

# Religious Dissent in Russia

## Old Believers and their Cultural Heritage



- Covers one of the most dynamic periods in the history of the Old Believers
- A unique example of a free and national press for religious dissenters
- The most prominent and widely read periodicals
- Most materials are not available in the West

State Historical Public Library, Moscow  
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## Old Believers and their cultural heritage

Two new installments complete this exciting series on the cultural and political heritage of religious dissenters in Russia. This collection comprises a wide array of sources gathered from several top libraries in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The new installments expand the collection with books in *kirillicheskii shrift*, polemical monographs in *grazhdanskii shrift*, post-revolutionary materials. Together with previously published periodicals, these materials reflect the turbulent history of Old Believers. It will appeal to Slavists, historians, theology students, and others with a special interest in the study of religious and cultural conflict.

### The Old Believers

The Old Believers (or ‘Old Ritualists’) originated as a group of religious dissenters opposed to Patriarch Nikon’s ritualistic innovations in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The dispute over the revision of the service books, which initially had a religious and cultural character, soon escalated and resulted in the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Persecuted by the authorities for adhering to the old rituals and service books, the Old Believers fled European Russia and settled in the sparsely populated areas of Siberia and the far north. Many of their communities lived in almost complete isolation, thus preserving the old liturgical practices that were crucial to their religious and cultural identity.

After years of persecution, the situation improved for the Old Believers in 1905, when Tsar Nicholas II issued the Edict of Toleration. In 1971, the Russian Orthodox Church revoked the anathemas of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, there are about 2.5 million Old Believers living in Russia, the United States, Canada, Australia and other parts of the world.

The Old Belief is not only a religious movement, but also a social and cultural phenomenon. From the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Old Believers participated increasingly actively in the social and political processes in Russia. Their books and periodicals are a unique historical source for tracing the relations between Old Believer communities and the world at large, and for establishing the role and status of the Old Believers within Russian society, their influence on the social and cultural processes in Russia, their economic activities, and their cooperation with the representatives of other religious creeds.

### Illegal book printing and *samizdat*

Starting in 1653 with the publication of the first amended service book, the Old Believers rejected the alterations imposed by Patriarch Nikon and recognized only those books that predated his reforms. Because the State had a monopoly on book printing and confiscated old liturgical material, an alarming shortage of old religious books soon became felt. The Old Believers responded by printing their own service books in illegal printing houses in Russia, as well as abroad - Austria, Prussia, and the Kingdom of Poland. They also ran secret print shops (Moscow and its surroundings, the Volga region, the Urals, and Siberia) and often succeeded in misleading the authorities by putting a false place of publication on the title page. Historians agree that these illegally produced materials were the first form of *samizdat* literature to appear in Russia.



Andrew, Archbishop of Caesarea. [Commentarius in Apocalypsin. Church Slavica], Moscow, 1913.

### The Golden Age of book printing

The practice of illegal book-printing came to an end with the enactment of the Edict of Tolerance in 1905 – a date generally considered to mark the beginning of the Golden Age of the Old Believers’ book printing.

In only thirteen years more books were published than during the two preceding centuries combined. These years also witnessed a flood of newspapers, journals, calendars and an impressive number of original monographs.

The Old Believers’ book production during the ‘Golden Age’ is estimated to exceed one thousand titles, many of which enjoyed high print runs. Old prayer books dating from before the Nikon reforms were reprinted, some of which for the first time and on the basis of ancient manuscripts: the *Apostolos*, the *Ostrog Bible*, *Stoglav* (a moral codex of ‘hundred chapters’), the famous *Domostroi* and the *Pomorskie otvety* (*Answers from Pomor’e*). For the first time chant books could be accurately printed.

### Old Believer printing houses

After 1905, there were about a dozen Old Believer printing houses throughout the country, for example, in Moscow, Ural’sk, and Nizhnii Novgorod. One of the largest and best known was the one set up in Moscow in 1907 by the prominent businessman, P.P. Riabushinskii. It was housed in a famous building that had been designed by the architect F. Shekhtel’ according to the modern style.

### Publishing in exile

This period of freedom was relatively short, however: In 1917, the Bolsheviks seized power and closed down all religious printing houses. For a while, the Old Believers continued printing books (mostly anti-Soviet material) on Russian soil, but only in those areas that were controlled by the White Movement. Between the second half of the 1920s and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Old Believers were again forced to live in exile. They set up print shops in Harbin (China), Chisinau (which was then in Rumania, but is now the capital of Moldova), Poland, Latvia, Switzerland,

the United States, and Australia. Until 1991, book production in Russia was limited to a few church calendars, and these were strictly censored and scarcely distributed.

### Spiritual heritage

The religious books that were printed prior to Nikon's reforms have always had a sacred status among Old Believers. Considering any alteration in the text a distortion of the Word of God, they have persisted in using the Old Slavic language and the *kirillicheskiĭ shrift*.

Rigorous and uncompromizing, the Old Believers have played an absolutely crucial role in the preservation of the Russian book, the Russian icon and Russia's spiritual heritage at large.

### Installment 1: Periodicals

The series on the Old Believers provides a wide variety of materials that will help to shed new light on the fascinating history of this religious minority and its place in Russian history. The present installment includes the most prominent and widely read Old Believers' periodicals published between 1905 and 1918. The collection includes, amongst others, journals of the *Popovtsy (Zlatostrui, Mirskaia zhizni)*, of the so-called Pomor'e Union (*Shchit very, Vestnik Vserossiiskogo soiuza khristian pomorskogo soglasiia*), the Belokrinskii Hierarchy (*Tserkov', Starobriadcheskaia mysl', Starobriadets*) and the Chapel Consent (*Ural'skii starobriadets*). Published during one of the most dynamic and turbulent periods of Russian history, these periodicals allow us to appreciate the traditional, yet vibrant world of the Old Believers at the eve of the revolution.

### Installment 2: Old Believer Cyrillic-script books

The printing of Old Believer books in *kirillicheskiĭ shrift* is a unique phenomenon in book history. The Old Believer movement carried on the traditions of Russian Orthodox Christianity into the middle of the 20th century. The Old Believer culture was outstanding in its rigorous acceptance of Cyrillic Church Slavonic texts, and in its guarded attitude toward the same



## Новая правда о 1812 году.

Близится столетний юбилей 1812 года. Официальные сферы дѣятельно готовятся торжественно и пышно отпраздновать его. Въ бу ущій музеѣ 1812 года усердно собираются всякія мелкія вещи. порой имѣющія самое отдаленное отношеніе къ эпохѣ Отечественнѣй войны. А между тѣмъ выясняется, что фактическая сторона войны 1812 года изслѣдована еще настолько слабо и недостаточно, что даже теперь, въ близкіе дни передъ юбилеемъ, возникаютъ споры относительно самыхъ кардинальныхъ моментовъ этой героической страницы русской исторіи.

*Mirskaia zhizn'* Moskva, 1911-1912

texts printed in *grazhdanskiĭ shrift*, which were introduced by Peter I in 1708. The books printed in Cyrillic have therefore always been the main source of information concerning the history and spiritual faith of the Old Believers. The beginning of the 20th century witnessed an avalanche of printed Old Believer religious literature. This literature comprises a number of original monographs, titled books, and icon-painting originals, as well as reprinted anti-Old Believer pamphlets in *krillicheskiĭ shrift* bearing polemic comments written by Old Believer adepts.

### Installment 3. Old Believer secular literature

At the dawn of the 20th century, the Old Believers exhibited an amazing ability to adapt to the new social and economic conditions without abandoning their traditional culture or their religious beliefs. This period saw the birth and subsequent blossoming of the widely known business dynasties. One of the main driving forces behind the printing of books in *grazhdanskiĭ shrift* was the revival of the polemic disputes between the Old Believers and the official Church. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Old Believers printed their secular literature in *grazhdanskiĭ shrift*, in order to draw attention to their crucial need for a greater number of sympathizers from the outside.

The variety of this type of Old Believer literature is extensive, ranging from historical and ethnographic works, polemic and political essays, scholarly works on philosophy, economics, and statistics, to works on theology and law, the minutes of Old Believer assemblies, fiction, and even poetry.

The recourse by the Old Believers to *grazhdanskiĭ shrift* and their deliberate orientation toward the "outside" reader and secular themes, makes this literature both more accessible and richer in substance and variety of topics.

### Libraries

The project is executed in close cooperation with Russia's main libraries: the State Historical Public Library in Moscow, the National Library of Russia and the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences (BAN) in St. Petersburg.

A.V. Zvatnov

# General information

Scope	123 titles
Number of fiche	1,464
Size of fiche	105 x 148 mm.
Film type	Positive silver halide
Reduction ratio	Varies depending on the size of the original
Internal finding aids	Eye-legible headers on every fiche indicating the author, abbreviated title, place and date of printing of each item
Bibliographic information	Bibliographic records for all titles ordered are supplied in AACR2/MARC21 format with the microfiches

This collection is also available in separate installments, for more information, please contact sales@idc.nl

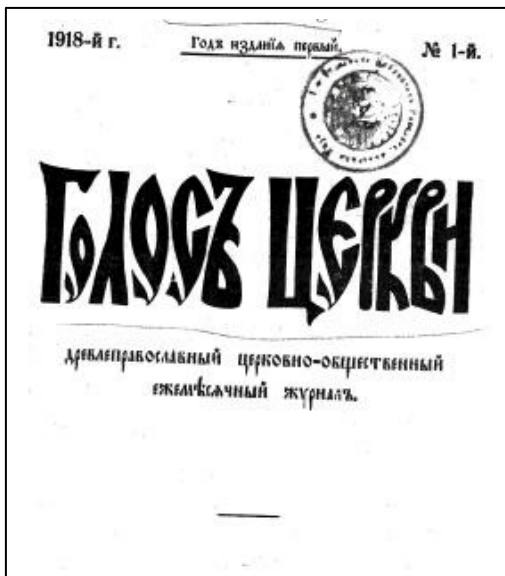
Installment	No. of titles	No. of microfiche
1. Periodicals, 1905-1918	24	991
2. Old Believer Cyrillic-script books 1906-1916	27	308
3. Old Believer secular literature, 1916-1918	72	165



Andrew, Archbishop of Caesarea. [Commentarius in Apocalypsin. Church Slavlic], Moscow, 1913.



Andrew, Archbishop of Caesarea. [Commentarius in Apocalypsin. Church Slavlic], Moscow, 1913.



Golos tserkvi Moskva : [s.n., 1918]



Chtenie dlia sem'i, shkoly i naroda. Moskva, [1914].



Drug zemli. Moskva, [1909-1914].