'IN ORDER TO STOP THE HOSTILE ACTIVITY OF THE KHLYST UNDERGROUND': THE 1945 DIRECTIVES OF THE NKGB OF THE USSR ON THE STRUGGLE AGAINST KHRISTOVER SECTARIANS

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the publication of the directive documents of the NKGB of the USSR on the intensification of the battle against the sect of the Khlysty. To date, the existence of the old Russian sectarianism in the Soviet Union has been an area of little study. Practically the only sources are documents from repressive Soviet era governmental bodies, still virtually inaccessible to researchers. The opening of the archives of the Soviet secret services in some post-Soviet countries opens up new opportunities for the study of religious movements in the USSR. The religious policy of the Soviet government created a situation where the main 'researchers' of religious movements were not scientists but investigators and the operational officers of the special services. The agents, by virtue of their profession, were inclined to exaggerate the significance of vertical ties in religious communities. In their eyes, the sect of the Khlysty appeared as a centralised organisation with a hierarchical leadership structure. As a result, a very peculiar 'research program' was formed in the heads of the state security workers, to which the collection of operational material was adjusted and to which the investigation was oriented. The approach of the Soviet special services practically differed little from the approach of prerevolutionary officials and missionaries. The published materials contain a brief history of the sect of the Khlysty as seen by the Soviet Chekists, and provides intelligence information about the ritualism of the Christian faith in the Soviet period.

Keywords: Khristovery, sect of the Khlysty, NKGB, repressions in the USSR, archival documents.

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'In Order to Stop the Hostile Activity of the Khlyst Underground': The 1945 Directives of the NKGB of the USSR on the Struggle against Khristover[1] Sectarians

The article is devoted to the publication of the directive documents of the NKGB of the USSR on the intensification of the battle against the sect of the Khlysty. To date, the existence of the old Russian sectarianism in the Soviet Union has been an area of little study. Practically the only sources are documents from repressive Soviet era governmental bodies, still virtually inaccessible to researchers. The opening of the archives of the Soviet secret services in some post-Soviet countries opens up new opportunities for the study of religious movements in the USSR. The religious policy of the Soviet government created a situation where the main "researchers" of religious movements were not scientists but investigators and the operational officers of the special services. The agents, by virtue of their profession, were inclined to exaggerate the significance of vertical ties in religious communities. In their eyes, the sect of the Khlysty appeared as a centralised organisation with a hierarchical leadership structure. As a result, a very peculiar "research program" was formed in the heads of the state security workers, to which the collection of operational material was adjusted and to which the investigation was oriented. The approach of the Soviet special services practically differed little from the approach of prerevolutionary officials and missionaries. The published materials contain a brief history of the sect of the Khlysty as seen by the Soviet Chekists, and provides intelligence information about the ritualism of the Christian faith in the Soviet period.

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The material published here comprises internal documents of the Soviet special services — the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB), which was separated from the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) in 1943. The powers of this organisation, besides counterespionage, included the struggle against manifestations of religion that were unwelcome to the authorities, including that against religious sects.

The historiography on the long-established Russian Christian sects is extremely extensive and has been discussed more than once in recent works [Panchenko 2002: 14–43; Berman 2014]. I shall not provide a detailed review of the literature here, but shall confine myself to recently published research on the sect of the Khlysty. Alexander Panchenko's 2002 monograph was an important milestone in the study

[1] *Khristovery* or *Khristovovery* (Christ Believers) was the preferred self-ascriptive term used by members of a Russian Orthodox Christian sect known by outsiders as *Khlysty* ('self-flagellants') that emerged in the seventeenth century and survived, despite persecution, into the twentieth century. Their ritual practices included ecstatic dancing (*radenie*). Like other religious groups, they were also subject to political repression at certain periods in the Soviet era [Eds.].

of old Russian sects. This work's undoubted merit is that the author examines the sects in the broad context of popular culture. Panchenko analyses in detail such forms of sectarian ritual as ecstatic meetings, prophecies, and the ideological notions of the Khlysty and Skoptsy.[1] There is a separate chapter on the origins of sectarian movements. Though the work as a whole is a notable scholarly achievement, certain of its approaches raise questions. For example, how justifiable is it to use material primarily relevant to the peasant environment for the analysis of the religious culture of Russian sects? It would be useful if the connection between Russian sects and sociopolitical processes were made more visible. Indeed, the author himself concedes that the study of Russian sects is still far from complete: 'Questions of the history and culture of Khristovshchina and Skopchestvo are not in the least exhausted in the present monograph: its size simply does not allow it to touch on a whole range of more particular questions. I would, however, like to think that I have succeeded in fulfilling the most important of the tasks that I have set myself — to put together a more or less systematic idea of the specific cultural tradition of these religious movements' [Panchenko 2002: 421].

There is little space devoted directly to the sects in Alexander Lavrov's work *Sorcery and Religion in Russia*, but this work nevertheless has an important methodological significance for our subject. The author suggests examining the religious landscape in Russia as a composite of religious cultures, Orthodox (i.e. official), Old Believer,[2] and Sectarian, the boundary between these cultures sometimes being hard to define. The author's observation, that the peasant character of sectarian religion is only apparent, is interesting: representatives of various strata of society took an active part in the formation of the sects. '[T]he right to speak in the Khlysty's "ship" belonged not to the peasants, but to the leaders, who were often connected in their origin to privileged classes' [Lavrov 2000: 76–7].

Likewise deserving mention is the research in the dissertation by Karlygash Sergazina, who reconstructed the rituals of the first Khlyst communities from eighteenth-century material, and was the first to use the innovatory method of analysing the prayer texts of the Khristovery [Sergazina 2005].

The American researcher J. Eugene Clay has studied the documents of the investigation into the sect of 'the People of God' in Uglich conducted in 1717. Using methods of comparative anthropology and history of religion, he examined the different theories of the

[1] Another Orthodox sect that practised self-castration, as reflected in the name [Eds.].

[2] On the Old Believers, see the article by Danila Rygovskiy in this issue [Eds.].

sect's origin, analysed the historiography of the problem and concluded that the sect had appeared as one of the tendencies of the Old Believer schism. Clay has also put forward the thesis that the formation of the Khlyst movement was strongly influenced by some Orthodox mystical traditions, in particular hesychasm and holy folly [Clay 1985; 2012].

The history of the sect of the Khlysty in the twentieth century to the present day is little studied, principally because the sources are unidentified or inaccessible. The sectarian communities of the Postniki in the Tambov Oblast [Klibanov 1960; 1961; Koretskiy 1961], the 'New Israel' [Malakhova 1970: 22–30], the community of the 'Redeemed Israel' in the Orenburg Oblast [Fedorenko 1965: 115–9; Amelin et al. 2015: 379–401] and the community of Khristovery in the city of Alatyr (Ulatăr) in the Chuvash ASSR [Berman 2008: 126–56; 2016] have been examined in greater or lesser detail. Researchers of the Soviet period formed the impression that under the influence of various factors, the sect of the Khlysty had practically ceased to exist in the 1970s.

Before the Second World War the sect of Khlysty in the USSR was hardly subjected to persecution at all. Far from it, in the initial stage of the Soviet regime's existence, members of sects were treated as potential sympathisers, accustomed as they were to constant oppression by the imperial authorities and the Synodal church. Many sectarian communities, such as the Baptists, Molokans, Dukhobors and the 'New Israel' did indeed accept the October Revolution, and were active supporters of the new regime. The 1918 decree of the Council of People's Commissars, 'On the Separation of Church and State', guaranteed religious sects a range of privileges [Klibanov 1969: 188].

At the same time, the policies of War Communism[1] provoked a sharp rejection on the part of the Khristovery, which is not surprising, since most members of the sect were well-off peasants and traders, i.e. petty bourgeois. As one of the sectarian prophets noted, 'there were altogether few poor sectarians' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4622, f. 128]. In 1918 Andrey Egorovich Malkin, the leader of the Khristovery in Ulatăr, even took part in the SR revolt against the Soviet regime [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 2569]. At a gathering of Khlysty in Ardatov in the winter of 1919 in the house of Pavel Petrovich Yufin, a leader of the sect, one of their prophets asserted that 'this year there will be a coup and the Soviet regime will be destroyed' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4622, f. 78].

[1] I.e. nationalisation, sanctions against traders, etc. [Eds.].

After the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the New Economic Policy,[1] the sectarians began to take a more accommodating attitude towards the new regime. One of the prophets of the Ulatăr community, S. Fomichev, in an autograph statement noted that in those years 'the sect as a religious organisation was not persecuted by the Soviet government and there were even occasions when a policeman was present at the meetings at Adatov' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4622, f. 78]. Fomichev also describes his own impressions: '[W]ith the introduction of NEP my negative attitude was sort of blunted, and often, even in the sectarian milieu, with which I was closely connected after 1922, when I came back from the Red Army, I would speak of Soviet society in a favourable tone, but for the most part the sectarians had been hard hit by the October Revolution, which took away their land, and reacted to what I said with mockery, asking, "Sergey Fedorovich, you're not a Party member by any chance?"' [Ibid., f. 94]. Despite the change in economic policy, even during NEP it was still prophesied during the meetings that there would soon be a change of regime. In 1923 Nikolay Tsaplin, who had been at a meeting, recounted his conversation in the village of Sobachenki with the authoritative old man Kuzma Maksimov, whom he asked 'So, Kuzma Ivanovich, our prophets are always prophesying that the Soviet regime will fall, and this is said almost every year, but in fact it doesn't fall.' To which Maksimov answered: 'Mikolya, none of those things that the prophets say about the regime will actually happen, the regime will change gradually by itself.' Tsaplin also thought that 'if the regime does change, it will only be through a gradual change of its policy in favour of the well-off, that is, a return to private trade, private property, etc.' [Ibid., f. 80v].

From the middle of the 1920s, the Soviet regime's attitude towards the sects as privileged organisations as compared with the Orthodox Church began to change towards a unified approach. A sign of the times was the circular of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party, 'On the Denial of Special Privileges to Sectarian Organisations', published on 22 August 1927. The circular, in particular, proposed '[f]orbidding the discussion and decision at the sectarians' religious meetings and congresses of questions unrelated to religion and religious worship, such as economic, political, cultural, educational and other such questions' [*Nasledie: Khrestomatiya* 2010: 51–2]. In this way there appeared a legal basis for persecuting the Khristovery, at whose meetings, as can be seen from the sources, prophecies about political topics were a regular occurrence.

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[1] Under the NEP, introduced in 1921, private traders and even manufacturers were allowed to operate.

With the beginning of agricultural collectivisation, the anti-Soviet mood among the Khristovery again strengthened. As the Sergey Fomichev mentioned above recounted, 'a negative attitude to the Soviet way of life awoke within me again during the antikulak operations of 1930. At that time I was working in Saransk, at the Regional Executive Committee, and sectarians who had been dispossessed as kulaks and disenfranchised began to come to Saransk in large numbers to apply to have their right to vote restored, their property returned, etc., and they used to visit me at my flat. My home turned into a sort of reception area for the "bereft and maltreated". Complaints and tears at the "savagery" of the Bolsheviks with detailed accounts of what they had done and exaggerated irritation, and the actions of the local authorities at the time of dispossession made a great impression on me. <…> It should be noted that the negative attitude towards the measures taken by the Soviet government at a later period, i.e. approximately after 1933, when the trading co-operation of state enterprises began to run more smoothly, was less acute' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4622, ff. 94–94v]. There is thus no record of any repression of the Khristovery on purely religious grounds either in the period of collectivisation or during the 'Great Terror' of 1937–1938. However, a significant proportion of the sectarians were dispossessed as kulaks, which led to a heightening of anti-Soviet attitudes.

During the Second World War, the state security apparatus 'purged' all illegal groups, irrespective of their religious adherence. The authorities regarded such groups as potential traitors who were ready to cross over to the German side. And indeed, there were cases where Soviet religious dissidents during the war really did sympathise with the German troops, which is confirmed inter alia by the sectarians' own autograph statements. In wartime conditions such an attitude and, even more so, public manifestations of 'defeatism' were regarded as crimes. However, the sectarians and other religious groups had no reason to feel sympathy for the Soviet authorities.

With the beginning of the Second World War the sectarians began to hope for change in the country's political system: 'The Germans will soon reach us, and then there will be no more Soviet rule and the religious and material life of the country will be better, we should not be afraid of the Germans, on the contrary, we should meet them and greet them as liberators from our present hard life,' said Yufin, one of the sectarian leaders, during a sermon [GIA ChR, f. R-1458s, op. 16s, d. 2914, f. 1v]. It was accordingly during the war that the NKVD began to take a serious interest in the activities of the Khristovery. In 1943–1944 the state security organs arrested active sectarians in various parts of the USSR, including Ulatăr [Berman 2016]. The documents published below appeared as a result of these actions.

In the postwar period the peak of the persecutions against the Khristovery was in 1957 and 1958. In 1954 Maria Petina, the leader of the 'Redeemed Israel' movement had come back from exile and set about strengthening the sect. She required her fellow-believers to reject all worldly habits and to refrain from social contact with people of different religions, and even more so with unbelievers. In order to strengthen her authority she was alleged in 1954 and 1955 to have carried out two human sacrifices. Despite all precautions and strict secrecy, the religious group's activities became known to the law enforcement agencies. As a result, the leaders of the sect were arrested in 1957. In the course of the investigations the fact of the human sacrifices was not examined. Ekaterina Ilyinichna Chernova, represented as the initiator and leader of the illegal sect from 1945 to 1947, found herself in the dock in 1958 [Amelin et al. 2015: 391].

The documents published here are directives of the central apparatus of the NKGB, addressed to the state security agencies of the union and autonomous republics, krais and oblasts. Particularly interesting is the so-called 'orientation', which is part of the first of the documents published. In the terminology of the state security agencies an orientation is a document that contains information for their agents about their adversaries, their organisations, personnel, strengths and capacities, the forms and methods of their subversive activities, and also about any measures taken by the state security agencies in various areas of espionage and counterespionage [*Kontrrazvedyvatelnyy slovar* 1972 195]. The orientation gives brief information about the history of the sect of Khristovery, and a list of the measures taken in the 1940s by the agencies of the NKVD and NKGB towards halting the sectarians' activities, and also information about the doctrines and rituals of the Khlysty.

The first thing that is noticeable is the poor quality of the historical account of the sect. Its sources were prerevolutionary popular editions: the Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary, from which almost all the early history of the sect was borrowed ['Khlysty' 1903] and the *Survey of Russian Sects and Their Denominations* by Archpriest Timofey Butkevich of Kharkov [Butkevich 1910]. At the same time the USSR had its own school of study of the sects, connected with the name of N. M. Matorin, the father of Soviet ethnography. Even before the war Matorin's pupils A. I. Klibanov and N. N. Volkov had written and published works about sects, including the old Russian sects [Shakhnovich, Chumakova 2016: 55–73]. However, Matorin had been shot during the Great Terror, and his pupils had been repressed as well. The author of the Orientation evidently derived his / her information about the elder Radaev of Arzamas (who was not a Khlyst) from N. M. Nikolskiy's *History of the Russian Church*, the first edition of which came out

in 1930, and the second in 1931 [Nikolskiy 1930; 1931]. One gets the impression that (s)he put the Orientation together using whatever material (s)he had to hand. The author of the Orientation was most likely someone working in the fifth section of the second directorate of the NKGB, who specialised in the struggle against 'religious obscurantism'. In his / her opinion, the leader of the Khristovery within the entire USSR was Semen Ivanovich Suslin, and the sect itself existed as a centralised organisation. S. I. Suslin was born in 1870 (or according to other data, 1871) in the village of Chernorechye in the Orenburg Governorate. In 1921 he settled in the town of Kinel, in 1928 he was forced to go into hiding, and in 1929 was arrested and sentenced (presumably exiled to Central Asia). In 1941 Suslin returned and lived in secret among his followers in the surroundings of Kuybyshev, in the villages of Zubchaninovka and Kryazh, and also at Koltubanka Station in the Chkalov Oblast. He was arrested again on 5 April 1944, and died in prison on 24 June of the same year [Amelin et al. 2015: 388].

In my opinion, the view of the sect as a centralised organisation reflects the specific mentality of the state security agents, who were inclined to see organised resistance to the Soviet regime in any forms of religious interaction. They imagined a standard 'counter-revolutionary organisation' invariably as hierarchical, with its 'leading centre' and leaders. While going about their counterespionage activities in the 1940s, the special services often found themselves dealing with just such structures. The concept of networks, horizontally structured organisations, began to take shape in the middle of the 1950s. However, the Khlyst communities within the USSR were relatively autonomous, and had no single leading centre, although they did keep in touch with one another. It is possible to speak of a network of communities, but not of a centralised organisation. At the same time, as the archival materials show, it cannot be said that individual sectarian communities that followed the same sort of religious practices had no connection with each other. As Sergey Fomichev testified, 'the people in Ulyanovsk kept in touch with Ulatăr and Kuybyshev. Mikhail Andreevich Chernov and another prophet called Vasya came from Kuybyshev to Ulyanovsk in 1940. Vasya came from the village of Soplevka, it seems, and Chernov from Mokshany' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4622, f. 81v]. 'The connection between the groups (communities) of sectarians was usually kept up by "visits" on horseback with three to five waggons. Before 1905 they used to go to the villages of Soplevka, Dubovoe and Kolyvan. The sectarian Pavel Evdokimovich (the owner of large houses is Baku) used to come from Baku to Ulatăr and Ardatov. In 1909 a sectarian called Nazarych came from the Ussuri Krai to Ulatăr and Chetvertakovo. In 1925 sectarians from Sobachenki, Mochkasy, Chetvertakovo and Ulatăr, with about

ten waggons, went to Krestnikovo (150 km) away and Vyazovyy Gay (200 km)' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4622, f. 84v]. Mikhail Yufin kept in touch with communities of Skoptsy and 'Porfiryevtsy-Kisilevtsy': 'My connections with the aforementioned sects were the result of my wish to be better acquainted with the life and customs of these sects, and also, in part, of my search for my own sect of Khlysty through the leaders of the aforementioned sects, but since at that time I had not found the sect of Khlysty, for that reason I kept in touch with the sect of Porfiryevtsy in Leningrad and the sect of Skoptsy in Moscow, although I did not join either of them' [Ibid., f. 195v].

The question arises as to how accurately the state security identified the sectarian movements of the twentieth century as Khlysty. The problem of identification is indeed a complex one. In the case of communities whose continuity goes back to the traditions of the beginning of the eighteenth century and which are mentioned in the documents of the investigative commissions of the 1730–1750s, one can say more or less definitely that they did belong to the Khlyst movement. Such communities continued to exist right to the end of the twentieth century, for example in the Ulatăr region, where Khlysty were recorded in the 1730s, or in the Chistopol Uyezd of the Kazan Governorate, where there were links with the Khlysty of Moscow. According to eyewitness accounts, there were still Khlysty in the Chistopolsky District of the Tartar ASSR in the 1930s.[1]

However, in the second half of the nineteenth century a large number of different religious groups which, in various respects, fitted the known description of the Khlysty (self-proclamation, ecstatic practices or simply religious enthusiasm, gatherings not in the form of divine service, etc.), began to be referred to as Khlysty.

At the same time, practices which are characteristic of the Khlysty are regularly reproduced in religious movements which have nothing to do with the sect of Khlysty. And the Khlyst movement itself shows typological similarities with analogous movements in previous periods. Alexander Panchenko proposed calling such movements 'spirit-bearing': 'The distinctive feature of spirit-bearing religions is that they see as the mediator between the sacred and profane worlds not sacred spaces, artefacts or texts, but the human body itself, which "interiorises" powerful sacral forces' [Panchenko 2013: 224]. This circumstance has frequently led researchers astray when they have tried to find the roots of the sect very nearly in the time of Jesus Christ, which, incidentally, corresponds to the views of the sectarians themselves, who trace their religious practices back to antiquity:

[1] According to E. F. Kolovskaya, born in the village of Kushnikovo, Chistopolsky District, Tartar ASSR, the sect of Khlysty in Kushnikovo was headed in 1931 by the ex-kulak Shugaev.

'[T]hus did the holy fathers in ancient times, and thus they got salvation for themselves' [Chistovich 1887: 15].

The root of the matter is, in my view, that the fundamental paradigm of Christian religious ideas is a mixture of the images of God, the Church, and the King in the person of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity. Jesus himself is, on the one hand, the King, the representative of God, crucified for the people's sins, and on the other, the representative of the masses of the people, the son of a carpenter. The events that embody the Christian plan of salvation take place in a specific chronotope, defined in later Jewish (particularly Sabbatean) tradition as 'the Messianic Age', in which social norms change their semiotics. This chronotope is nothing other than a religiously interpreted continuum of social crisis. Features of the trickster can clearly be traced in the very literary image of Jesus as described in the Gospels [Berman, Danilova 2016]. These ideas, in 'a changed form', are fixed as dogma and create the ideological basis for charismatic leadership and eventually for religious and political self-proclamation in the Christian tradition.

However, this side of the Christian faith is not altogether convenient within the relationship between the ecclesiastical and political elites. Therefore in periods of the stabilisation of social institutions, other aspects of Christian ideas come to the fore: the individual's fate in the next life, commemoration of the departed, etc. But in periods of social crisis, the fundamental paradigm of Christianity attains a new relevance every time. The sectarian tendencies in Christianity are distinguished from the Christianity of the Church by the very fact that they continue to practice this fundamental paradigm even when the crisis is over. In other words, for charismatic sectarians the 'Messianic Age' never ends.

In prerevolutionary times, Russian sects were divided into the mystical (Khlysty and Skoptsy) and the rationalist (Dukhobors and Molokans). This classification evidently came about as a result of observations on the history of Protestantism, which began as a rational critique of certain Catholic practices. In reality one can find many mystical elements in the rationalism of Russian sects, and the sectarians' mystical practices are in themselves quite rational and logical. In my opinion the division of old Russian sects into mystical and rational should be regarded as an established historiographical tradition and nothing more.

The characteristic peculiarity of the Khlyst movement is an absence of strict dogma and of more or less regulated practice, i.e. an absence of normative texts, without which institutionalised leadership cannot exist, and, therefore, neither can effective social control within the sectarian community. There was an attempt to produce such texts at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth

century among the Khlyst community of Moscow and Kostroma, but it was not successful because of state persecution. The religious leadership in the sect of the Khristovery remained charismatic, and therefore unstable. To compensate for this inconstancy Russian sectarianism developed its own mechanism, that of leadership dynasties.

Another circumstance that makes the identification of old sects difficult is that the religious groups that were outside the control of state institutions actively influenced each other. Different sectarian communities readily adopted each other's folkloric texts, and in the absence of clear doctrinal and liturgical boundaries no objections were raised to borrowings and mutual crossovers between different religious movements. For example, texts borrowed from the Skoptsy tradition circulated in Petr Melnikov's community, which existed in the second half of the nineteenth century in Simbirsk Province [GAUO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 257, ff. 25–6]. Some gatherings of the Ulatăr Khlyst community might use the Baptist hymnbook *Gusli*,[1] which had been introduced by the former Baptist I. Korzhenkov [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4623, f. 75]. Ivan Shiryaev, a member of the Ulatăr circle of the Postniki, who kept themselves aloof from the rest of the Khlysty, also frequented a group of nuns from a convent that had been closed down by the authorities. In the words of the eyewitness Sergey Fomichev, 'Shiryaev is connected with the nuns, he has the reputation of no ordinary person among them, and is not without success in exerting influence over them. He conceals his belonging to a sect from them' [Ibid., d. 4622, f. 133v].

A most important part of the religion of the Russian Khlysty was attaining ecstasy as a means of direct contact with God. However, religious ecstasy is an important element in the Christianity of the Church as well. In the Orthodox tradition practices of attaining ecstasy came to be called hesychasm. As such they are opposed to normative Christian ritual and, therefore, to the institution of Christian priesthood in general and episcopacy in particular, since they lead to the appearance of charismatic leaders. Therefore for the whole history of the Church ecstatic practices have been regarded with suspicion by the clergy, who have been anxious to take control of them. The history of monasticism may serve as an example: originally it was a charismatic movement, but then turned into an institution of religious control from which the bishops were recruited. From time to time specific heresies have arisen in the monastic environment, known both in Western and Eastern Christianity under various names: Beghards and Beguines, Messalians, Euchites and Bogomils, right up to the Russian 'elders'

[1] The word *gusli*, properly a type of zither, is used in Russian bibles to name the instrument played by King David, in the English tradition a harp [Trans.].

and their movements in recent times. Some of these movements were successfully brought into the official mainstream by means of the institutional 'approbation' of their practices and the canonisation of their leaders. Movements for which this did not happen continued to exist independently and became 'sects'. As can be seen, the boundary between established and unofficial charismatic movements is quite fragile.

As an illustration we may take the history of the charismatic movement that grew up in the Tambov region and was known by various names: the Postniki 'those who fast', the 'Old Israel', or the 'New Israel'. The prehistory of the movement belongs to the 1760s, when sectarian groups are recorded in the Tambov Governorate among members of the former servitor class, the yeomen (*odnodvortsy*). The movement of the Skoptsy appeared in the province at the same time, and spread among the communities of Khlysty that already existed there. The sect of Postniki evidently arose at the beginning of the 1830s as a charismatic movement among the followers of Avvakum Kopylov. The 'yeoman's wife' Tatyana Makarova Chernosvitova (Remizova),[1] who, judging by the extant data, was a Khlyst by birth, played a decisive role in the establishment of the Postniki sect. Thus the Postniki movement has a hereditary link with the early Khlysty. It is not altogether clear what was meant by the term 'Old Israel': either it was the name of the followers of Perfil Katasonov, who had separated himself from the community led by the Kopylov dynasty, or else the reverse, it was the name of the 'Old Khlysty' who had remained loyal to the Kopylovs [Koretskiy 1961: 61]. The 'New Israel' movement gradually lost the liturgical peculiarities of the Khlysty — ecstatic meetings, fasting, rejection of marriage — and became an independent movement reminiscent of Protestant sects.

Thus, in order to decide the question of whether a particular community belonged to the Khlysty one must take into account both hereditary links and typological resemblance to early Khlyst communities. From my point of view the hereditary factors are decisive here, since the basic typological feature of the Khlyst cult — the ecstatic meeting — has its parallels also amongst Protestant charismatic movements such as the Pentecostals.

[1] The Chernosvitovs were an old servitor family who had estates in the Tula Governorate, among them one not far from the town of Venyov, which was a centre of the early Khlyst movement. Some branches of the family lost their gentry status and passed into the category of peasant soldiers and yeomen [Chernosvitov 2012–2018]. Tatyana Makarova went by the alias of Remizova. As the well-known Russian writer Aleksey Remizov (1877–1957), a distant relative of Tatyana Makarova, recounts, 'my grandfather was from Tula, from the village of Alitovo, a freed serf, and lived in Moscow near St John the Warrior <…> Among my father's relatives his sister Anna Alekseeva was mentioned as living in Tula, and it was also said that he had relatives in the Tambov Governorate, a cousin or a second cousin, the Khlyst Tatyana Makarova' [Remizov 2000: 64–6]. Remizov also mentions Tatyana Makarova's son, an engineer who had property in the Kirsanov Uyezd.

It is interesting to see how the Khlysty themselves defined their religious adherence in the 1940s. For instance, Mikhail Yufin, one of the leaders of the Ulatăr group of the Khristovery wrote in his complaint to the USSR public prosecutor's office: 'Being the son of a sectarian of the religious sect of Spiritual Christians (to which my mother, grandmother and great-grandfather also belonged), and knowing how these people had been persecuted for their religious convictions, I consider it my duty to apply to you to intervene in this case and put a stop to our persecution as if we were political criminals' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4624, f. 197$_5$]. The daughter of another Ulatăr prophet, Ivan Zubkov, indicated in a letter to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR that her 'father is a hereditary Molokan' [GIA ChR, f. R-1458s, op. 16s, d. 2914, f. 119]. In the criminal proceedings against the Ulatăr leader Andrey Egorovich Malkin in 1932 it is said that 'being a religious sectarian, Malkin was the leader of the sect of Molokans in Ulatăr. The Molokan sectarians from the villages often gathered at his house for meetings and prayer in the guise of guests' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 2569, f. 70].

However, this sort of self-identification ought not to lead the researcher astray. The legalisation of Khlysty as Molokans began in the early years of the twentieth century. The decree 'On the Order of Formation and Activity of Old Believer and Sectarian Communities and on the Rules and Duties of the Members of the Communities Who Are Followers of Old Believer Denominations and Sects That Have Separated Themselves from Orthodoxy', issued on 17 October 1906, permitted the free existence of Molokan religious societies, which, inter alia, received the right to register acts of civil status. The Khlysty, however, continued to be regarded as 'perverted sects' and were not allowed to be legalised. The police authorities began to receive numerous applications from Khlysty to be registered as Spiritual Christians, i.e. Molokan. This on 31 March 1914, Sergey Petrov Mitryasov, Petr Timofeev Mitryasov, Dmitriy Vasilyev Loginov and Praskovya Semenova Mitryasova, peasants of the village of Mishukovo, applied to the Ulatăr police authority, declaring '[W]e have hitherto maintained and professed the Great Russian faith, but having studied the Holy Scriptures, we consider it better and more spiritually beneficial to maintain the religion of the Spiritual Christians, and we renounce the Orthodox religion, and for this reason we request the police authority to inform the priest of Mishukovo and the proper authorities of this, regarding us as free of the Orthodox religion and the ministry of its priests' [GAUO, f. 88, op. 4, d. 295, f. 3].

Nevertheless the authorities, evidently by a number of signs (the existence of the sect of Khlysty in that locality for a long time, their ecstatic meetings and their attitude towards marriage), accurately

identified the new 'Molokans' as Khlysty. In the police report for 1912 on the number of sectarians in the Simbirsk Governorate, it is indicated directly that these are Khlysty 'who call themselves "Spiritual Christians" or "Molokans", of whom 274 have so far been identified, including the aforementioned in the village of Mishukovo' [GAUO, f. 134, op. 7, d. 916, f. 9v]. The Molokan presbyters were not misled by the self-identification of the Khlysty either. In 1912 the Khlysty of the village of Sobachenki in the Simbirsk Governorate invited a real Molokan presbyter, Stepan Kichaev of the village of Romodanovo in the Penza Governorate, to a discussion with the diocesan missionary in order to convince him that they really were Molokans. However, Kichaev, on hearing of the opinions of the Khlysty on marriage, refused to take part in the discussions with the missionary [GAUO, f. 134, op. 7, d. 924, f. 7]. In 1911 in the Novouzensk Uyezd, Samara Governorate, Mormon sectarians recruited from among the Khlysty and Molokans also attempted to be legalised under the name of 'Free Spiritual Christians', but had no success ['O "svobodnykh dukhovnykh khristianakh"' 1911]. The age-old tradition of concealing their faith told in their self-identification: for the Khlysty of the beginning of the twentieth century, belonging to the community of the Molokans, which was more or less tolerated by the authorities, fulfilled the same function of concealment as their forefathers' attendance at Orthodox worship. Besides, officially belonging to a Molokan community was cheaper: the Khlysty did not have to buy off the priest or give bribes to the police so that they would leave them alone.

The Khlysty themselves were well aware of the difference between them and the Molokans. In their autograph depositions, which seem to have been written without immediate pressure from the investigators (at least, no signs of such pressure are in evidence), the sectarians openly call their movement Khlyst. For example, Sergey Fomichev writes when setting down the history of his community 'The sect of Khlysty in the town of Ulatăr has existed since about 1890' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4622, f. 83]. Moreover, the names of 'Spiritual Christians' and 'Molokans' are not to be found at all in the depositions. These terms appear only in documents intended for the upper levels of the administration (the Public Prosecutor's Office of the USSR, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR) and serve to place the movement in a favourable light as having suffered persecution under the tsars.

It should also be borne in mind that the Khlysty of the twentieth century were not the illiterate peasants that mid-nineteenth-century missionaries imagined them to be. Some of them even had higher education and, one may presume, were acquainted with the basic works of research into the sects of their time. For example, the authors read by Sergey Fomichev included Owen, Chernyshevsky,

August Bebel and Tolstoy [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4622, f. 93v]. When Mikhail Yufin's home was searched, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Hermann Oldenberg's *Buddha: Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* were found [Ibid., d. 4623, f. 117]. So it is by no means improbable that the sectarians were acquainted with the works of the researchers A. Prugavin and V. Bonch-Bruyevich, writing in a Narodnik and Marxist vein, who regarded the sectarian movements as a form of social protest. The Khristovery understood very well that these authors were ideologically close to the communist authorities and referred to them in order to justify their own position, stressing that their religion was 'progressive'. 'It is time to stop religious persecution in the twentieth century after the birth of Christ in a civilised, free and democratic country. It is time to renounce this mediaeval barbarity, which can only be explained by the local authorities' total ignorance of the nature of the religious teachings of the sect of Spiritual Christians (see the research of Bonch-Bruyevich and Prugavin, which gives a certain idea of the external side of the cult). The reality of this religion is much more profound, much purer and more perfect than many other religions, much more progressive and civilised, and stands much closer to the reality of socialism, since the first apostles and Christ were persecuted only because their teaching was not rightly understood, and therefore the teaching of Christ and the apostles is alive to this day and has been preserved in greater purity in those sects which separated themselves from the official and dominant religions that adapted themselves to the requirements of the ruling classes and governments,' proclaimed Mikhail Yufin [Ibid., d. 4624, f. 197_6].

Besides, such terms as 'Khlysty' and 'Molokans' were ideological constructs, imposed on the sects by their adversaries, the missionaries, the police, and also the research community. To themselves, all the old Russian sectarians, as, indeed, were the adherents of analogous movements in other religious traditions (such as the Sabbateans in Judaism), were 'the faithful', 'the people of God', 'Spiritual Christians'. In fact, even the name 'Christian' was in origin an external term, and the early Christians themselves called themselves *ma'ămin*im, that is, believers. In such a case, if the external terminology did not have negative connotations, it stood a chance of becoming a movement's self-designation. At the same time, representatives of different sectarian movements were aware of the differences between them and applied external terminology for self-identification in, so to speak, 'secular' contexts.

The main 'students' of the sect of Khlysty in the USSR were by no means the scholarly community, but those whose job it was to do it, i.e. the representatives of the repressive apparatus of the Soviet regime. Detectives and agents of the special services became willy-nilly the main collectors of sectarian folklore, interviewers of the

members of sectarian movements and observers of their religious practices. The 'research programme' of the Soviet special services was not much different from the tasks which missionaries and officials had set themselves in prerevolutionary times, and therefore prerevolutionary handbooks on the study of the sects fully corresponded to the way members of the state security apparatus viewed the problem. Effectively, the directives of the central apparatus of the NKGB and the tasks set by the state security leadership were a sort of 'research programme'. In the texts of the documents published we can see how the paradigm of prerevolutionary research into mystical sectarianism is gradually replaced by the paradigm of the struggle with the sects in Soviet conditions. For the prerevolutionary missionary or official the sectarians were religious schismatics who were to be converted to Orthodoxy or else isolated from society so that they did not infect other people with their heresy. The representatives of the Soviet 'organs' look on the sects in exactly the same way: the published directives demand 'prophylaxis and promoting disaffection amongst the ordinary "Khlyst" sectarians with the aim of cutting them off from the influence of the reactionary leading activists.' It is telling that the historical note on the Khlysty published here uncritically includes the admirers of John of Kronstadt (the Johannite Porfiryevtsy) among the Khristovery, in full accord with the prerevolutionary tendency to regard all manifestations of unauthorised mysticism as Khlyst. It is interesting that the Khristovery themselves, under the influence of literature about the sects, began to make contact with the Johannites. For example, the leader of the Khlysty of Ulatăr, Mikhail Yufin, testified under interrogation that 'when I was studying in Leningrad I attended meetings of the sect of "Porfiryevtsy"' [GIA ChR, f. R-1458s, op. 16s, d. 2914, f. 84v].

However, the agents of the central apparatus of the special services can hardly have had direct contact with the sectarians, or, to use academic jargon, 'have worked in the field'. It is interesting to juxtapose this term used by anthropologists and the agents' professional expression, 'working on the ground'. Alexander Panchenko, comparing the working methods of collectors of folklore and detectives in the eighteenth century, remarks that the texts obtained in the course of investigations and in the work of folklore collectors 'are entirely analogous in character'. He concludes that the work of anthropologists and detectives should be considered as specific activities for acquiring meanings. The texts themselves may thus be regarded as a sort of 'added value' in the form of ideal products or 'symbolic values' [Panchenko 2001: 9].

Accepting Panchenko's conclusions, I would like to add that the 'field' or 'ground' may in this case be imagined as a peculiar expanse for the 'class struggle'. For people being interrogated (as, indeed,

for informants during field research) the actual interrogation (interview) is a process of alienation, and the texts that come into being as a result of it are nothing else but the product of this alienation, when the words spoken are literally predominant over the man. This approach opens new possibilities for interpreting anthropological information. Essentially, the problem of the alienation of symbolic values has long been examined in this light by left-leaning Western sociology from Marcuse to Bourdieu.

In connection with this, the researcher is faced with the problem of verifying the data that (s)he has obtained. The evaluation of reliability in this case means not only a scrupulous comparison of the new information with the totality of that which already exists, but also an evaluation of the motives behind one utterance or another, which brings the work of a student of grass-roots religious movements even closer to that of a criminal investigator. The events of the past are a sort of 'crime scene' in the form of the 'clues' that the researcher has discovered, and his / her task is to study the scene, identify those things which in one way or another are at odds with the general aspect of the place, analyse the clues that have been left, and on the base of the analysis of the clues recreate the sequence of events that make up the subject of the investigation.

The directives were compiled on the basis of material obtained by low-level agents and informers. Information from the informers is specially interesting. The informer's activity may be seen as a sort of participant observation, and the accuracy with which what had been seen and heard was described depended directly on the extent to which the agent / observer was integrated into the life of the religious community. In the documents published the ritual of the ecstatic meeting is described somewhat schematically, so one may assume that the agent had been specially infiltrated into the community and was not a believing sectarian. But in any case such reports are practically the only sources that describe the religious practices of the sectarians as directly observed.

Documents of the Soviet special services dealing with religious policy in the USSR, including the persecution of believers, are currently being actively declassified and published in Ukraine. Among such initiatives it is worth mentioning D. V. Vedeneev's book *Ateisty v mundirakh* (Atheists in Uniform), which is based on archival documents of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and recounts operations carried out by the state security agencies from the 1920s to the 1960s [Vedeneev 2016]. With support from Ukrainian colleagues, researchers from Russia are also able to have access to documents of this sort. The present publication became possible thanks to the kind assistance of the historian Roman Skakun of Lviv, who provided photocopies of the material. The documents that are

of interest to us were deposited in fond 9 of the Branch State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (OGA SBU). The materials of this archive cover the period from 1919 to 1991 and include 971 items. They preserve orders and directions from the leadership of the state security organs of the Ukrainian SSR (from 1921), orders and directions from the leadership of the state security organs of the USSR (from 1934), minutes of meetings, reports and decisions of the collegium of the KGB attached to the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR (from 1961), reports, indications, reviews and orientations regarding the lines and directions of operations, relating to personnel, and to all aspects of providing for the activities of the state security organs of the USSR (from 1946) and reports, indications, reviews and orientations regarding the lines and directions of operations, relating to personnel, and to all aspects of providing for the activities of the state security organs of the Ukrainian SSR (from 1945) [Danilenko 2010: 23].

The documents published here are yellowed printed or typewritten pages, copied using the technology available in the 1940s.[1] The pages have round holes made by a punch so that they could be collected in a folder. Most of them bear resolutions in pencil of various colours (which have been deciphered as far as possible). Special terms are also explained in the commentaries. Obvious misprints, mistakes of grammar and mistakes of punctuation have been corrected.

1. Directive of the People's Commissar for State Security of the USSR, V. Merkulov, on Intensifying the Struggle against the Sect of Khlysty

OGA SBU, f. 9, d. 17, f. 2–2v. Above the text is a nearly illegible resolution in black pencil, beginning with the words 'To Comrades Pogrebnyy...' In the top left-hand corner has been added in blue ink, vertically, '13X-6 24.1-45 2 copies'.

234[2]

TO THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSARS FOR STATE SECURITY
OF THE UNION AND AUTONOMOUS REPUBLICS
AND DEPARTMENT HEADS OF THE NKGB
OF TERRITORIES AND REGIONS

The NKGB of the USSR is in possession of data on the growing anti-Soviet activity of the so-called 'Khlyst' sectarians.

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1 That is, mimeograph machines (stencil duplicators) [Eds.].

2 This is the number of the document in the general collection of directives, instructions and orientations of the NKGB of the USSR.

It is established that the activists of the 'Khlysty' ('Christs', 'Mothers of God', 'prophets') are trying to restore the previously destroyed leading centres with the aim of carrying out organised anti-Soviet work.

The anti-Soviet underground of the 'Khlysty' was partly liquidated in operations during 1943 and 1944.

Material from agents and investigators has established that the illegal groups of 'Khlysty' of that underground, which existed in the Kuybyshev, Ulyanovsk, Chkalov and Gorky Oblasts and in the Chuvash ASSR, were subordinated to a single anti-Soviet leading centre headed by Suslin S. I., known as the 'Christ' among the 'Khlyst' sectarians.

Supplying herewith an orientation on the 'Khlyst' sectarians and their anti-Soviet activity, the NKGB of the USSR

PROPOSES:

1. On the basis of the data set out in the present orientation, to take measures to intensify the work of agents among the 'Khlyst' sectarians, the discovery and liquidation of any anti-Soviet groups and organisations from among the 'Khlyst' sectarians that may arise.

2. With the same aims, to carry out a careful revision of active and archived cases involving 'Khlyst' sectarians, and to take special control of those that present the greatest operational interest.

3. To pay special attention to finding and actively dealing with the so-called 'Christs', 'Mothers of God' and 'prophets', who are the main organisers and leaders of this underground.

4. To set about embedding a network of agents amongst the 'Khlyst' sectarians, and first of all to create qualified route agents[1] capable of deep penetration into the underground and unmasking its hostile activity.

The NKGB of the USSR is to be informed of the results of the work undertaken in conformance with the present directive.

Enclosure: Orientation on the 'Khlyst' sectarians.

People's Commissar for State Security of the USSR
State Security Commissar class 1 V. MERKULOV

No. 6
5 January 1945
Moscow

[1] 'A route agent (*agent marshrutnyy*) is an agent of the state security organs who carries out tasks along a particular line of the Cheka's work while travelling along defined routes. Route agents are mostly used for discovering particularly dangerous state criminals and unmasking illegal anti-Soviet nationalist or sectarian groups' [*Kontrrazvedyvatelnyy slovar* 1972: 9].

2. Orientation on the 'Khlyst' sectarians[1]

OGA SBU, f. 9, d. 17, ff. 3–6v. Printed. On the last page are the signatures of those agents who had read it, in various pencils, and the date 22/II-45.

ORIENTATION
on the 'Khlyst' sectarians

The sectarian movement of the so-called 'Khlysty' arose in the middle of the seventeenth century in Russia during the reign of Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov.

This was a period when feudal serf-owning reaction was in the ascendant and the Orthodox Church was all-powerful.

The power of Patriarch Nikon at that time was compared to the sun in the sky, and the power of the Tsar to the moon, which derives its light from the sun.

The first group of the sect of Khlysty appeared in 1645 on the territory of the former Yuryevsky Uyezd of the Kostroma Governorate. Its founder was the peasant Daniil Filippovich, who had formerly belonged to the Priestless Old Believers.

He set out his teaching in twelve commandments:

1. I am that God who was foretold by the prophets, and have come down to earth to save the human race. Seek no other God.

2. There is no other teaching; seek none.

3. Stand upon that whereon you are set.

4. Drink no strong drink.

5. Commit no fleshly sin.

6. Do not marry. And let him who is married live with his wife as with a sister. Give not in marriage, and set asunder those who are to be given in marriage.

7. Use no foul language, do not use swearwords in cursing, and do not even pronounce the name of the Devil: call him 'the Enemy'.

8. Do not attend weddings or christenings, do not frequent gatherings where there is strong liquor.

9. Do not steal. If anyone steals but a single kopeck, in the next world that kopeck will be put on the top of his head, and when it melts from the fire of Hell, only then will he receive forgiveness.

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[1] The orientation is part of the foregoing document, but on account of its historical importance and stylistic independence I have decided to number it separately.

10. Keep your faith secret and reveal it to no one, not even your father or mother, and if necessary, you must endure the fire, and the knout, and the axe, but do not reveal anything about the faith.

11. Visit one another, be hospitable, love one another, keep the commandments.

12. Believe the Holy Spirit.[1]

Daniil Filippovich's teaching, which did not reject an outward regard for the Orthodox Church, spread rapidly, first among the local peasants in the Kostroma Governorate, and then to the Nizhny Novgorod Governorate and other governorates.

A few years later, after organising the first group of the sect, Daniil Filippovich called one of his close disciples, the peasant Ivan Timofeevich Suslov from the Vladimir Governorate, 'his' son, that is, 'the Son of God', or 'Christ'.[2] This was the first 'Christ' among the Khlysty. For the sectarians of this group and those close to them he became their faith and truth, the almighty and all-knowing 'holy man'.

Suslov in turn chose twelve 'apostles' from among his disciples, with whom he spread the teaching of Daniil Filippovich in the Vladimir, Kostroma and Nizhny Novgorod Governorates.

Having planted a great number of Khlyst groups in these governorates, Suslov soon moved to Moscow, where he began his greatest sectarian activity.

In Moscow he built his own house, which he called 'the House of Zion', or 'the New Jerusalem', and which later became a place of pilgrimage and large-scale gatherings of Khlysty. The Khlyst religion, brought from the far-flung little villages of the former Kostroma Governorate, spread rapidly among the suburban population of Moscow.

The teaching of Suslov and his adherents soon became known to the authorities in Moscow, and he was arrested.

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[1] The so-called 'Commandments of Danila Filippovich' were discovered during an investigation into the Khysty of Moscow in the late 1830s and are part of the folkloric tradition of a particular community of sectarians. Later researchers, who imagined the Khlyst movement to be a doctrinal system (by analogy with the Christianity of the Church), accepted this tradition uncritically as some sort of creed derived from the common founder of the Khlyst movement. The publication of the 'Commandments' became a commonplace of works setting out the history of the Khlyst movement. However, as archival and folkloric material shows, there is no basis for regarding these commandments as common to all the Khlysty, let alone twentieth-century communities. Moreover, twentieth-century sectarians themselves read literature on the history of their sect and could borrow some kinds of folklore from scholarly texts.

[2] 'A few years after he began preaching Daniil Filippov called one of his disciples, the peasant Ivan Timofeevich Suslov from the Vladimir Governorate, his son, that is the Son of God, the Christ' ['Khlysty' 1903: 403].

Released from imprisonment in 1658, Suslov set about disseminating his teaching with even greater zeal. He built four more houses in Moscow, where large gatherings of Khlyst sectarians were systematically conducted, led by 'prophets' whom he had specially appointed.

The influence of the Khlysty was so prominent at that time that it even began to penetrate the monasteries.

After Suslov's death in 1716, the *strelets* Prokopiy Lupkin, who lived in Nizhny Novgorod, proclaimed himself the next 'Christ', calling his wife Akulina Ivanovna 'the Mother of God'.[1]

'Christs' and 'Mothers of God' became a characteristic manifestation of the Khlyst movement. The name 'Khlyst' itself probably came from one of these sectarians' religious rites, during which they beat themselves on the body with withes, rods and horsewhips (*khlysty*).[2]

The Khlysty call themselves, in accordance with Prokopiy Lupkin's teaching, 'the People of God'.

Lupkin was just such an authority for the Khlyst sectarians as his predecessor the 'Christ' Suslov had been. When they met him the Khlysty called him tsar, crossed themselves before him and kissed his hands.

Lupkin first disseminated his teaching in the Nizhny Novgorod and Yaroslavl Governorates, and somewhat later in Moscow. At that time the Khlyst movement spread more and more not only among the ordinary people and merchants, but even among the clergy.

The first criminal case against Khlyst sectarians took place in 1733: seventy so-called 'blasphemers' were accused. By the court's sentence the nun Anastasia and the priest-monks Tikhon and Filaret were beheaded, and the rest exiled to distant monasteries.[3] This was the first heavy blow inflicted by the imperial government on the now widespread sectarian movement of the Khlysty in Russia.

But the Khlyst movement was not destroyed by these measures. It continued to spread an exert influence over the most backward strata of the population of the eastern regions of the country.

A new 'Christ', the peasant Andrey Petrov, appeared in Moscow in 1740. There were large gatherings of Khlysty at his house near the

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1 'After Suslov the *strelets* Prokopiy Lupkin, who lived in Nizhny Novgorod, proclaimed himself Christ. He called his wife Akulina Ivanovna the Mother of God' ['Khlysty' 1903: 403].

2 'The name "Khlyst" came from one of these sectarians' religious rites, during which they whip and beat themselves on the body with withes, rods, etc.' ['Khlysty' 1903: 403].

3 'The first criminal case against the Khlysty took place in 1733, involving seventy-eight persons. Three of them — the nun Anastasia from Ivanovsky Convent and the priest-monks Tikhon and Filaret — were beheaded, and the rest exiled to distant monasteries' ['Khlysty' 1903: 404].

Sukharev Tower. Soon all Moscow was talking about him as 'a blessed holy man'. His house was frequented not only by the ordinary people, but also by people of status and position. Andrey Petrov himself was an honoured guest in the homes of counts and princes.[1] Thanks to his influence, Khlyst teachings penetrated the monasteries and even the secular clergy.

The Khlysty who fled Moscow to avoid arrest in 1733–34 actively promoted their doctrine in the Nizhny Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Vladimir, Kostroma, Ryazan, Tver, Simbirsk, Penza and Vologda Governorates, and eventually the Khlyst movement reached St Petersburg.

In 1745, a hundred years after the first sect of Khlysty had appeared, there was a second criminal case against the Khlysty. 416 persons were accused, among them priests, monks and nuns. The sentence against them was very severe. Many of them were exiled for life to Siberia and to distant monasteries.[2]

But the Khlyst movement continued to spread even after this.

It attained a particularly great influence at the beginning of the nineteenth century during the reign of Alexander I, when mystical ideas were at their widest extent.[3]

At this time the Khlyst movement rooted itself in aristocratic social circles in St Petersburg. Chief among these aristocrats was Princess Tatarinova.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the Khlyst sectarian movement spread to the south of Russia and in particular the Caucasus.

At the end of the nineteenth century groups of Khlysty appeared in the Samara and Orenburg Governorates. Here also there arose and spread the so-called Shaloputstvo (a kind of Khlyst movement), the homeland of which was the former Ekaterininsky Governorate, and its leader was the peasant Grigoriy Shevchenko.

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1 'A new "Christ", the peasant Andrey Petrov, appeared in Moscow in 1740. There were large gatherings of Khlysty at his house, which was situated near the Sukharev Tower. Andrey Petrov adopted the mask of holy folly, became a silentiary and foretold something of the future. <…> His house was frequented not only by the ordinary people, but also by people of position, who wanted to see the holy man and receive some prophecy from him. Andrey Petrov himself visited the homes of Count Sheremetev, princess Cherkasskaya and others' ['Khlysty' 1903: 404].

2 'The Khlysty who fled Moscow during the prosecution of 1733–34 propagated their sect in the Nizhny Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Vladimir, Kostroma, Ryazan, Tver, Simbirsk, Penza and Vologda Governorates and in St Petersburg. In 1745 a second criminal case was initiated against the Khlysty, lasting until 1752. 416 persons were accused, among them priests, monks and nuns. Many of them were exiled with hard labour, and others sent and to distant monasteries or sent back to their previous places of residence' ['Khlysty' 1903: 404].

3 'The sect spread with the greatest success during the reign of the Emperor Alexander I, which was favourable for the flourishing of mystical ideas' ['Khlysty' 1903: 404].

The most original of the Khlyst leaders is thought to be Radaev, a great theoretician and a talented propagator of Khlyst teaching. He may be said to have systematised Khlyst doctrine.[1]

The Khlysty were not as one in their dogmatic teaching. Separate tendencies may be identified within the sect of Khlysty.

One such tendency (or sect) are the so-called Sober Ones (*trezvenniki*), who put the absolute abstention from alcoholic drink at the heart of their teaching.

'Always be sober (*trezvyy*)' — hence the name 'Trezvenniki'.

Adherents of this tendency acknowledge marriage and family life. The main organisers of the Trezvenniki sectarians were Ivan Churikov (Ivan Samarskiy) in Leningrad and Ivan Koloskov in Moscow.

In 1897 a sect calling itself the 'New Israel' separated itself from the Khlysty of the Caucasus. Its first leader was Vasiliy Lubkov, a peasant of the Voronezh Governorate.

This sect was often called the Lubkovtsy after its founder's name. They are called the 'New Israel' because they regard themselves as the chosen people of God, like the Israelites in the Old Testament.[2]

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[1] 'The deftest and most original Christ of the nineteenth century was beyond doubt Radaev from the Arzamas "ship" in the Nizhny Novgorod Governorate in the 1840s. <...> He had a good knowledge of the Scriptures and some of the Church Fathers, was acquainted with the teachings of the mystics of that period and was the first to try to give the Khlyst doctrine on the spirit and spiritual revelation a theoretical basis in his polemical correspondence with the priest Minervin and in his dogmatic writings; he was thus the first theologian of the Khlyst sect' [Nikolskiy 1983: 297]. The village mystic Vasiliy Radaev, who combined the Jesus Prayer with sexual excesses, became 'the Khlyst theologian' thanks to I. Dobrotvorskiy, who came into possession of a notebook with Radaev's notes and his correspondence with the priest Minervin, and the writer P. Melnikov (Andrey Pechersky), who took part in the investigation of Radaev as a special agent of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Dobrotvorskiy and Melnikov were under the misapprehension that Radaev was a Khlyst, and ever since, the supposedly Khlyst 'doctrine of the mystical death and mystical resurrection' has passed from publication to publication on the subject of the Khlysty [Dobrotvorskiy 1869: 66–100; Melnikov 1909: 316–31]. This established opinion was vigorously rebutted by D. G. Konovalov: 'Such a view of Radaev must be repudiated with the utmost vigour as unsupported by any factual data and contradicting the most reliable information about the nature of the sect of Khlysty. The investigation did not establish any connection between Radaev and his circle and any Khlyst community or with individual Khlyst sectarians' [Konovalov 1914, 3: 112]. N. M. Nikolskiy approached the prerevolutionary publications uncritically, so that the passage about Radaev found a place in his *History of the Russian Church*. Contemporary researchers continue to find reasons to associate Radaev with the Khlysty; however, as Alexander Panchenko notes, 'Radaev's teaching did indeed have a number of features that were typologically similar to Khristovshchina, but a careful analysis of the material from the investigation convinces us that neither Radaev himself nor the investigators had any direct acquaintance with the ritual practices, folklore or ideology of Khristovshchina or the Skoptsy' [Panchenko 2002: 22].

[2] 'This sect is often known as the "Lubkovtsy Sect" after its founder's name. It separated itself from the Khlyst community of the Caucasus; the Khlysty only call themselves Israel because they falsely regard themselves as "the chosen people of God", as once the Israelites of the Old Testament really were' [Butkevich 1910: 116].

The New Israelites' teaching about Jesus Christ and the Mother of God is the same as that of the Khlysty.[1]

Lubkov himself did not deny that he was the 'Christ'.[2] The sect regarded the woman he lived with as 'our mother the Mother of God'.

The sect of the 'New Israel' had its greatest influence on the backward sections of the population of the Voronezh, Ryazan and Tambov Governorates.

A less significant tendency within the Khlyst movement is the sect of 'Johannites' or Khlysty of the 'Kiseleva denomination'.

This sect received its name from that of Ioann Sergeev, archpriest of the cathedral of Kronstadt, whom the Johannites regard as 'God incarnate'. They are called Khlysty of the Kiseleva denomination from the name of their 'Mother of God', Porfiriia Kiseleva. This name was officially given to them by the former Holy Synod in 1912.

According to the doctrine of the Johannites, Christ became incarnate for the last time in Father John of Kronstadt and they do not recognise any further incarnations of him.[3] This is the main difference between them and the other tendencies among the Khlysty.

The propaganda of Johannite teachings had considerable success among the people. The community was dispersed all over Russia. They were united by the Johannite journal *Kronshtadtskiy mayak*. The sectarians also published Johannite brochures and distributed them widely.

In giving the present short survey of the history of the genesis and evolution of the Khlyst sectarian movement, it should be said that it first arose and spread widely on the territory of Russia.

The peoples of the countries of Western Europe and the East have hardly experienced any influence from the reactionary teaching of the Khlysty, with the exception of Austrian Galicia, where the Khlyst movement also put down deep roots among the peasant population.

Under Soviet rule the sectarian movement in our country suffered a devastating blow. The unprecedented rise in the cultural and material condition of the working masses has allowed religious sectarian and mystical ideas to be swiftly eradicated from the consciousness of the backward part of our population.

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1 'The teaching of the New Israelite sect about God, Christ, metempsychosis, etc. is in essence no different from the overall religious teaching of the Khlysty' [Butkevich 1910: 117].

2 'Lubkov does not deny that he is the "Christ"' [Butkevich 1910: 118].

3 'According to the teaching of the Johannites "Christ became incarnate for the last time in Father John of Kronstadt, and there will be no more incarnations of him, because the end of the world will soon come"' [Skvortsov 1912: 231].

However, the Khlyst movement remains very much alive in our day. An example of this is the discovery and liquidation of a large anti-Soviet formation of Khlysty in 1943–44, numbering up to 1,000 members, organised in small groups and scattered over various oblasts and republics of the country.

Such groups have been discovered in the Kuybyshev, Chkalov, Ulyanovsk and Gorky Oblasts, in the Chuvash ASSR and the Dagestan ASSR, and in other places.

As came to light during the current year's examinations and investigations, all the said underground groups of Khlyst sectarians were organisationally closely connected with each other and directed in the hostile work they undertook by a common leading centre, headed by Semen Ivanovich Suslin, who was called the 'Christ' among the Khlysty.

Suslin joined the sectarian movement of the Khlysty in the 90s of the previous century; before the revolution he had his own two-storeyed house in Kuybyshev, was exiled for three years for anti-Soviet activity, and in recent times has not worked anywhere, living in his own house in the village of Koltubanovka, Chkalov Oblast.

Suslin's closest assistants in leading the Khlyst organisation were the 'prophets' he had appointed, Ivan Afanasyevich Tyumkaev, his first deputy, the leader of the group of Khlysty at Zubchaninovka, Kuybyshev Oblast, Efrem Vasilyevich Nurdin, the leader of the illegal group of Khlysty in the town of Kinel in the same oblast, and Tikhon Mikhaylovich Kaboskin, the leader of the groups of Khlysty at Kryazh, Kuybyshev Oblast.

Communications between the centre and Suslin and the illegal groups of Khlysty were maintained through special couriers and messengers, chosen from among the most reliable illegal sectarians. One of the most active and trusted messengers was Suslin's own wife Tatyana (the sectarians' 'Mother of God').

It has also been established that the Khlyst underground had at its disposal secret and safe houses, which served at the same time as places where illegal persons could hide out. It is known that one such house functioned in Kinel not far from the railway station, owned by the active sectarian Grigoriy Vasilyevich Goryushkin.

The material base of the organisation consisted of voluntary contributions from its members, both in money and in kind.

The Khlysty did not conduct any congresses or conferences, since Suslin decided all questions by himself. At the same time the organisation conducted systematic illegal gatherings of the groups, open only to reliable 'brothers and sisters'; outsiders were, as a rule, not admitted. In cases when these outsiders did get into the gatherings,

all the Khlysty were warned to be cautious and their ritual was confined to prayers.

Usually at these illegal gatherings, besides the so-called 'ecstatic meetings', anti-Soviet agitation took place, slanderous inventions were disseminated, and defeatist attitudes expressed.

The majority of Khlyst sectarians are by conviction violent opponents of collective farms and of service in the Red Army, and moreover those who are liable to be called up for the Red Army try by all means to avoid mobilisation, having recourse for this purpose to bribing doctors, exhausting their organism by fasting, feigning illness, etc.[1]

In addition to this, members of the organisation recruit new members from among the backward and uncultured strata of society.

Suslin's dogmatic teaching hardly differs from that of his predecessors and may be subsumed under the following heads:

Only this earthly life exists, they do not recognise life after death. The spirit of a good and righteous man, in their opinion, migrates after death into another person, and the spirit of a bad and wicked man into one of the lower animals. All good people bear within themselves the image of Christ, and therefore the Khlysty do not recognise icons and do not venerate them, but venerate only people like themselves. They reject fasting, prayer, baptism, marriage and the breaking of bread.

They understand the scriptures spiritually. They do not recognise the teachings of Christ or any sort of learned or literary book either. They are guided in all things by autosuggestion and Suslin's 'prophecies'. For them Suslin is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. The Kingdom of God, as explained by Suslin, will come when there will be no evil on earth, and when the world will be governed by believing Khlysty.[2]

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[1] This might indeed happen. In Ulatăr, as S. Fomichev reports, '[d]uring the war a certain part of the sectarians of military age began to avoid conscription into the army, feigning various kinds of illness. Thus Yakov Ivanovich Filippov reduced himself to a state of inanition by fasting and was discharged from the army on account of illness. His son feigned epilepsy' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4622, f. 93v].

[2] It is hard to say to what extent all this 'dogma' corresponded to reality. It may be based on the records of the interrogations of Suslin and other Khristovery. Such questions could have been asked by the interrogators, even though in general they were not particularly interested in religious doctrine. One might compare this creed with that expressed by M. Yufin: 'Meanwhile the essence of this sect's religious convictions consists basically in a spiritual understanding of the teachings of Christ as set forth in the Gospels, and a sounder and more critical study of the essence of this teaching almost without any ritual. It is acknowledged that the service of God consists in keeping the Divine Commandments set forth in the Gospels, that is, in high moral self-perfection according to the Scriptures: "Be ye holy, for I am holy"; and Christ says: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Only through a strictly moral life and love for God and one's neighbour can one attain to communion with the spirit of God, which is what the people of this sect seek for in their prayers' [GIA ChR, f. 2669, op. 3, d. 4624, ff. 1975–6v].

The particular sign by which Khlyst sectarians may be distinguished from the many other sects is their preaching of 'ecstatic meetings' (divine service). We give a short description of one the 'ecstatic meetings' that took place at an illegal gathering at Kryazh, Kuybyshev Oblast, in 1943.

The gathering began with the singing of Khlyst hymns and songs, all the singers beating time with their hands and feet. The preacher gave an explanation after each song.

Then the 'prophetesses' began to come out into the middle of the room and shout out commands to stand firm on the path of truth, since there would soon be an end to persecution. This was followed by the shouting out of incoherent sounds and meaningless words ('prophecy in tongues'). One Khlyst woman shouted in ecstasy that soon there would be freedom, the jailhouses and prisons would be opened and out captives would return. The other Khlysty were muttering 'the spirit, the spirit, the spirit', during this.

After the prophecies, four women came out singing and dancing, and began to dance with lightning speed. Somewhat later four more women joined them, and, putting their arms round each other, began to whirl round with dizzy speed in the so-called 'little wheel'. All the rest stood around in the 'big wheel' and stamped their feet, clapped their hands, whistled, hissed and squealed with all their might.

After this a 'prophet' stepped forth and did some complicated dance, at first by himself, and then he was joined by [illegible because of a hole punched through it. — *A.B.*]] women and they all began to execute complex figures in time with the Khlysty surrounding them.

Late at night, bowing down to the ground to each other, the Khlysty departed.

All those present wore white.

Dissensions have been observed within the anti-Soviet organisation of Khlysty headed by Suslin, and these have led to the separation of a certain part of the Khlyst sectarians. One separated part of the sectarians was headed by the preacher Malkov (the 'Malkovtsy'), and another, the so-called 'Old Israel' organisation of Khlysty, by the preacher Mikheev (the 'Mikheevtsy'). There were no disagreements of principle amongst them, except that Malkov and Mikheev do not recognise S. I. Suslin as 'Christ'. According to their teaching all are equal and Christ abides in all of them.

At present the main leaders of the unmasked anti-Soviet formation of the Khlysty have been arrested, except for Malkov, who has retreated deep underground and is being searched for.

From all of the above it is clear that the Khlyst movement is the most reactionary and a deeply secret sectarian underground. Even

in our time it continues to exercise a harmful influence over backward strata of the population, distracting them from the work of building socialism and turning some of them into a weapon of the enemies of Soviet rule.

Head of the Fifth Section of the Second Directorate
of the NKGB of the USSR
Commissar for State Security KARPOV

3. Supplementary directive of the NKGB of the USSR concerning the intensification of the struggle with the sect of Khlysty

OGA SBU, f. 9, d. 87, ff. 288–9v. Photographic copy from typescript. At the beginning of the document there is a note in red pencil: 'Comrade Uglov! Provide me with all the material on churchmen and sectarians, including the Khlysty. Deadline 26 I 45. Signature. 24 I 45. K.' At the end of the document, in blue ink: 'To Comrade Masalov. 1. To the leadership and executives. 2. Send the directive to the heads of RO[1] and GO.[2] 3. Develop means of intensifying the work on the Khlysty. Date. Signature.'

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'APPROVED'
PEOPLE'S COMMISSAR FOR STATE SECURITY OF THE USSR
General of the Army
V. MERKULOV

TO THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSARS FOR STATE SECURITY
OF UNION AND AUTONOMOUS REPUBLICS,
HEADS OF THE UNKGB OF TERRITORIES AND REGIONS

It is established, on the basis of materials received by the NKGB of the USSR, that there has recently been a surge in the hostile activities of the 'Khlyst' sectarians in a number of oblasts of the Soviet Union.

The greatest increase in the hostile activities of the Khlyst underground has been observed in the Astrakhan, Voronezh, Kuybyshev, Molotov, Penza, Ryazan, Tambov, Saratov, Ulyanovsk, and Chkalov Oblasts and in the Krasnodar Krai.

Analysis of the material received from the UNKGB shows that the members of the Khlyst underground have directed their hostile activity mainly towards seditious work in the collective farms.

In the Astrakhan, Voronezh, Molotov, Penza, and other oblasts the activists of the Khlyst sectarians at their illegal gatherings compel

[1] Regional sections of the NKGB.

[2] Town sections of the NKGB.

the sectarians to leave the collective farms and not to submit to labour discipline.

SALNIKOV, the former chairman of the 'Ural' Collective Farm (Molotov Oblast), after being worked on by the 'Khlysty', became an active sectarian, ruined the discipline in the collective farm and let his house be used for the sectarians' illegal gatherings.

A significant part of the 'Khlyst' sectarians of the Ryazan, Tambov, Ulyanovsk, and Chkalov Oblasts, after being worked on by the preaching activists, refused to pay taxes, buy government bonds or carry out their labour responsibilities.

There have been instances noted when Khlysty have engaged in extremely harmful, bigoted activity.

In addition, the Khlyst activists are energetically recruiting new members to the sect.

Thus, for example, the number of participants in the Khlyst underground rose over the last few months of 1945 to 400 persons, in the Chkalov Oblast, 100 in the Voronezh Oblast, 66 in the Krasnodar Krai, etc.

It is not only ordinary collective farmers and workers who are being attracted to the sect, but also members of the Komsomol, members of the militia, of the collective farm leadership, and pupils at technical and industrial schools (Molotov, Astrakhan, and Chkalov Oblasts).

At the same time as the general growth of the Khlyst underground and the increase in its hostile activity, the Khlyst sectarians are taking active measures to keep their activities strictly secret. An increase in the numbers of safe houses for the Khlysty and their leaders, the so-called 'prophets', 'Mothers of God' and 'Christs', has been observed in the Voronezh, Kuybyshev, and Ryazan Oblasts, among others.

The growth of the Khlyst underground and the connections between the people whom we have investigated in the Astrakhan, Kuybyshev, Molotov, Ulyanovsk, Chkalov and other regions, gives grounds for supposing the existence of a leading centre of 'Khlysty' in deep concealment on the territory of the USSR.

In order to stop the hostile activity of the Khlyst underground and if possible to uncover its existing illegal leading centre, the Second Directorate of the NKGB of the USSR proposes:

1. Guided by directive No. 6 of the NKGB of the USSR of 5 January 1945 and the present orientation, to take decisive measures to strengthen the work on the Khlyst underground, paying special attention to the identification of its leaders, the so-called 'Christs', 'Mothers of God' and 'prophets'.

2. Over the next one or two months to create a network of qualified route agents able to discover the practical hostile work of the participants in this underground. It is desirable to recruit agents of this category from the people who maintain the safe houses and trusted members of the underground — messengers, wandering elders, etc.

3. Carefully to study the connection of the participants in the Khlyst underground with other towns, with the aim of discovering the illegal leading centre of the Khlysty which might exist on the territory of the USSR.

4. To develop and put into practice measures to discover all the safe houses and other places of concealment of illegal 'Khlysty' (wandering elders, messengers, 'prophets', 'Mothers of God' and 'Christs') as possible participants in the illegal centre. To this end to practise silent arrests[1] of wandering elders, messengers, 'prophets' and 'Mothers of God' who are in an illegal situation, subjecting them to immediate and detailed interrogation.

5. Together with processing the participants in the Khlyst underground and preparation for its operational liquidation, to carry out prophylaxis and promote disaffection amongst the ordinary 'Khlyst' sectarians with the aim of cutting them off from the influence of the reactionary leading activists.

The operational liquidation of the Khlyst underground is to be conducted with the sanction of the Second Directorate of the NKGB of the USSR.

The Second Directorate of the NKGB of the USSR is to be informed of the fulfilment of these instructions by 15 November of this year.

HEAD OF THE SECOND DIRECTORATE OF THE NKGB
OF THE USSR
Lieutenant-General FEDOTOV
HEAD OF THE FIFTH SECTION OF THE SECOND
DIRECTORATE
OF THE NKGB OF THE USSR
Major-General KARPOV

No. 105
5 October 1945
Moscow

I certify this is a true copy: [*signature*]

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[1] Silent custody is administrative custody or custody during a criminal investigation which for operative reasons takes place in secret from the contacts of the person arrested and from third parties. The need for silent custody arises when it is intended to carry out operative or investigative measures in respect of the person arrested or his / her accomplices (using the person arrested in an operational game with the enemy, recruiting him / her as an agent, carrying out searches or other investigative actions in respect of his / her accomplices, etc.). Silent custody is used on the same basis as open administrative custody or custody during a criminal investigation [*Kontrrazvedyvatelnyy slovar* 1972: 104].

Abbreviations

GAUO — State Archive of the Ulyanovsk Region

GIA ChR — State Historical Archive of the Chuvash Republic

OGA SBU — Branch State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine

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GAUO, f. 88, op. 4, d. 295. On the registration as members of the sect of Spiritual Christians of Sergey Petrov Mitryasov and others, peasants of the village of Mishukovo, Ulatăr Uyezd, 1914.

GAUO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 257. On halting the activities of the sect of Khlysty called 'the ship' in the town of Ulatăr and correspondence with the Moscow Spiritual Consistory on studying the documents of the case. 1876–1913.

GAUO, f. 134, op. 7, d. 916. On providing the provincial administration with information on Old Believers and sectarians who have apostasised from Orthodoxy, and not from other religions. 1912.

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