft, who worship nature, the earth and the cosmos as pantheistic gods, and who, as radical feminists, are promoting a Mother Goddess religion' [Marrs 1988: 199]. It is typical that the main accent in these constructs lay (and lies) on the actual religious function of the conspirators' actions: as servants of Satan and helpers of the coming Antichrist, they must seduce Christians and prevent the conversion to Christianity of other people.

With time the conspiracy narrative about neo-pagan New Agers firmly absorbed the traditional narrative and hortative clichés of the American Fundamentalist Protestant conspiracy theory. Thus Steve Urick in his handbooks of 'cults and false religions' ends his article on what is in his opinion the pagan New Age movement with the words 'The NAM is attempting to undermine our national security and freedom by promoting a socialistic New World Order in our schools and government under the evil control of an international, totalitarian world government (a goal of the UN)' [Urick 2011: 272].

The story of the New Age conspiracy has been heard amongst conspiracy theorists in post-Soviet Russia [Senchenko 2007: 11–123], but it seems that ideas about the involvement of neo-pagans in bringing about the intentions of secretly active structures came into being relatively independently of the American tradition of unmasking the nature of new religious movements. In Russian anti-pagan polemics such plans are rarely alleged as directed against Christianity in general. On the contrary, they are seen as a game whose object is solely the destruction of Russia. In this conception the religious neo-pagan (or rather native faith) component of the project is rejected as external camouflage concealing the geopolitical objectives of those forces which are aiming to dominate the country. Moreover, the attack on Orthodoxy is usually understood as having a tactical significance (destroy Orthodoxy and Russia will fall). The Orthodox religion is understood rather as a condition for the preservation of the state and the nation than as a true means for the salvation of the soul. In the polemical repertoire of the enemies of neo-paganism in Russia political rhetoric and vocabulary take the

place of the eschatological passages from the Scriptures followed by facts from current reality that confirm the truth of Biblical prophecies traditional for Protestant religious conspiracy theory.

I do not mean to say that Orthodox thought on conspiracy theories avoids working with the traditional images of Christian eschatology. But in the polemic against the native faith they withdraw into the background, leaving room for ‘civil’ narratives about the interventions of Western intelligence services, etc. And vice versa, for American Fundamentalist Christians the achievement of the New Age conspirators’ political programme is designed to help them attain their main aim, the spiritual victory over the faithful.

The following example of a fairly early discussion of the nature of the native faith anti-Christian protest conveys the atmosphere of a polemic in which terms like ‘provocateur’ and ‘traitor’ are more appropriate than, say, the anti-cult Protestants’ favourite images of Babylon and the Mark of the Beast: ‘It is the enemies of Russia who have provided the neo-pagans with their anti-Christian ideas, there is no doubt about it. The professional provocateurs who foist anti-Christian ‘literature’ on the illiterate masses know very well who is paying them their thirty pieces of silver. The conversation with such people should be short — as it should with a traitor’ [*Zashchitim veru* 1996]. This is a quotation from an article published in the *Chernaya sotnya* [Black Hundred]<sup>1</sup> newspaper. In a publication that came out three years later in the same paper, the author poses the question, who are the Russian neo-pagans: stool pigeons of the intelligence services or ignoramuses? To judge by the following passage, the reader should incline to the former answer: ‘Having a certain credit balance of trust among the people thanks to their patriotic views, they use it to the most cunning ends, directing their activities against Orthodoxy, calling Christ, who was crucified by the Jews (God forgive us!) an agent of Jewish influence! What won’t people think up when they’re being paid for it!’ [Shtilmark 1999]. Aleksandr Verkhovskiy gives several examples of anti-pagan political conspiracy theory in his book: ‘The neo-pagans are directly or indirectly supported by foreign security services’; ‘The enemies of our country propose two most important measures: the dismemberment of the Russian Orthodox Church and support for neo-paganism, also with the aim of undermining the Church’s authority and sowing discord in the Russian national self-consciousness and the movement for the revival of Russia.’ In this connection Verkhovskiy writes that Orthodox polemicists regard the neo-pagans ‘not simply as the enemy, but as the agents of some more powerful enemies’ [Verkhovskiy 2003: 186–7].

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘Black Hundreds’ was applied to the extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic movements of the 1900s and 1910s, such as the Union of the Russian People in St Petersburg. [Eds.].



In narratives of this sort it is only the details that change, heightening the colour of the tale but not disrupting its general logic. Here is an acute formulation of this thought by Yuriy Petukhov, the author of several books on the history of the Russian people, who is, incidentally, respected by many adherents of the native faith: 'The Russian "neo-pagans", who have emerged from the same Satanic depths of the CIA <...> are openly carrying out the task that they have been set by the NATO and Vatican intelligence services of destroying the last support of Russian self-awareness, the Russian Orthodox Church' [Petukhov 2004: 119].

So German Mamiev's article does no more than reproduce a conspiracy narrative that was already in being, and attaches it as far as possible to the current realities of North Ossetia.

I would note that the narrative about sinister secret plans against Russia, the Caucasus and Ossetia may also be found amongst representatives of the Muslim communities of North Ossetia. Mufti Khadzi-Murat Gatsalov, the chairman of the Spiritual Directorate of the republic's Muslims, gave the following account of the reasons for the apprehensive attitude towards Islam in the modern world:

*Look at the directions in which Islam is being targeted. They are the strategic directions surrounding Russia. <...> [The USA] is making a lodgement for the struggle with Russia. This is high strategy, it is politics. But they've called the problem 'Islam'. And by putting out that easily understood category, they deflect attention from their real motives. Islam is something very convenient for their purposes. There are twenty million Muslims in Russia, and the Caucasus is in Russia too. 'We've fed the Caucasus for long enough' is a slogan invented in the West and used by Russian liberals who do not want a strong Russia [Gatsalov 2015: 19].<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> The idea that anti-Caucasian attitudes are not engendered or supported in those strata of society that are politically conservative and xenophobic, but inspired by the liberal opposition has also been expressed by the leader of the republic, Taymuraz Mamsurov, who, in an interview with *Kommersant*, expressed himself quite clearly in this respect, preferring to sympathise with the 'patriots':

***At the high point of the campaign that 'We've fed the Caucasus for long enough' you reacted sharply in an interview. Why?***

*This rhetoric was aggressive, it got on our nerves. And then we took a good look at those people and understood whom we were dealing with. Here in the Caucasus all the leaders of the Caucasian republics decided that it was a very good thing that these persons were criticising us. If they were singing our praises, we'd never wash it off. Because these are people who hate their own country. They have no greater enemy than Russia. They are sickened by the fact that Russia is getting stronger. <...> It's time for the people who feed the Caucasus to shut up, but now they've turned their attention to the Crimea. Now they're explaining to us that we don't need the Crimea, that it will be another drain on our resources. <...> So it is the same people who are talking about the Caucasus and the Crimea. I could understand it if they worked in the sweat of their brow and had the right to ask where their taxes were going. But some of them are sitting behind their computers and governing the country. Some of them are concerned citizens, or something else. I've never seen sweat on the brows of the people 'who feed the Caucasus' who are yelling on Bolotnaya Square, or coal dust, or calluses on their hands, so I don't know whom they do feed. I'm not even sure they're capable of feeding their own families.*

Similar in tone were the mufti's comments on the problem of so-called dual loyalties, that is the possibility of a conflict-free combination of Islamic and ethnic (in this case Ossetian) identities:

*This question is being particularly actively ventilated in Ossetia. <...> These doubts and fears and the present hostile attitude to Islam are due solely to outside influence and attempts at destabilisation. Attempts to inculcate distrust towards Muslims and their religion [Gatsalov 2015: 22].*

So the Christians and the traditionalists are not so much reproducing each other's conspiracy theories and changing their direction as following a more general ideological and rhetorical trend.

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In a situation where the logic of conspiracy theory is widespread in the interpretation of social reality, it is not only the existing narratives about the destructive forces of darkness that are reproduced. In my opinion, the understanding of reality as a secret struggle between us and them, absorbed in Soviet times and replicated many times in popular culture (in *The Night Watch* and *The Day Watch*, for example) provides a stimulus for the creation of new narratives. Their characteristic feature is the construction of a genealogy of the secret work of the forces of good, which have been concealed for centuries from evil conspirators in order to convey to new generations essential information needed for the survival of the nation and humanity as a whole. Daurbek Makeev sees this 'light' dynasty as: the ancient Aryans (the As) — the magi of the New Testament (Iranian Zoroastrians; true — not Pauline — Christians also find their place here in the ranks of the forces of light) — the Freemasons! [sic!] — modern Ossetes resisting globalisation. Some of the supporters of this concept include in the chain the famous esoteric practitioners of the past, modern teachers of oriental wisdom and, among others, Stalin. Some (such as the restorer and artist Slaviy Dzhanayev) speak of the

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***Wait a minute, it wasn't the people on Bolotnaya Square that shouted 'We've fed the Caucasus for long enough.' That was the radical nationalist groups at Chistye Prudy and Lyublino. And they, quite the reverse, support the annexation of the Crimea.***

*I don't care what sort of patriots they are, what colours they wear. I can see what is good for the country and what is bad for it. The wind will blow the chaff away, and leave the grain. If these people have understood that the Crimea is Russian land, then they're not such fools [Mamsurov 2014: 14].*

<sup>1</sup> 'The Masons, recognising the unspiritual nature of Pauline Christianity, called themselves "spiritual Christians". This fact speaks of the religious character of the Masons' ideology. Who are the Masons? Where did they get their ideas from? <...> From the extant literature we can discover that the Masonic movement (not to be confused with Yiddish Masonry) was born in Anglo-Saxon aristocratic circles, at the height of the dawn of "the Christian darkness of the Middle Ages". This ideology came into being within the framework of the transmission of the mysteries of the ancestors. It is interesting to remember that the Anglo-Saxon aristocratic and royal dynasties trace their ancestry back to the As. Nowadays it is reliably known that King Arthur and the knights of the round table were of Sarmatian descent' [Makeev 2007: 179–80].

first secret society or order in the world, which in the tenth to seventh centuries B.C. was transformed into ‘the elite, spiritual-ideological, governing, Indo-European organisation’ of the epic Narts, in order to protect over the centuries the Iron-Alan people, inhabiting the mountains of the Caucasus, from external ideological (primarily Christian) influence [Dzhanayty 2007: 104, 145].

From this point of view the present moment in the secret struggle between the two sides has only the external appearance of specific political events, a discussion between intellectuals or a dispute between religions. In fact this conflict is a real battle on a cosmic scale. In Makeev’s version it is a struggle between the spirits of good, the As, and the spirits of evil, the Deva, who are supported by Deva-worshippers, the Christians and other people alien to true Aryan spirituality. This is a highly dramatic, even eschatological struggle. In this sense the remarks of one of the most prominent and eccentric Ossetian traditionalists, Lyudmila Magkeeva, about the true meaning of the events at Beslan in September 2004 are highly characteristic: ‘Beslan is a tragedy on a planetary scale, like the killing of Christ in its time <...> It may be that the future Saviour had been born in Ossetia, in Beslan, amongst those children. And the forces of darkness in heaven combined with their representatives on earth and by their hands they killed the representatives of the Race of the Future on earth’ [Magkeeva 2007].

This conflict is presented no less dramatically, though in a somewhat different key, in the preface to a history of the ancient past of the Alans: ‘The professional researchers into history are in their own way emissaries of Chronos and his mystical servants. Often they are black, and befog the eyes of Chronos with clouds of lies and hatred, and then the deity in his wrath opens his bottomless maw, glittering with the stars of eternity, and swallows up national time — the people declines in intellect and in number, and swiftly perishes. But Chronos’s servants may also be bright, and open up before Chronos the shining *rukhs* [‘light’ in Ossetian. — S.S.], carefully turning the titan’s head towards the bright side of the horizon, shining with azure light. And then Chronos closes his dreadful jaws and, pacified, sinks for ages into his eternal thoughts: the people retains its historical time, the time in which its national fate is accomplished’ [Torchinov 2009: 8–9]<sup>1</sup>.

But however the battle is joined, optimistic conspiracy theorists maintain that it will end in the victory of ‘the sons of light’. For ‘the power of the deva-worshippers is founded on ignorance,’ and ‘now, with the appearance of the internet, <...> there is very little chance

<sup>1</sup> On the next page of this preface the bright servants of Chronos are given an even more colourful title — ‘the white priests of historical time’.

that the deva tendencies will “crush” the true (As) doctrine.’ [Makeev 2007: 182].

Thus in conditions where everyone is tacitly aware of the mechanisms for the attainment of world domination, conspiracy narratives describing (or rather creating) the genealogy of the mysterious forces standing on the side of good, and capable of dealing with the agents of the conspiracy to destroy the country and society, are more visible and more than ever in demand. This vector of conspiracy invention complicates the established axiological and narrative schemes, and the traditionalist mistrust of everything foreign is replaced by a hope of obtaining new allies and resources for the struggle against globalism.

In this respect the following discussion is a good example, anticipating as it does a concrete initiative towards assuring the unity of the Ossetian people, currently being torn apart by religious contradictions [Ardigon 2014]. The argumentation begins by noting obvious threats (which therefore need no confirmation): ‘The black clouds of the New World Order continue to lower over the heads of humanity. The hurricane of liberal globalisation blows now from one quarter, now from the next.’ It is evident that liberal globalisation is an unqualified evil. But it is opposed not only by the people’s ability to defend its ethnic individuality, but by other ‘global’ tendencies: ‘If belonging to different religions prevents us from coming together, the best way out for us may be to return to our roots, to our traditional faith. We should also be pushed towards this by the circumstance that a tendency towards the integration and universalisation of world religions is becoming every more prominent in the modern world. There is a search for the fundamental principles of religious consciousness, on which it should be possible to build a single religion. But for this it is inevitably necessary to return to the universal first principle of all religions.’ It is quite curious that the author goes on to cite Confucius as an authority (‘Why should we not take as our guide to action Confucius’s statement that the world is ruled by Signs and Symbols, and not by word and law?’), which of course may be an expression of the idea that there is an alternative to Western ‘wisdom’ (civilisation) in the form of Eastern philosophy, but it is nevertheless rather a long way from the field of Indo-Iranian cultural tradition.

It is even more interesting that the project of creating a symbol of national unity which the author of this article proposes (he suggests raising an artificial barrow in the middle of Ossetia and setting up on it an Ossete ritual table, a *fying*, ‘of large dimensions and made of marble or granite’) supposes that this *fying* will acquire ‘international status’ and become ‘a tourist attraction’. The new monument would be a sign of the Ossetes’ presence in the global world, to which, rather than to itself, the people would demonstrate its readiness to resist ‘the New World Order’.

In concluding this discussion, I would like to stress that in the post-Soviet context there are other types of informational environments, which have developed their own hermeneutic skills that determine the contours of conspiracy narratives. Thus the mental habit of looking for signs of the spiritual world in the material world, which is typical of a large number of conservative Christians, both Orthodox [Akhmetova 2010: 176–214] and, for example, Pentecostal [Panchenko 2015], makes them examine the world about them with anxiety. An experienced eye will easily find in it material for building an eschatological conspiracy theory in which there is no place for hope in a secret order of sages, but there is room for an anxious inner readiness for the final trial which awaits Christians in the last days. And in this, of course, they are not much different from other apocalyptically inclined movements and groups, such as American Fundamentalist Protestants.

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