



THE EFFECT OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES ON THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE OLD BELIEVERS OF THE YENISEI

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Abstract: This paper examines religious practices and their connection to the social structure of Old Believers who live in the Republic of Tuva and the South of the Krasnoyarsk Krai (the Yenisei River-basin area). The author considers religious practices through the metaphor of ‘assemblage’, that is, a practice that produces the Old Believers’ communities as it is preconditioned by the specific attitude of Old Believers to Orthodox ritualism. This approach demonstrates that minute changes of the context result in a transformation of religious practices and, in turn, the social structure of the group. In particular, the paper discusses issues that are especially important to Yenisei Old Believers, such as the refusal to receive pension payments and blessing groceries with so-called ‘minor water’. Due to a close proximity to local towns and developed infrastructure, Southern Krasnoyarsk communities of Old Believers cannot maintain a fully sustainable and autonomous housekeeping; the opposite is true in Tuva. Thus, the former stay loyal to members of the community who receive pensions. They also actively practice the blessing of groceries, contrary to the Tuvan communities. Though they appeared in circumstances set beyond the control of Old Believers, variations in practices has led to ongoing debates and a reciprocal alienation of both territorial groups. The given examples show that the impact of the local economy ‘produces’ religious practices, which — in turn — reassemble the social groups around them.

Keywords: Old Believers, Chasovennye Old Believers, religious practices, transfer of ritual, technology of producing the community.

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The Effect of Religious Practices on the Social Structure of the Old Believers of the Yenisei¹

This paper examines religious practices and their connection to the social structure of Old Believers who live in the Republic of Tuva and the South of the Krasnoyarsk Krai (the Yenisei River-basin area). The author considers religious practices through the metaphor of 'assemblage', that is, a practice that produces the Old Believers' communities as it is preconditioned by the specific attitude of Old Believers to Orthodox ritualism. This approach demonstrates that minute changes of the context result in a transformation of religious practices and, in turn, the social structure of the group. In particular, the paper discusses issues that are especially important to Yenisei Old Believers, such as the refusal to receive pension payments and blessing groceries with so-called 'minor water'. Due to a close proximity to local towns and developed infrastructure, Southern Krasnoyarsk communities of Old Believers cannot maintain a fully sustainable and autonomous housekeeping; the opposite is true in Tuva. Thus, the former stay loyal to members of the community who receive pensions. They also actively practice the blessing of groceries, contrary to the Tuvan communities. Though they appeared in circumstances set beyond the control of Old Believers, variations in practices has led to ongoing debates and a reciprocal alienation of both territorial groups. The given examples show that the impact of the local economy 'produces' religious practices, which — in turn — reassemble the social groups around them.

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Introduction

The Old Believers of the Yenisei only occasionally call themselves by the name *Chasovenyye*, which is usual in academic circles. Most often they refer to themselves as *khristiyane*² 'Christians', less frequently as *bespopovtsy* 'priestless', *starobryadtsy* 'Old Ritualists' or *staroveryye* 'Old Believers'. This terminological confusion, however, should not worry us: if we listen carefully to the Christians' accounts of their ties of kinship, friendship and religion, any doubts that they are referring to one and the same group are dissipated. The idiosyncratic mental map of the Christians of the Yenisei includes two basic points.³ These are the Lower Yenisei, or, as the Old Believers themselves call it, 'the North' (Krasnoyarsk Krai), and the Upper Yenisei (Tuva). These two locations are separated by the Sayan Mountains, so that travel

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¹ The Old Believers is the generic term for a group of Orthodox denominations that split with the Moscow Patriarchate in the seventeenth century, including both 'priested' denominations with a church hierarchy (priests and bishops), and 'priestless' groups where rituals are carried out by the laity. Members of these groups do not consider themselves members of 'sects' or 'schismatics', instead regarding mainstream Orthodox believers as heretics [Eds.].

² This is the dialect term, rather than the standard *khristiane* [Eds.].

³ The territory where Old Believers of the Chasovenyye denomination live is much wider and includes the Ural, the Altay, Kemerovo Oblast, Khakassia, Irkutsk Oblast, the Far East, Brazil, Argentina, the USA and Canada.

between them is called simply ‘coming from over the Sayans’ or ‘going over the Sayans’. Several large and fairly solid communities of Chasovennye are concentrated in ‘the North’, especially in the south of the Krasnoyarsk Krai and a little further downriver, around Podkamennaya Tunguska. This is also where the famous Dubches Hermitages are situated. There was once also an Old Believer monastery at Burundat (Kuraginsky District, Krasnoyarsk Krai), but it disappeared in Soviet times.¹ The upper reaches comprise the Kerzhak² region in Tuva, in the Little Yenisei Basin (in Tuvan Kaa-Khem). At present, with rare exceptions, only Old Believers or their descendants dwell in the upper villages. Until recently they had their own hermitages there as well. It was here, in Father Palladiy’s scriptorium, that N. N. Pokrovskiy’s expedition made its extremely valuable manuscript discoveries [Pokrovskiy 2005: 10–39]. A few years ago the few remaining nuns, according to my informants, asked to be taken to Dubches, because there were no more ‘fathers’, i.e. male monks who could hear confessions and conduct the occasional offices, left in Tuva. There are also, in the region of Bii-Khem, the Great Yenisei, between Kyzyl, the capital of the republic, and the upper reaches of the river, several settlements founded at the beginning of the twentieth century by Old Believers who had moved from other parts of the region. I conducted fieldwork in the settlements of the Yenisei Chasovennye in August 2017 and from January to April 2018. The resulting material formed the basis for this article.

The Chasovennye denomination is an interesting example of the evolution of Old Believer practices from priested to priestless. N. N. Pokrovskiy saw a social conflict in this shift. Though originally they were part of the priested tendency within the Old Belief, over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Chasovennye denomination took on the practices of the priestless, which was a consequence of the opposition between ‘the peasant communities in the Trans-Urals <...> which took a radical position both against the civil power and against the established church and its priests’ and ‘the Beglopopovtsy hermitages, which were connected with the industrial elite and which took a more moderate attitude’ [Pokrovskiy, Zolnikova 2002: 18]. As applied to the Chasovennye denomination today, in which there is no such profound stratification on the basis of property, this model does not work so well, since it does not allow any other explanation of the conflict than the activity of community leaders in pursuit of their own interests (at least in the promotion

¹ The events of the novel *Black Poplar* by Aleksey Cherkasov and Polina Moskvitina take place in this area.

² *Kerzhak* is one of the commonest religious designations by which outsiders in Siberia call the Old Believers. The origin of the word is no doubt connected with the River Kerzhenets in the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast.

of their own theological ideas). In accordance with the concept of the transfer of ritual, changes in ritual practice may take place as a result of the slightest transformations of context [Langer et al. 2006]. Therefore, researchers into the Chasovennye denomination have paid attention in particular to how its practices have affected the ways in which its communities have provided for themselves (see, for example: [Lyubimova 2017]). However, I should like to go further and demonstrate that religious practice may by itself determine the structure of the community.

By religious practices I mean, for the most part, rituals (such as baptism, communion, marriage, the funeral service, and so on), but also the so-called micropractices which are mostly concerned with the preservation of individual ritual purity. Among the latter, besides the well-known keeping of two sets of eating and drinking vessels, one for Old Believers and one for people from the outside world, are included the rejection of pensions and other benefits paid by the state, and also of certain registration documents, such as tax identification numbers, national insurance numbers, and suchlike. In the same category of micropractices should be included the blessing of foodstuffs and the use of water blessed at the feasts of the Epiphany and the Procession of the Cross.¹ I should remark that the rites of the Chasovennye denomination have not been adequately described in the scholarly literature from the point of view of social anthropology. Thus, the earliest authors, N. A. Putilov [Putilov 1885: 11–2], A. V. Adrianov [Adrianov 1904: 32–3], F. Ya. Kon [Kon 1914: 47–55] and others,² mention the Chasovennye Old Believers in connection with the settlement of the region, but if they write about their religious practices at all, they say little of substance. In Soviet times, this subject was mainly the province of works primarily intended to denounce Old Believer ‘obscurantism’ (see: [Maslov 1933; Emelyanov 1984]), though these do also contain some ethnographical information. The situation changed in the last decades of the USSR’s existence, after the archaeological expeditions to Tuva and other regions of southern Siberia by N. N. Pokrovskiy and N. D. Zolnikova, and others, whose works [Pokrovskiy 1974; 1998; *Dukhovnaya literatura...* 1999; Pokrovskiy 2000; Pokrovskiy, Zolnikova 2002 and others], shed light on the religious practices of the Chasovennye Old Believers. I should also mention in particular one of Pokrovskiy’s articles, in which he traced which changes in the performance of the occasional offices had been accepted at the councils of this denomination [Pokrovskiy 2000].³ A few years ago a collection of articles on the history and folklore

¹ These practices are discussed below.

² The history of the question is set out in greater detail in [Storozhenko 2015].

³ The article is reprinted in [Pokrovskiy, Zolnikova 2002: 59–104].

of the Chasovennye of Tuva was published [Tatarintseva, Storozhenko 2015]. Only in two works have I found an optimally detailed description of the religious practices of the Chasovennye: those by A. B. Ostrovskiy [Ostrovskiy 2011: 211–28], and S. A. Beloborodov in collaboration with Yu. V. Borovik [Beloborodov, Borovik 2017: 218–31]. Their data were collected in the Ural, but on the whole, the findings are very similar to those for Siberia. But while the descriptions of practices given in the works listed above contain important ethnographic details, and also take the peculiarities of Old Believer theology into account, they do not detail the dependence of the rites on the way of life, nor their influence on the structure of the community.

Assembling the community in Christian ritual

When I talked with Old Believers about their practices, I could not help noticing that our conversations often turned upon seemingly insignificant trivia. At times it even seemed as if the essence of religious convictions consisted in the precise observance of all the details of the rite. For example, if we spoke about other Old Believer denominations, then, no matter whether my interlocutors knew who the Belaya Krinitsa¹, Pomortsy², Stranniki³ or other people were, our conversation would follow the same plan: we would begin to discuss the religious practices and attributes of these denominations. Thus, the Chasovennye told me that they had ‘the same prayer’ as the Pomortsy, but they (in their opinion) did not believe in the Holy Spirit, because no dove was depicted on their icons. Besides, they baptised ‘without turning’.⁴ This could all be explained as the so-called ‘faith in rituals’, as it was described in the popular scholarly literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, Archpriest P. S. Smirnov, in his work on the history of the Old Believers, when listing the characteristics of the movement, noted inter alia the following: ‘The schism is a literalist, ritualistic tendency within religious life, which does not go beyond teaching about a certain kind of liturgical books and a particular set of rituals’ [Smirnov 1895: 1]. It is no accident that the very name ‘Old Ritualists’ is sometimes understood as a hint at the blind adherence to ritual, obscurantism and backwardness of Old Orthodox

¹ The Belaya Krinitsa, or Belokrinitskoe, denomination is one of the most numerous priested factions in contemporary Old Belief. It appeared relatively recently, in the mid-nineteenth century, when the first Old Believer hierarchies were founded in Belaya Krinitsa (contemporary Ukraine). Many former Chasovennye Old Believers have joined it since then.

² The Pomortsy denomination is one of the earliest in Russian Old Belief, having appeared in the late seventeenth century. It represents a priestless branch of the Old Belief.

³ The Stranniki are another priestless denomination that was established in the late seventeenth century.

⁴ I shall explain what this means below.

Christians. In contrast to this characterisation of the Old Belief stands a discursive convention at the far end of the spectrum: the exaltation of the merits of the Old Believers as the preservers of ‘the ancient piety’ and ‘genuine Russian antiquity’. But another way of treating the Old Believers’ precision in following the ritual side of faith is possible. From their own point of view, religious practices directly reflect Orthodox dogma, and therefore they cannot change. Moreover, certain everyday practices and things which at first sight have nothing to do with religion acquire a colouring that is symbolically significant for the profession of Orthodoxy. Therefore, refusing a pension is just as much a religious practice for the Chasovennye as, say, baptism.

Religious practices, at least as far as research into the Old Belief is concerned, are most often regarded as the result of lengthy discussions within particular denominations or in polemics between groups. However, it is not so much that the Old Believers tried to ‘bring’ their practice into line with Orthodox dogma as that the context in which this practice had to exist after the Schism was different from previous times. The absence of priests, of the sacraments, and of most of the attributes of liturgical activity could not but affect its transformation. Yet from the Old Believer point of view, practice did not change. They had only to ‘find’ suitable models in the sacred texts, that is, they also took into account what they considered the objective obstacles to the performance of the rites¹ in the proper form prescribed by Orthodox tradition which, therefore, excused its incomplete correspondence to practice before the Schism. Religious polemic reveals different points of view about how exactly the text and the current context are connected; at the same time, practice was not understood to ‘develop’, but conceived as ready-made, displaying its ‘agency’, i.e. capacity to create confessional communities around itself.

In the present article, taking the Chasovennye of the Yenisei as an example, I aim to show how exactly religious practices, the context of their existence and the social structure of the community are interconnected. During fieldwork in Old Believer communities I noticed that the structure of the community might not be visible in everyday life, but was very clearly displayed in religious practices (and in the present case it does not matter whether the rite was observed directly or whether we are dealing with an oral description of it). Such practices produce not only the community itself, but its inner structure, providing a basis for inclusion or exclusion, social distance and the character of mutual internal relationships; they bring together the confessional community and help to identify its limits (the community may be regarded as everyone who adheres

¹ In the present work ‘rite’, ‘ritual’ and ‘religious practice’ are synonymous.

to particular practices and is included in performing the ritual at the present moment). The use of the production metaphor is not accidental here, because in a certain sense religious practice is a technology for assembling the community.

Apart from everything else, the religious practices of which I spoke above decide the fundamental question of whether an individual is to be included in the confessional group or excluded from it. For example, before conducting the funeral service for a dead person, the group to which (s)he belonged must determine how exactly (s)he died and whether there is any impediment to his / her funeral. Similar questions arise before the solemnisation of matrimony. In both cases it is important how a person was baptised. Therefore, it is practice that determines the structure of the community. In comparing the rite to technology, I have in mind the principles of the organisation of a process which resembles more the preparation of food or the assembling of a machine than the workings of a mechanism. Religious practice is regulated by definite rules, it requires specialists of various levels, an established network of social contacts and particular material objects. The key concept here is assembly. For a ritual to be performed, it is equally important for the community to be assembled in the prayer house and for all the necessary apparatus to be provided. Thus, the metaphor of technology may be applied quite successfully to the concept of cultural transfer, since, as researchers into technology note, the latter may experience difficulties when transferred from one context to another even for the most insignificant reasons: boilers will not heat up because the local wood does not suit them, beetles spoil the sawdust that the kitchen stove burns, and lights have plugs that do not match the sockets in the houses of consumers on a different continent [De Laet, Mol 2000: 226].

If the ritual is not properly carried out — if, say, some mistakes were made during a baptism — then it is regarded as void, and because of this the person may not be included in the community. The responsibility for incorrect ritual practice is borne by the person who performed the ritual (most often the head of the community).

And from the Christians of Tyumen, from the whole country, lifting of the three-year penance on the occasion of union [with the rest of the Chasovennye denomination]: the mistaken reception in the house of prayer by Daniil Ivanov Kabykin, preceptor¹ of the village of Shchelkonogova, of a priest of the Edinovertsy,² for which the entire

¹ In the case of the priestless Chasovennye, all rituals and services are performed by preceptors, also known as elders, i.e. elected members of communities, who yet remain in the status of laity.

² The Edinovertsy (often translated 'Coreligionists') is the name for Old Believer denominations that were reconciled with mainstream Orthodoxy beginning in the late eighteenth century. Needless to say, this has made them unpopular with other Old Believer denominations [Eds.].

country of Tyumen, on behalf of such a zealous teacher and leader, accepted a three-year penance for such a mistake, so as to smooth over this shameful circumstance in the face of the whole Christian community [Dukhovnaya literatura... 1999: 338].

The correctness of the assembly is controlled by instructions. The Old Believer Book of Needs¹ fulfils this function. To illustrate this, I shall cite fragments describing the order of actions during baptism, from a Book of Needs, part of the text of which we were allowed to copy in a village on the Upper Yenisei:

The order for holy baptism for the human race; conducted by a layman, in case of need, there being no priest. Water is to be brought from the spring, and poured into the font, and four candles lit, and placed about it <...> Then he² turns the person being baptised to face west, holding his hands downwards, and he asks the person baptised, 'N., dost thou renounce Satan?' <...> Then he takes the censer and censens the images that are there, and censens around the font in the form of a cross, and then he makes the sign of the cross with the candles over the water, three times, and plunges them in. Then he places his sleeves on his hands, that is, he makes a cloth. Then he baptises the person who has come, saying 'The servant of God N. is baptised in the name of the Father,' and he immerses him in the water once, facing east, and raises him up saying, 'Amen.' Then he immerses him for a second time and says 'and of the Son, Amen.' And again he immerses him for a third time, saying, 'and of the Holy Ghost, now and for ever and unto ages of ages, Amen.' And each time he speaks he brings him down into the font, immersing him in the water, and raises him up, holding him so that he faces him. And if it is an infant that is baptised, he immerses him in the font carefully holding his mouth with his hand, to prevent water from getting into it, because an infant is weak.

The technological aspect of baptism may be traced in the list of apparatus, and in the regulated sequence of actions, and in the ability to see practice in the text. For example, it says that the person being baptised is immersed 'facing east', and that he is lifted out 'holding him so that he faces him'. However, the Chasovennye also believe that the person carrying out the baptism should stand facing east as well, because otherwise (s)he turns his / her back on the icons. Therefore, when (s)he lifts the infant out of the water, (s)he quickly turns the infant to face himself / herself, and then back to face the icons as (s)he immerses him / her again. Moreover the infant must

¹ The Book of Needs (Potrebnik) is a manual of prayers, sacraments, and minor rituals such as the blessing of a dwelling, etc. commonly used in Eastern Orthodoxy.

² Although baptism could be conducted by both men and women, non-inclusive pronouns have been preserved here, since they remain a feature of Eastern Christian liturgical and service books, as (until recently) in the West.

only be turned towards the right, because 'if he is turned to the left, it is towards the devil' (Field notes, Tuva, 20 January 2018).¹ Like any other assembly instructions, the text of the Book of Needs requires an understanding of how the description of the practice is to be translated into actual action, and also of particular techniques, such as the turning of infants.

The slightest elements of the ritual are objects of reflection for the community. One occasion for this may be ritual similarity to some other Old Believer tradition. In Siberia the Chasovennye often found that their neighbours were Pomortsy, which inevitably led to a discursive rejection of 'alien' elements of religious practice.

The Order for those who come from heresy: among certain preceptors in the renunciations these words were found: 'I curse those who perform holy baptism in a corrupt manner, even though it is in the name of the Father and calling upon the Holy Trinity,' and they curse this. But the council that was in Terenkul decreed that these words should be left out, because they came in from the Pomortsy through carelessness [Dukhovnaya literatura... 1999: 356].

One of the Chasovennye whom I spoke to explained to me the 'error' made by the Pomortsy during baptism: instead of standing facing the icons they turn their backs on them.² This reversed bodily symbolism, in the opinion of the Chasovennye, nullifies all the grace of the sacrament. They call everyone baptised with their backs to the icons 'westerners'. In other words, even the slightest discrepancy in the performance of the rite can lead to quarrels between denominations and social separations. And, by contrast, communities with identical practices unite, or ought to do so. Evagriy, a monk of the Chasovennye denomination,³ whose words were recorded and published by N. S. Murashova, expressed his surprise at the absence of such unification thus: 'I don't understand why the Titovane don't unite with the Pomortsy. They both baptise without turning, facing west' [Murashova 2003: 215].

The infrastructure and socioeconomic provision for religious practices

The successful functioning of any technology requires a certain infrastructure (providing the possibility, for example, of easily replacing broken parts with new ones). Technology should also be

¹ Here and below the author's field materials will be quoted with an indication of the region studied and the date of the conversation.

² The techniques of baptism of the Pomortsy do indeed differ from what the Chasovennye consider them to be. Most often the preceptors of the Pomortsy stand facing east.

³ By the time N. S. Murashova's material was published, Evagriy had changed his allegiance to the Belaya Krinitsa denomination.

supported by certain social connections and economic relations. The same may be said of rituals. Discussion of religious practices is reflected in the council (*sobor*)¹ resolutions of the Chasovennye denomination examined by N. N. Pokrovskiy [Pokrovskiy 2000: 129–37], who noted that because of its priestless situation this denomination ‘had had to review a great deal in liturgical practice and the performance of rituals, excluding, modifying or replacing all those acts and prayers that only the priest could perform’ [Ibid.: 130]. Citing the council resolutions, Pokrovskiy noted that a canon was modified if it was impossible to fulfil some of its requirements. Thus, the Council of Bikin of 1926 gave permission for a child to be christened by its father, mother, or grandmother, if there was no other possibility [*Dukhovnaya literatura...* 1999: 379]. The earlier Council of Biysk (1902) had proclaimed that ‘an infant may not be baptised by its mother or grandmother’ [Ibid.: 359]. I too have had occasion to hear stories about how a child was christened not by the preceptor or anyone who had been blessed for that purpose, but by its parents. The main thing was that the child baptised should have been immersed, head and all, three times, and turned towards the right, and that the words ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost’ should have been pronounced separately with each immersion (‘A new-born child in danger of death may be immersed by anybody, with the proper prayers and turnings’) (Field notes, Tuva, 20 January 2018). This is usually done if there is a likelihood that the child will soon die, or sometimes if the preceptor lives a very long way away. Something similar takes place with the solemnisation of matrimony: there is an order of service for this, but sometimes it is replaced by a parental blessing. (For understandable reasons, such marriages were particularly common in Soviet times.) If we return to the metaphor of ritual as technology, it follows from the discussion above that this technology was developed to be as flexible as possible, allowing the substitution of some elements for others if anything was not available. However, what are the limits of this flexibility? It is not enough to reach a particular opinion and compose the relevant offices. Each community is now confronted very acutely with the question of conformity with this canon, which requires the availability of a certain infrastructure. I shall list below only the most significant conditions for this.

The spiritual life of the Old Orthodox communities is made up of the services and festivals of the calendar, and also diverse rituals:

¹ The word *sobor* may be understood in three ways. Firstly, as a house of prayer. Secondly, as the assembly of faithful Christians, or the brotherhood. Thirdly, as a special meeting of people with authority in theological questions, which is intended to resolve questions of significance for the spiritual life of the denomination. The resolutions of a council are a written document that reflects the decisions of such a council.

baptism, matrimony, communion (with holy water), and confession. Without Books of Needs, and without people who know how to use them properly, there can be no rituals. Incidentally, it is not only a person's knowledge that matters, but also his / her biography: (s)he must have been baptised according to the rules of the Chasovennye denomination, properly married,¹ be a member of the brotherhood and have the preceptor's blessing either to perform particular rites, or to undertake any of the activities performed by the preceptor himself / herself. If there is not such person in the neighbourhood, the community finds itself in a somewhat ambiguous position. In their domestic prayers, the Chasovennye Old Believers are content to use the Pomorye calendar, which sets out the order of readings and actions simply and in detail. But for communal worship they need 'real' books: the Old Believers use the 'Eye of the Church' (a Typicon), the Menaia (collections of saints' lives), and other liturgical books.² It is necessary to approach the books used for the services with suspicion and only use reliable editions (or, better still, the same old books as they have previously prayed from). Icons should be dealt with in the same way. People should bring their own candles to church, but unadulterated ones, made from pure beeswax. This means that every believer should know a reliable beekeeper, preferably of the same religion, who can provide the proper raw material (it is quite easy to make candles at home). Candles must not be lit with ordinary matches: the 'living' fire of the stove must be used. Therefore divine worship cannot do without a house with a Russian stove in which such fire is maintained.³ Christians must have suitable clothes for prayer — for men a Russian shirt and belt or a kaftan and for women a sarafan, a long skirt, a headscarf, etc. — handmade, even if out of factory-produced material. This means that this kind of women's work is in particular demand in the communities. The daily concern about the crockery (cups for the believers and for outsiders must not be mixed up or washed in the same water) also falls to the women. This background micropractice relates most directly to the confession of faith and to the maintenance of tradition, apparently without even being noticed by the people who keep it up. Everyone must know how to make prayer ropes (*lestovki*)⁴ out of leather or black cloth for everyday

¹ Since the Chasovennye have no priests, they have no *venchanie* 'solemnisation of matrimony' as such, so the rite is known as *brakosochetanie* 'joining in marriage' or *brachenie* 'marrying', the first variant in written texts, the latter only in the spoken language.

² I mention in the first place those books which my interlocutors named in conversations about the organisation of services. This does not of course mean that the Old Believers do not use other Orthodox books.

³ One community uses matches 'without writing', that is, without inscriptions or bar codes on the boxes.

⁴ A *lestovka* or prayer rope is a traditional type of rosary that until the seventeenth century was widely used in Russia generally, and is occasionally still used in mainstream Orthodoxy as well as by Old Believers: it comprises links that resemble 'steps' (rather than the beads in the familiar type of Roman

use, and white ones for the commemoration of the dead. Pectoral crosses may be ordered from the Pomorye shop in Moscow (as may calendars and small icons for use at home), but it is better if they are cast within the community, because a craftsman of ‘their own’ will use a mould with all the necessary details. The Chasovennye of the Yenisei have such a workshop in ‘the North’, that is, on the Lower Yenisei. Finally, religious practice is impossible without the community of faithful Christians, those who do not eat with the world, do not receive pensions and who follow all the other commandments. On the other hand, worldly Old Believers also play an important role in the community: the economic prosperity of Christian families often depends on them.

From the examples listed above it follows that the religious practices of the Chasovennye depend quite seriously both on the communities’ way of life, and on the infrastructure within which liturgical objects, materials, knowledge and people may circulate. Ritual, in a certain sense, goes beyond the limits of practices as such and absorbs this infrastructure. Therefore, for a rite to take place in the proper form, corresponding to what is prescribed in the books and to what people have come to believe, it must be ‘assembled’ from many parts.

The pension question

The Chasovennye of the Yenisei are divided not only by geographical borders, but also by differences in their religious concepts and practices. Each community has a standard structure for the Chasovennye: it is divided into those who belong to the brotherhood and the worldly. The worldly may have been baptised and married in the Old Believer manner, but because they have broken some of the rules in force in the community (if, for example, they eat with people who are not Old Believers at work, if they smoke or shave) they are not allowed to pray together with those who do observe the rules. To be precise, they may attend the services at the house of prayer, but they may not bow down or cross themselves. Nor are they allowed to eat from the same vessels as the brotherhood uses. But whereas, within the confines of a single community, the inner boundaries are more or less clear, the situation is extremely complex when it comes to relations between different communities: someone who is a member of the brotherhood in one place may be regarded as worldly in another. It is all a matter of differences in the interpretation of the religious rules, and the pension question has become a particular stumbling block for the Chasovennye of the Yenisei.

Catholic or modern Orthodox rosary), and at the end, rather than a cross, it has *lopastki*, triangular pieces of cloth or leather that symbolise the Trinity (with two or more stitched together so that they resemble a schematised Christmas tree) [Eds.].

The Old Believers of the Little Yenisei for the most part believe that receiving a pension is sinful. ‘The North’, however, is more tolerant of its pensioners. There, they hold the conviction that a person has earned his / her pension, and therefore there is nothing sinful in receiving it. Yet in fact, the division between the Upper Reaches and ‘the North’ is fairly fluid. Each community resolves the pension question in its own way, and the limit of what is acceptable may vary, within certain bounds.

Thus, the Chasovennye of the Upper Yenisei are firmly convinced that receiving a pension is a grave sin. Therefore they do not pray together with ‘pensioners’. A Christian must provide for himself / herself, and if (s)he is unable to work, his / her children must help him / her. One of my informants told me: ‘My father had five sons. We all helped him. And now people bring the old women firewood, chop it for them and do everything they need. But if she gets a pension she has to buy the same firewood for money’ (Field notes, 13 August 2017). The result is that observing strict rules must be maintained by a social structure in which children help their parents. However, there are exceptions to the rule. In one of the upper villages the disabled are allowed to remain in the brotherhood and receive a pension on the pretext that they would not be able to live without it. Another village, Sizim, though it is regarded as ‘one of ours’, does not reject pensioners: they may pray together with everyone else. However, the Sizim community is the smallest of the upper communities, and only a small number of the inhabitants of the village come to the communal prayers. In other villages there are ‘dissidents’ who receive their pension despite disapproval on the part of the rest of the brotherhood. Thus, one of my informants explained that he had agreed to the payments after he had been seriously injured and as a result could no longer work and provide for himself. Ilya Kuzmich¹ considers that there is no rule that forbids receiving a pension, and that appeals to oral tradition (‘the idea, that formerly the old people kept themselves from it’) look unconvincing. As he sees it, on the Upper Yenisei they forbid pensions, but allow the receipt of various benefits connected with childbirth. He regards this as a great sin, referring to a certain written prophecy: ‘When the last times come, a mother will sell her child three times: maternity leave, child benefit and maternity grant.’ From his point of view, the irony is also that these benefits are obtained from the Pensions Department.

Ilya Kuzmich is clearly closer to the position of his coreligionists in the Krasnoyarsk Krai. They appeal to their own oral tradition. Nikita

¹ The name has been changed.

from Yuzhnoe,¹ for example, told a story about one ‘little old man’. He asked the preceptor at Sokol² about his pension. The preceptor enquired whether the old man had any other income and whether his pension was enough to live on. He replied that he had no children, that he could live only on his pension, and that it was quite enough for him. Then the preceptor allowed him to receive it. Nikita concluded his story by saying that it was desirable to ‘keep oneself safe’ and refuse not only the pension, but other documents as well, but without a national insurance certificate it was impossible to own a car or a house, and without a card you can’t get your wages, etc. He added that their old people ‘blame’ their documents. This means that it is not actually forbidden to have documents, but one should remember that it is still an infringement of the rules. The pension question is treated in much the same manner. According to my observations, the Old Believers of Krasnoyarsk refuse their pensions if they feel that they can do without them.

Interviewer: *Are there people who refuse their pensions here?*

Informant: *Of course there are! A lot, basically almost... My father retired at sixty and lived to be eighty-four, and never once took his pension. Not once. Not a single payment. Of course, I take mine because I've got to support my granddaughter <...> I leave [a little] for myself, and send the rest off <...>*

Interviewer: *If power is from God, then is the pension also from God?*

Informant: *That's how they interpret it, particularly before... Before everyone worked on all the holy days, they had to go out to work. That's why they thought that they mustn't... mustn't use that money, which <...> even when we were children, first of all, we didn't work on holy days. Even if we went to pick mushrooms on a holy day, we had to eat the mushrooms that same day. Even berries. Of course, we didn't do quite right, picking mushrooms and picking berries at that time. But working, even at the hardest of times... even in the hardest of times, unless it was going out to work. At home. At home we didn't work even in the hardest of times, I mean when it was a holy day (Field notes, Krasnoyarsk Krai, 25 April 2018).*

My informant Timofey Grigoryevich's references to the Soviet regime of working, which prevented people from observing the requirements of the religious calendar, are the most typical basis for refusing the pension. In this narrative the motifs of a golden age ('At home we didn't work [on holy days] even in the hardest of times') and its overthrow ('before [at work] everyone worked on all the holy days') are not separated from each other in time, as is usual in texts of this type. Nevertheless, Timofey Grigoryevich's story shows that

¹ The name and place name have been changed.

² Sokol is an Old Believer village in Mountain Shoriya. It is known to the Old Believers of the Yenisei because many people originally from there live among them.

actions such as a refusal of ‘unearned’ payments are welcomed in the milieu of the Krasnoyarsk Old Believers: it may not always be attainable, but it is the ideal of a righteous Christian path. The absence of any strict prohibition allows those old people who are heavily dependant on their pension to remain within the brotherhood. This also, to a much greater degree, corresponds to the very widespread model of the relationship between the older and younger generations in Russian families generally, where it is the old people who help their children financially, and not the other way round. In this sense, it is hard to say for sure which of the two opposing sides is ‘backsliding’ in its way of life and which is not. Their religious practices are on the whole very similar. But small differences in the way they assemble them — in their account of the economic context and widening or narrowing of the circle of people entitled to be members of the brotherhood — lead to contradictions.

What is the attitude in ‘the North’ to the strict refusal of pensions on the Upper Yenisei? Is the putting into practice of the ideal not a stimulus to follow it? It turns out that the Chasovennye of Krasnoyarsk have a fine perception of the difference in the ways that they themselves and ‘those people’ provide for themselves. I have more than once heard the opinion that the Chasovennye of the Upper Yenisei can refuse their pensions because they have always lived off the taiga, have had no state or legal employment, and so they simply do not need any benefits.

The last assertion is of course an exaggeration. In Soviet times the Old Believers on the Upper Yenisei were employed by state forestry enterprises,¹ so they were familiar with working for the state. But the idea that they can provide for themselves from the resources of the taiga does seem to me correct. And what is most important, it illustrates the dependence of religious practice on economic conditions in particular regions. In fact, the difference between the contexts of the Krasnoyarsk Krai and Tuva is not too great. In both cases we are dealing with typical village communities heavily orientated towards their farm businesses. However, there are far fewer possibilities of relying solely upon farms in the Krasnoyarsk Krai [Lyubimova 2017: 127–9]. The local village communities are orientated towards the economies of the nearest towns (Abakan, Minusinsk and Krasnoyarsk), and therefore forced to obtain a large selection of goods from the shops, to deal more often with various documents, and sometimes to work for wages instead of selling their own produce. I do not mean that the Chasovennye of Tuva live in a far-flung country where there are no shops or other signs of modern civilisation. The point is that their everyday life is not bound

¹ I am grateful to A. A. Storozhenko for this information.

up with the shops: they can get by perfectly well buying only grains, flour, vegetable oil and factory-produced cloth for their clothes — the things that they cannot produce for themselves. This sort of way of life — working on the vegetable plot, at home, at crafts — is associated with freedom on the Upper Yenisei. ‘Nobody makes us work like in Soviet times,’ one of my informants remarked (Field notes, Krasnoyarsk Krai, 25 April 2018). The dependence of religious practices on the way particular communities have come to provide for themselves is even more strikingly illustrated by the example of water consecrated at Epiphany and at the Procession of the Cross, which will be discussed below.

‘Great water’ and ‘little water’¹

The use of water blessed at Epiphany for communion is an extremely important practice for the Chasovennye Old Believers. According to their beliefs, on the eve of 19 January,² the feast of the Epiphany, all the water in natural sources is consecrated and becomes suitable for communion. But so that the water may be kept and used during the whole year, on the day of the Epiphany they must ‘dilute’ it during their communal service. To this end, during the evening service one of the parishioners goes down to the river, draws water and brings it to the house of prayer. There they say the required prayers, cense it and pour the remains of the previous year’s water into the vessel containing the water that has just been brought (this is how they ‘dilute’ it). After this the brotherhood may take communion. They pour the new water into two cups,³ and place a spoon by each. The people come up to the cups two at a time, first the men, then the women. The two people who approach first bow from the waist twice, then drink three spoonfuls of the Epiphany water with the words ‘Glory to thy Theophany, O Lord’. After this they bow to the ground, and ask forgiveness of each other (bowing to each other), and of the preceptor and of the whole assembly (bowing, accordingly, to them too). Finally they go, and their place is taken by the next two people. Only the brotherhood may take communion this way. A worldly or ‘unpurified’ person (that is, one who has broken some rule and has not fulfilled the penance for it by saying the quantity of prayers decreed by the preceptor) can go to the Yenisei with a spoon and communicate with prayers there.

¹ See also N. D. Zolnikova’s article, which explains certain aspects of the polemic around the use of great and little water in the Chasovennye denomination: [Zolnikova 2001: 297–9].

² Dates are given New Style: Epiphany falls 6 January Old Style in Russian tradition, as in the Western Church [Trans].

³ They keep special vessels for the Epiphany water which are not used for any other rites. They treat this water extremely carefully. It is considered that if even a little bit of it is spilt on the floor, that place must be scraped up or burnt, and if on a ‘vesture’, the place is cut out. If it falls on the ground, Epiphany water catches fire.

One of my informants told me that hunters used the Epiphany water in the same way in the taiga, when they had not been able to return in time for the festival (Field notes, Tuva, 20 January 2018). Two or three hours after the communion in the house of prayer, the preceptor pours the Epiphany water into a flagon, after which it is the great water. The great water is used only for giving communion to the dying. The rest of the water is poured back into the Yenisei. The little water, or Saviour's water, is obtained in a similar manner. It is consecrated on the feast of the Procession of the Cross (the First Feast of the Saviour, 14 August). But this water is not used for communion. At this festival fruit and vegetables are blessed, and the water is preserved for purifying 'defiled'¹ vessels. In the Krasnoyarsk Krai the little water is also used for 'purifying' foodstuffs bought in the shops.

This circumstance is criticised by the Chasovennye of the Upper Yenisei. They only allow certain products to be obtained at the shops: 'They buy oil, sugar, and grains. But we try to make our own bacon. We have our own milk, our own fish, our own meat. They buy herring. We try not to take tinned stuff' (Field notes, Tuva, 12 August 2017). The selection suggested is not only essential for life, it is ritually safe. These are 'dry goods', which cannot defile a person, and there is a danger of being defiled by shop-bought food. One of the preceptors from the Upper Yenisei, Feofan,² spoke quite extensively about this. This was his selection of permissible foods: flour, grains, salt, vegetable oil, dried fruit. Tinned foods, pickled foods, and everything else were forbidden. Some people buy macaroni, but this is not an essential product. Feofan considers that sausage that is not home-made must definitely not be eaten. In his words, a certain eyewitness who had worked (evidently in Soviet times) in a sausage factory had testified that rubbish was always getting into the sausage meat, and rats and mice too: 'They set production going, and minced everything there was all together. This is not permissible for a Christian, it is eating unclean things' (Field notes, Tuva, 20 January 2018). At the same time 'sugar is allowed, but if anyone abstains from it, they think well of him; anyone who can, keeps bees or buys honey' (Ibid.). Condensed milk, sweets and other sweet things can also be dangerous, because flies and maggots can get into them at the factory: 'Our children make sweets out of sugar, or else out of cream' (Ibid.). In this context the scepticism of the Chasovennye of the Upper Yenisei is understandable: in the Krasnoyarsk Krai they even 'get bread at the shops', and it might defile a Christian. Not even the little water can purify such a product: 'If you have

¹ For example, if tableware has been licked by a cat, it is considered unsuitable for use by Christians. However, it can be 'purified' using the little water or washed in an open water source at the Epiphany.

² The name has been changed.

misgivings, don't eat it. And if you don't, buy it and eat it,' is the view of one of my informants (Field notes, Tuva, 13 August 2017). This conflict has brought about the appearance of dissidents of their own in the Krasnoyarsk communities.

He's that sort of person, of course, who keeps all the canons strictly, because he won't even... He doesn't even come to the prayer house here. For the reason, because he, that is... young people come to church now, you see, some lad with a telephone in his pocket, or, perhaps, they drink fizzy drinks, or something else, you know. So he doesn't go to the prayer house... er... he won't cross himself with them. He thinks that they, that is... to them... they've gone wrong somewhere... they're in a wrong way. Even here, when he prayed, he came. Even though everyone who was here, you know, hadn't gone wrong, but he didn't cross himself, only bowed down. But he didn't make the sign of the cross on himself (Field notes, Krasnoyarsk Krai, 25 April 2018).

The man I was being told about in this interview has the preceptor's blessing to carry out almost all the rituals in this community. Thus a rather curious situation has come about: an authoritative representative of the community is externally in the same position as the Old Believers of the Upper Yenisei who have been excluded from the brotherhood.

G. V. Lyubimova connects the common practices of purifying foodstuffs in the Krasnoyarsk Krai with the natural and climatic conditions that obtain at the hermitages on the Dubches: 'The more severe conditions in the North, which do not allow people to get by with what they can produce by their own labour, predetermined the necessity of introducing so-called *isprava* ['purification'; italics in the original. — D.R.] [Lyubimova 2017: 127]. However, the climate was not the only reason, but also, on the one hand, the Old Believers' forceful rejection of Soviet rule, and on the other the complete change in the system of supply that took place during that period. The Chasovennyye of Krasnoyarsk found themselves closer to the large urban centres and Soviet infrastructure than those of Tuva, and so their everyday life could not help including the purchase of goods in shops.¹ The point at which shops offering a wide assortment of consumer goods became essential for an adequate supply of the necessities of life has been relatively well documented by the Old Believers themselves in the materials of their councils. The practice of purifying foodstuffs is first² mentioned in the Angara Conciliar

¹ See: 'Before there used not to be any purification, they got everything at the market. But under Soviet rule they began to think that everything it produced was unclean, and you couldn't take anything. And the Siberians [i.e. from Krasnoyarsk. — D.R.] started purifying everything from the shops. The monasteries on the Upper Yenisei stopped taking anything, particularly from those worldly folk who had got documents' [Murashova 2003: 204].

² At least, in the documents that have been discovered and published by manuscript specialists.

Code of 1956 in connection with permission to purify sugar: ‘Sugar, if necessary, may be purified for use in food, so long as nothing unclean was mixed with it when it was produced at the factory, as is written in the Chulym regulation (about bones), article 11¹ [Dukhovnaya literatura... 1999: 384]. The Minusinsk council of 1974 has left a short list of foodstuffs that may be bought: ‘Do not buy sweet foods at the market, apart from sugar, bread, salt and other essential foodstuffs, which it is not forbidden to buy at the market’ [Ibid.: 390]. The article in the codex of 1990 (the council in Bezymyanka) is more concrete and detailed:

On the purification of foodstuffs. Flour, grains, sugar (granulated), vegetable oil, dried fruit, salt fish, salt and soda. Furthermore, in case of great need, if anyone has a big family and cannot do without it, then purify, only for such people, noodles (if it does not happen, by the testimony of certain people, that dairy products have been added to them). Do not use other forms of pasta. Likewise butter: if someone has no cow and needs it, then it is to be purified. Do not take butter from people who live wickedly. And the rest, as, for example, dried milk, yeast, sushki, gingerbread, margarine, or anything in tins, there is no direction in any judgments for purifying that, and we should not introduce it [Dukhovnaya literatura... 1999: 391].

The history of the purification of foodstuffs confirms the proposition that the means of supplying the necessities that are accepted in the community may have a significant influence on religious practices. I shall supplement my argumentation with a further example: the struggle against mobile phones, in which everyday life has also triumphed. In January 2014 the Chasovennye of the Yenisei summoned a council at which the question of telephones was hotly debated. But the prohibition was not accepted. People are not excluded from the brotherhood for a telephone, but the question is left to the individual’s conscience, and so anyone who uses a telephone ‘should think about it and do penance’ (Field notes, Tuva, 20 January 2018). Mobile phones have become an important part of everyday life. ‘Everything involves the telephone. Buying and selling’ (Ibid.).

The vicissitudes of assembling the community

Here I would like to return to the question of infrastructure provision for religious practices. Its significance may only become

¹ The Chulym council had forbidden buying sweets and sugar and using them for food: ‘Do not buy sweet things at the market, that is gingerbread, sweets and sugar. When being made this sweet food is strained through the bones of carrion and beasts. And the rules of the holy fathers forbid eating unclean beasts. Do not buy baked bread either, if there is no need, but in the case of great need it is not forbidden. And everything else which is necessary for human life, all that is needful, it is not forbidden to buy at the market’ [Dukhovnaya literatura... 1999: 367].

apparent when we encounter cases where some element of the ritual is missing, which leads to the construction of quite complicated structures within the community of the Christians of the Yenisei. And for this it is necessary to give a more detailed account of some communities of the Chasovennye of Tuva, whom I shall call the Bii-Khem Old Believers. (From an administrative point of view this territory belongs to the town of Kyzyl and the Kaa-Khemsy and Tandinsky Districts.) At one time many villages were founded in the Bii-Khem valley by Old Believers migrating to Tuva, but now few of them are left.

As an example, I shall give the story of an Old Believer woman from Maksimovka.¹ At one time both Chasovennye and Pomortsy lived there. The Pomortsy are either all dead or have left Tuva, as have most of the Chasovennye from that village. My informant told me that she had begun to go to a prayer house in the 1990s, and at first she knew nothing about the church services. She had to learn everything from books. But since they had none of their own, the people used Novozybkov editions (i.e. the publications of the Russian Old Orthodox Church, also known as the Novozybkov denomination²). In my informant's opinion these books are not received on the Upper Yenisei, where they use Pomorye books. At the same time she remembers that in her village they always objected to the Pomortsy, and so she does not understand why they use those books on the Upper Yenisei. In Maksimovka they also used to obtain Pomorye editions from the Grebenshchikov community in Riga. Later, when the Novozybkov books became available, they went over to them, because the books from Riga were Pomorye books. My informant likes the Novozybkov publications: she 'orientates' herself on them. The Epiphany water in Maksimovka is not kept by one person, but by all the members of the brotherhood: after the service for the feast it is distributed to everybody to be kept at home.

This case is interesting in that the lack of ritual requisites in this community is supplied from the resources of different denominations. This is not exceptional among the Chasovennye of the Yenisei. I have already mentioned above that books and calendars published by the Old Orthodox Church of the Pomorye are actively used by the Old Believers, admittedly mostly for domestic prayer. The Chasovennye consider that the texts in their books and those of the Pomortsy are identical, perhaps with the exception of a few details. Novozybkov books are also obtained, but to a lesser degree. But in Maksimovka 'other people's' books were in demand for communal worship as well. The rejection of Pomorye books in favour of Novozybkov books

¹ The name of the village has been changed.

² Novozybkov denomination has its own Old Believer hierarchy, which should be distinguished from the Belaya Krinita. The former was established in 1920s.

is connected with the fact that the two communities lived together in the same village and the evident debate between them in the past.

The communities of which I am speaking here are organised in a way that is not typical of the region as a whole, which results from the difficulties of assembling. In them too there is a separation between brotherhood and worldly Old Believers, but the latter, if they are sufficiently literate, may play a major role in the life of the brotherhood. People whose spouses are not members of the denomination are not accepted into the brotherhood. Such marriages were common when the communities had either ceased to exist, or were well hidden. But nowadays, when communal worship is open, the parishioners do not always have the opportunity to correct the facts of their Soviet curriculum vitae. In one such case known to me, it turned out that an 'improperly married' woman knew the order of the services better than anyone else. She had to obtain the Krasnoyarsk preceptors' blessing in order to correct the old women of the community at the services. However, she cannot pray at the same time as them.

In these communities the situation regarding the great water is problematic, because without the preceptor's blessing it cannot be 'diluted' and kept during the year. They have to apply to their coreligionists in the Krasnoyarsk Krai both for their blessing and for the water itself.

They have this water, that was handed down when there were priests in Russia. It was running out among them. <...> it seems even to have sort of evaporated <...>. We went to [Yuzhnoye]. There is a very big brotherhood there. There are very few unbelievers <...>. They poured the water into this flagon for us. We asked for it, and they gave it to us. But for some reason we don't receive the little water. It's not our custom (Field notes, Tuva, 29 April 2018).

Although these communities are in Tuva, when they are looking for things that they lack for their rituals they turn to their coreligionists in the Krasnoyarsk Krai, and not in the neighbouring Kaa-Khem. This is certainly a long way to go. However, the communities of the Upper Yenisei, in the words of my informants, refuse to receive them. I suppose that this is the result of a dissonance of social status. On the Upper Yenisei they consider that people who receive pensions and eat shop-bought food are unworthy to remain in the brotherhood. However, the Old Believer brotherhoods of Bii-Khem consist of just such people. They do not only regard as worldly those people who are married against the rules, but also those who 'do not hold the cup', i.e. do not eat from separate vessels and at a separate table from people of other religions. For the Upper Yenisei this is unacceptable.

Conclusion

The dependence of the religious practices of the Chasovennye on the context is interpreted by the tradition itself and presupposes that the community must resist the entropy of the transfer of ritual, otherwise it will be threatened by the danger of distancing itself from Orthodox symbolism in its Old Believer recension. This resistance has taken place mostly in theological discussions. However, the religious practices of the Chasovennye denomination have been formed (and continue to be formed) not only in the course of debate. They are quite strongly connected with certain means of the provision of necessities, and also with the histories of particular families and communities, who had access, or did not have access, to certain resources that created the conditions for reproducing the practices. The ritual of the Chasovennye is subject to the influence of the external market and conditioned by the possibility or impossibility of replacing mass-produced goods with home-produced ones, and also by the character of the social connection in particular communities. In turn, the lack or replacement of an element of practice that might not at first sight seem important might have a radical effect on the social structure of the Old Believers.

These considerations were reinforced by a description of the practices and social structure of the Chasovennye of the Yenisei. The system of the Upper Yenisei, where people live by farming or are supported by their children, sometimes breaks down, and then members of the community who are unable either to support themselves to an acceptable standard or to adopt a humbler way of life are excluded from the religious community (i.e. the brotherhood). The Christians of Krasnoyarsk offer a more flexible approach, which supposes different variants of personal salvation (for example, with the possibility of receiving a pension or of refusing it). The opponents are well aware of the difference between the ways of life on the Upper Yenisei and in the Krasnoyarsk Krai, but that does not stop them from arguing. On the contrary, both sides put forward moral arguments (thus the Chasovennye of the Upper Yenisei think that the rules established by 'the fathers' are being broken in the North) or point to the non-religious character of the established practices (people in Tuva refuse pensions because they have never been wage-earners).

The metaphor of technology shows the vagueness of the borders between ritual, context and community, although all three are discursively packaged as different 'things'. However, it seems to me that it is the religious practice that is the 'moment of assembly' of the community. As I have shown more than once in this article, the Old Believer group is a very unstable category. Its internal structure is not only hard to describe from outside, it is constantly changing: individuals and whole communities are included and excluded from

the group, and for several different reasons which also change. Besides, it is not always immediately clear what should be regarded as an element of practice and what as an element of context. For example, shop-bought goods are understood by the Chasovennye in categories of ritual impurity, and thus obtain characteristics of the religious. This is the basis for regarding them as part of a certain ritual — that of ‘purification’ — or for refusing to buy them.

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