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RUSSIAN OLD BELIEVERS (LIPOVANS) IN ROMANIA: CULTURAL VALUES AND SYMBOLS

Foreword

Russian Old Believers, known in Romania as 'Lipovans', are descendants of the people who disputed the religious reforms initiated by Patriarch Nikon of Russia in 1653-1667. These reforms of the Church Ritual and Holy Books of the Russian Orthodox Church were supported by the then Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov (1645-1676) and were the cause of social upheaval and unrest. Strong opposition to the introduction of these innovations resulted in a powerful movement to retain the pre-Reform rite. This movement rapidly grew to embrace a substantial number of Orthodox Russians. Socially, its adherents covered a spectrum ranging from wealthy merchants and industrial entrepreneurs to Cossacks and black-soil peasants.

The Tsarist and clerical supporters of the Reforms, initiated by Patriarch Nikon, blamed opponents of the reforms of committing the sin of disobedience to the Russian Church. They called them *Raskolniki*, meaning schismatics.

However, the dissenters maintained that they were not causing any changes. They named each other *Starovery* (of old faith – Old Believers) or *Drevlepravoslavnye khristiane* (Old Orthodox Christians). In 1785, for the first time in official documentation, they were referred to as *Starobryadtsy* (of old Rite – Old Ritualists).

Those who accepted the Nikon Reforms in the church's missal and ritual were called "Nikonians", "New Stylists", or *Shchepotniki* (from the Russian *shepotka*, which relates to the *pinch* of tobacco applied to the heterodox sign of the cross).

Although Patriarch Nikon was later deposed, the schism remains to this day in the Orthodox Church in Russia.

Large groups wishing to keep the Old Rite and refusing to adopt the Reforms of the Church, as mandated by the Patriarch and the Tsar, were excommunicated and subjected to severe measures of persecution. In resisting attempts to change their ways, some Old Believers burned themselves in their own churches.² Many dissenters escaped to the margins of the Tsarist Empire and beyond.

One noted historian has estimated that “in the eighteenth century alone, over one million Old Believers left Russia to escape persecution by the Russian church and state, seeking freedom of religion outside the confines of the land of their ancestors”.³

Many fled Russia to the areas of the Russian Far North seas (*Pomorie*) or to Siberia. They were convinced that the apostolic succession had been jeopardized through the apostasy of the Russian Orthodox Church after the schism; that the Church had fallen into the hands of the Anti-Christ; and, therefore, there was no longer a valid Priesthood. This is the defining doctrine of the all priestless factions, in particular that of the Pomortsy and Chasovennye. They are known as the Priestless Old Believers (*Bezpopovtsy*), and are still to be found today in Korelia, Russia, the Baltic States, Belarus, Poland, United States, Latin America, Canada, and Australia.

A large number of dissenters also fled to the Crimea, Moldavia and to the mouth of the Danube River in Dobrogea⁴ securing their protection by Ottoman Empire rulers. Later, many were encouraged by the government of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to settle in the Bucovina, where, together with the local Old Believers, they established two monasteries in Belaya Krinitsa.

Subsequently, they received permission to bring in a foreign bishop to establish a hierarchy of clergy. This became known as the Belaya Krinitsa order of Old Believers.

Others (the Nekrasovtsy Cossacks) ventured deeper into the Ottoman Empire and settled at Lake Maenos.⁵ They maintained relations with the Old Believers of Dobrogea and the Bucovina and accepted priesthood ordained from Belaya Krinitsa. In the 1960s, many of their number chose to return to Russia, while others left for the United States.

For over two centuries, the Russian official Church carried out an intensive polemic, describing Old Believers with offensive stereotypes and seeing in their movement only a schism of dogmatic extremists, stubborn conservatives, and uneducated fanatics. In the opinion of the official polemicists, a change in form of ritual did not imply a change in the content of belief. Their analytical thinking opposed form to content.

The Old Believers, on the other hand, appreciated harmony and unity of form and content, maintaining that a change in essential ritual was a change in the content of belief.

The works written against Old Believers misled the general public. Russian Lipovans in Romania paid the consequences of this and were treated like a sectarian group. Until recently, there had been only one work devoted to the schism. It was written by the Romanian bishop Melchisedek (Ștefănescu), who took inspiration from the sources of the official Russian Church (*Lipovenismul, adică schismaticii sau răscolnicii și ereticii rusești după autori ruși și izvoare naționale române*, București, 1871). In his work, he supported the ideas promoted by the historians of the missionary schools and the theory that Patriarch Nikon had effected the reform in order to return the Russian Church to the original orthodox tradition. In his opinion, the corrections made under Nikon's supervision were based on the original Greek books and the old Slavic translation. Other Romanians who wrote about the Russian Lipovans relied on this source, without attempting a more in depth study of the topic.

Only after 1989 were Russian Lipovan specialists able to publish a series of Romanian works, airing different points of view. At last, Old Believers had been allowed to speak for themselves and enjoy the opportunity of defending their position.

I. GENERAL REFERENCES TO THE ORIGIN OF THE RUSSIAN LIPOVANS

1.1. Historical Reference

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire (c. 1453), the theory of Moscow as a "Third Rome" preoccupied Russian zealots. These enthusiasts considered that Russia, the last independent Orthodox state, was destined by God to preserve and to defend the "true Orthodox nation". Being subjects of the Ottoman Turks, Greeks themselves recognized Muscovite

Russia as the last bulwark of true Orthodoxy. This idea was also very attractive to Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov, who became convinced that the Byzantine patrimony was now his responsibility to maintain and defend. Along with the military reforms designed to strengthen the country's defenses against the West, the Tsar also undertook the codification of laws and supported his ambitious mentor and friend, Patriarch Nikon, in his efforts to centralize power within the Russian Orthodox Church.

The focus of the ensuing struggle was authority, but on purely liturgical and ritualistic grounds. Observing some discrepancies between Russian and contemporary Greek rites and missal texts, the Patriarch, without summoning a Church Council, ordered an adjustment that was designed to bring Russian practice in line with what he conceived to be the more authentically patristic practice of the Greek Church. As research on the history of liturgical texts at that time was nearly non-existent, there was no one to explain to him that these discrepancies were not necessarily the result of Russian errors or arbitrary textual revisions, but had developed from changes initiated by the Greeks some centuries before. Thus, the Russian texts and ritual were actually closer to those early Byzantine ones than were those of the contemporary Greek Church.⁶ The Tsar knew that he needed to unite Orthodox liturgical practice with that of contemporary Greece and other Orthodox countries to help smooth his path to dominance, first religiously and then in terms of secular power.

All this took place during a time of a widespread religious revival in Moscow led by a group of clergy called the Zealots of Piety. This group of reformers aimed to restore the purity of Muscovite piety and fought against corruption in the Russian church and popular religion. The movement, like the liturgical reform initiated by the Patriarch, was aimed at the reinvigoration of the Church and the spiritual renewal of believers. The principal leaders of this group were archpriests Avvakum and Neronov.

On the other hand, the Kiev scholars and clergy, who were educated in the Latin tradition, were quite influential within Moscow Patriarchate circles.

Although the Patriarchal Reforms were accepted by various Church Councils of the 1650s and 1660s, a significant proportion of the population, both lay and clerical, considered them unsanctified innovations and an implicit condemnation of the piety of their forefathers. Inspired by the religious activism of the time and encouraged by certain Zealots of Piety,

many rejected the reforms and resisted the authority of both the Patriarch and the Tsar to introduce them. They considered the traditional respect accorded to both divine and secular rulers irreparably ruined and the Tsar a representative of destructive anti-Christian powers. All measures undertaken by the Tsarist and Church authorities were held to be fundamentally immoral.

The Tsar, however, was prepared to support the decision of his Patriarch with the force of the state. Rejection of the reforms became a political as well as a theological matter. The history of the Old Belief's early years tells of numerous confrontations between agents of the state and dissenters.

Claiming that the heart of the schism lay in the ignorance of Russian peasants, the authorities maintained that the State Church was the only legitimate form of Russian Orthodoxy. Old Believers nevertheless remained opposed to the Russian Orthodox Church, rejecting its authority and, by implication, the State that sponsored it. They strictly opposed any innovation, influence, or message from outside the boundaries of their ritual. This attitude was consistent with their negative reaction to the centralization of autocratic power, which was based on serfdom and disrespect for local traditions.

By the 1680s, the breakaway religious movement had spread widely, along with resistance to the government. In 1684, Tsar Aleksei's daughter, Sophia, acting regent for her brother Peter, promulgated laws that made adherence to the Old Belief a state crime.

Among the first martyrs of the schism were the fathers of the Old Belief – Pavel (the last Bishop of the Old Believers), Archpriest Avvakum, Epifanii, Feodor, Lazar – as well as members of the nobility, such as Boyarina Morozova and her sister, Princess Urusova.

Those still practicing the old ways of Russian piety ran the risk of being subjected to terrible corporal punishment, such as having his tongue cut out, being burnt at the stake or, in the most horrible instances, being smoked alive.

The movement also grew rapidly among the peasantry. Many peasants believed that the patriarch's condemnation of their generations-old practices of worship could only signify the end of the world.

With the emergence of a secular, absolutist State under Peter the Great (1689-1725) and the frequently brutal enforcement of cultural and political reforms based on Western European models, the paths of Russian culture bifurcated. The decrees during the reign of Peter the Great, such

as the enforced shaving of beards and the imposition of Western fashion in clothing, were interpreted as deeds of the Antichrist. Indeed Peter the Great was viewed by the Old Believers as the complete embodiment of the Antichrist.

In the following centuries, the Old Belief was the refuge of cultural as well as religious dissent, and also nurtured native artistic traditions and practices. When later laws allowed the Old Believers to practice openly on condition of their registering, untold numbers refused. Registration meant paying a punitive double capitation tax in addition to the tax levied on men wearing beards. Furthermore, laws forbade the holding of public office by Old Believers; they were not allowed to propagate their faith and parents were not allowed to educate their own children in the Old Rite. Old Believers isolated themselves in communities where they had the freedom to protect the traditions of their ancestors. The books they lovingly copied, generation after generation, became one of the most important vehicles for preserving the culture they valued so highly.

Their situation improved dramatically with the beginning of the reign of Peter III (1761-1762) when a period of general acceptance of the Old Belief was inaugurated by the Russian imperial government. Although not considered Orthodox, Old Believers did receive the right to congregate in prayer. During the rule of Catherine II (1762-1796), the great Old Believer centers of Preobrazhenskoe and Rogozhskoe in Moscow were founded. In these centers were created large complexes of chapels, churches, bell towers, and charitable institutions and almshouses.

In 1819, Tsar Aleksander I (1801-1825) created a secret committee to study possibilities for rapprochement between moderate Old Believers and the State. His *ukase* (edict) of March 1822 recognized the right of Old Believers to exist and to congregate, and it even accepted the flight of priests from the Russian Orthodox Church to serve Old Believers. The State Church itself softened its attitude toward the Old Ritual by its creation in 1800 of the *Edinoverie*, a special arm of the official Church that continued to use the Old Rite.

Later, in the wake of the controversial succession of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1850) to the Russian throne, Old Believers once more found their legal status eroded. The Tsar began to close the Old Believers' places of worship, seize their property, and harass the faithful. By 1834, the gains made by Old Believers had been completely lost.

State policy toward religious communities remained generally static during the successive reigns of Aleksander II (1855-1881), Aleksander III (1881-1894), and the early reign of Nicholas II (1894-1917). However, after the revolution of 1905, a number of reforms were adopted. With regard to religion, against the wishes of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Emperor granted full toleration of all religious groups through his edict of 17 April 1905. In the late Imperial period, this date would be celebrated by Old Believers as the beginning of a silver age of growth and wide public acceptance.

The 1917 revolution in Russia muted the voices of both the Russian Orthodox Church and Old Believers. The Orthodox Church re-emerged as a political force during the Second World War. And it was only in 1973 that the Moscow Patriarchate lifted the anathema originally pronounced on Old Believers at the Councils in 1666-1667.

1.2. Settlement of Russian Lipovans in Romania

The most representative regions of Romania populated by Russian Old Believers (Lipovans) are Dobrogea, Moldavia, and Bucovina.⁷ Officially, there were 36,397 Russian Lipovans recorded in the census of 2002, but the records of the Old Believer Church show there to be some 100,000. Today, they are scattered all over Romanian territory and many of them work and live abroad.

There are several un-documented assumptions that may account for the presence of Slavic Russians in Dobrogea (the region situated in the southeastern part of Romania between the Danube River and the Black Sea) even before the immigration that was caused by the Nikonian reforms.

Sevastian Fenoghen, an Old Believer historian from Sarichioi, supports this idea by quoting the Turkish traveler Evlia Celebi (1611-1683) who, on his journey, mentions the presence of *giaurs* (Christians) in the village of Sary-Kioi (Sarichioi). Celebi also mentions Cossack incursions in Babadag in 1587 and further confrontation between the Cossacks and the Turks near Lake Razim, where Sarichioi is situated. Another source of support for this idea come from the *Marele Dicționar Geografic al României* (The Large Geographical Dictionary of Romania)⁸ which mentions “a temporary dwelling of ataman Stepan Razin in the fortress Enisala (a few kilometers to the south from Sarichioi); Van’ka Kain on the island Popina (to the north-east from Sarichioi); and Trishka-Rastrishka

on the island Bisericutsa. These settlements could only have existed before 1670 since later, in 1670-1671, Stepan Razin was to lead the uprising on the Don River in southern Russia".⁹

Filip Ipateov questions the truthfulness of the information contained in the Dictionary, pointing out that other facts presented therein are done so without any realistic basis.¹⁰ By way of example, he cites the statement that attests to the presence of Lipovans in Moldova during the period of Stefan the Great (1457-1507). This fact is also doubted by S. Fenoghen, who claims the term "Lipovan" was first used in literature in the nineteenth century in a work by Ignatius Kulchinski.¹¹

In any case, the appearance of the Russian Lipovans in these territories must be related to the events that took place after the mid-seventeenth century religious reformation and social movements in Russia, and more precisely beginning in the eighteenth century. By that time, Dobrogea, Moldova, and Bucovina were under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

Cossack settlement in areas of Romania

Many Russian people (in particular black-soil peasants) found shelter from Tsarist oppression within the democratic life style of Don Cossack communities. Tsar Peter the Great was eager to bring them under his control. This resulted in a large uprising led by ataman Condrati Bulavin who was drowned in 1707-1708. The Cossacks and the people who had joined the uprising retreated south to the region of Kuban in the Crimea. Here they joined the Cossack army that had been in existence since 1688 under the leadership of the ataman Lev Manotski.

The ataman Ignat Nekrasov (1660-1737), a man of great and strong personality, also brought his people to the region and organized a Republic. They became known as the Nekrasovtsy Cossacks. During his 30 years leadership,¹² social life in the Nekrasovtsy Republic was based on the so-called "The Ignat's Vow" and this vow was respected and applied long after Nekrasov's death.¹³

When Tsarist authorities intensified the oppression, the Cossacks and Old Believers fled to the mouth of the Danube River on the Black Sea. The historian, Sevastian Fenoghen, claims that in 1740-1741, some 1,500 refugees settled in two of the villages of the Northern Dobrogea: Sarichioi and Dunavats. According to his research, the first wave of Russian emigration took place immediately after the Stepan Razin uprising in

1670 since, in 1708, there already existed in Sarichioi “a small community of Russians dwelling beside the Tatar majority”.¹⁴ This can be considered the beginning of the process of migration of the Old Believers to Dobrogea that continued during the centuries of persecution in Russia. However, even in these places they were watched by the Tsarist authorities.

On the other hand, in 1775 Turkish authorities permitted the Ukrainian Zaporozhskie Cossacks exiled by Catherine the Great to settle near Silistra in southern Dobrogea. However, the wild Zaporozhtsy Cossacks entered into a state of permanent conflict with the Old Believer Cossacks. Due to these circumstances, in 1814 a large group of Nekrasovtsy and their families moved deeper into the Ottoman Empire, founding villages on the shores of lake Maenos, Turkey.

There had been an earlier movement of Nekrasovtsy to Bucovina in 1783. Here the Nekrasovtsy benefited from many privileges granted by the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Josef II. There were already Old Believer communities in Bucovina, such as that in Socolinty (today Lipoveni, near Suceava), which is considered the oldest documented location of Old Believers in Romania (1724).¹⁵

Austro-Hungarian reports described them as “unusually quiet, capable and generally strong and robust. Each of them, in addition to farming, had some sort of useful profession. Drinking and swearing among them was rare. Their dress, especially for women, is attractive and quite respectable. They are responsible in fulfilling their obligations”. The reports concluded that, “There are many of these Lipovans in the Crimea and Moldavia who could settle in Bucovina”, and, “by their hardworking and zealous manner, they can serve as an example for all in Bucovina”.¹⁶

With the favorable encouragement of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Josef II, the Lipovans were awarded religious freedom in a “patent of religious tolerance” and other benefits to “attract them as much as possible to the territory”.

1.3. Religious factions

For the Old Believers, the possible loss of sacramental life caused the movement to splinter shortly after the 1666 schism. Since no bishops would consecrate new hierarchs according to the old ritual, Old Believers soon found themselves bereft of canonical clergy. The decision of how to deal with this lack of clergy increasingly became a defining issue among Old Believers.

Differences within the Old Believer communities solidified into a number of *soglasii* (“concord” or “agreements”). The differences between them concerned not so doctrinal issues as sacramental procedures and interaction with the state:¹⁷

Beglopopovtsy

Initially, the majority of the Old Believers in Romania belonged to communities that accepted fugitive clergy consecrated in the State-sponsored Church (*Beglopopovtsy*) or to communities that rejected the priesthood (*Bezpopovtsy*).

The first concord (*Beglopopovtsy*) differentiated between the concepts of ritual and dogma more than other Old Believer groups. They claimed that the false teachings of Nikonian Russian Orthodoxy did not undermine the Church’s status as Orthodox. They realized, however, that the Russian Orthodox Church was an imperfect system and refused to take in its full hierarchy, accepting none above the rank of priest. For them, the need to celebrate the Holy Mysteries overpowered any suspicions of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Belokrinitskie

This name comes from the village called *Belaia Krinitsa* (White Fountain, now in the Ukraine) founded by Nekrasovtsy Cossacks and Old Believers who had arrived from Dobrogea. Nearby, they established two monasteries – one for men, and one for women – though the monasteries were officially unregistered.¹⁸ The Austro-Hungarian authorities became concerned: the Lipovans had no priests; they held services, but were not subordinate to the Catholic Bishop of Bucovina, or to any hierarchy of clergy for that matter. Thus, there was no official representation and no record kept of births, marriages, deaths.

When in 1846, through a series of negotiations, the two Lipovan monks, Alimpy Miloradov and Pavel Vasiliev, and the last ataman Osip Goncar succeeded in securing the approval of the Emperor, Ferdinand I, for them to take a “foreign” Bishop of the Old Rite, the former metropolitan of Bosnia and Sarajevo, Amvrosii, agreed to lead the Old Ritualist diocese at the fugitive-priestly monastery of Belaia Krinitsa. Thus, the *Belokrinitskoe* or *Avstrijskoe soglasie* (agreement) was established. This

concord consecrated bishops and priests and did away with the need for fugitive clergy. In creating a Church complete with a full Episcopal hierarchy and complete sacramental life, the *Belokrinitskie* allowed the Old Believers to retain their ideology and identity without any obligation to the Synodal Church.

Synodal leaders saw in the flowering of the *Belokrinitsky* concord the growth of a competitor for the legitimate title of Russian Orthodoxy. In their defense of the established Church, the Synodal leaders damned the *Belokrinitskie* as pseudo-Orthodox imposters. Their missionaries started to act against the Metropolitan Amvrosij.

As a consequence, not all *Beglopovtsy* joined the *Belokrinitskoe* agreement. Archbishop Amvrosij's background as a non-Russian cleric made him suspect in the eyes of many Old Ritualists, including many *Beglopovtsy*. They only trusted in the sanctity of the Russian tradition. Moreover, there was objection to the fact that Metropolitan Amvrosij had consecrated Bishop Kiril without the assistance of another bishop: canon law calls for two bishops in the blessing of a third.

The *Belokrinitskie* pointed out the emergency nature of the practice. However, the year after he had joined the Old Belief, Metropolitan Amvrosij was exiled to Tsilly (now in Slovakia) by the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Ferdinand I, who was pressed to do so by Russian Tsar, Nicolai I.

The *Beglopovtsy* objected to the *Belokrinitskie*, decided to continue taking in fugitive priests, despite the difficulties. Much later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, another small group of this faction, originating mainly from Tulcea, was to join the *Belokrinitskie* and build a second *Belokrinitsky* Church in the town, not far from their former *Beglopovtsy* Church.

During the Communist regime, only *Belokrinitskie* were recognized officially by the Romanian State as a legal religious cult probably because in 1940 their Metropolitan center was moved from Belaya Krintsa to Braila on the River Danube.

Beglopovtsy went through difficult times in this period. Although not forbidden, they could not freely invite fugitive priests from Russia, and had to live like *Bezpopovtsy*. Indeed, until 1990 they were known as *Bezpopovtsy* or *Razdorniki* (from the Russian *razdor* = discord).

One center of the *Beglopovtsy*, considered the headquarters of the *Drevlepravoslavnye Christiane*, was located in the city of Novozybkovo in Bryansk oblast' of Southern Russia. This branch resumed its activities

in 1923, after Archbishop Nicolai of the Russian Orthodox Church joined the Old Belief.

As a result of gaining a Bishop who could ordain priests, the term *Beglopovtsy* lost its former exclusive meaning. It is now used only as a custom.

In 1990, the first official delegation from Russia paid visit to the *Beglopovtsy* of Romania, consecrating for them a Bishop (Bishop Evmenii) and priests for the four existing parishes, all of which are situated in Dobrogea: Tulcea, Sarichioi, Slava Cercheza and Machmudia (though in Slava Rusă there is a church, there is no priest as the number of parishioners is negligible). This concord is known as ***Novozybkovskoie soglasie***.

Edinovertsy

In 1871, after the institution of *edinoverie* (unified faith) was created to lure Old Believers back to the fold, a small group of the Old Believers from Climăuți (Bucovina) joined the *edinoverie* concord and, with financial help from Moscow, built a Church in the village. For a while, Romanian priests would come to conduct religious services. It was a bizarre situation: the priests used the Romanian language and the believers answered with Church Slavonic. This is the only case of *edinovertsy* in Romania. Today there remain only three old people. The church and its patrimony are officially under the auspices of the Romanian Bishop of Suceava, but nobody comes to conduct religious services anymore. A group of *Belokrinskije* Old Believers from the village take care of the church and protect it from robbery.

Bezpopovtsy

At the present time, *Bezpopovtsy* (Priestless) represent a small group of Old Believers in Romania. Most of them are in Braila, where they have a *Chasovnya* (a small church without altar). They try to keep themselves separate from their *Belokrinskije* neighbors by living in a close community. They have the nickname of *Barabul'niki*, though nobody knows its origin. Until 1940s, there were *Bezpopovtsy* in Climăuți and Bordoșani (in the Ialomitsa district) but they were later assimilated by *Belokrinskije*. In Tulcea and Machmudia, there is a small number of *Bezpopovtsy Pomortsy*.

Khatniki

Khatniki, in Slava Chercheza, split from the Novozybkovskie priested concord after their bishop Evmenii was deposed by the council in Novozybkovo in 2000. Their name comes from the word *khata*, meaning “house”, and owes its origin to the fact that they used to gather and pray in the house of one of their members. By no longer accepting priests they became priestless (*bezpopovtsy*).

1.4. Non-Old Believer Groups

Beside the above-mentioned groups of Old Believers, other Russian religious groups came to Romania that did not strictly belong to the Old Belief due to their partial acceptance of the Nikonian reforms. They were eventually assimilated by the Old Believers or simply disappeared. They are the *Molokanye* and *Scoptsy*.

Molokanye acquired their name from the Russian word *moloko* (milk) owing to their practice of drinking milk during Lent. The origins of this group also date back to the schism of the seventeenth century, though they did not emerge as a named sect until the eighteenth century. They are often referred to as a “protestant” type of religion in contrast to the Eastern Orthodox religion. This is somewhat accurate: the Molokans protested against the extensive ceremony in the orthodox service and apparent obsession with material symbols and gestures (e.g., icons, incense, vestments, holy water, and the sign of the cross) and with the necessity of subjugating oneself to an entire hierarchy of priests.¹⁹ Only a few references among Lipovans today recall the existence of this group in Romania.

The *Scoptsy* were members of a religious sect that called themselves “white doves”, to symbolize the Holy Spirit. They were classified as belonging to the New Believers (*novoverie*), or as members of a sect that practiced extreme asceticism. Kondraty Selivanov, their founder and leader, passed away in 1832 in the monastery of Suzdal’ at an age of approximately one hundred years old. In Romania, they founded the village of 2 Mai on the Black Sea coast. Many of them lived in Bucharest and were known under the name of *muscalii*.

II. ETHNOCULTURAL VALUES AND SYMBOLS

Religion and culture are often seen as twin topics. The desire of the Old Believers to maintain orthodox ritual resulted in a unique fusion of religious and social experience.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Old Believers created their own distinct and substantially new culture as a counterpoise to the official culture of imperial Russia. They preserved as much as possible of the old ways of life, but new challenges forced them to create new arguments or new artistic forms based on old ones in their struggle to defend the tradition. The counter-culture of Old Belief was both staunchly conservative and impressively creative.

Owing largely to their history, the Russian Lipovans in Romania have retained a strong sense of cultural and religious identity. Like other Old Believers, they earned the reputation of being lovers of the holy books that predated the Nikonian reforms. They read, touched, and collected books with adoration. In Russia, Old Believers were widely believed to be more literate than the average Russian. Their love of books and high rate of literacy (among other factors) led to the claim by scholars that the development of the Old Belief was analogous to the Reformation in Western Europe. Old Believers revered books themselves as vessels of tradition and thus keys to salvation.

This bibliophilia of the Russian Lipovans helped the community to preserve the Russian language. They achieved this despite having been separated from their country of origin and despite their exposure in the host country to public schooling and to other languages, such as Romanian and Ukrainian, or even Turkish in Dobrogea and German in Bocovina and Moldova, which they needed to ensure their economic survival. Collectively the language has remained Russian, despite an eclectic accumulation of linguistic expressions.

The use of Church Slavonic in religious services, the *znamennyi raspev* (chant by signs, an ancient form of Russian chant) has served as another explanation for the retention of tradition by the Lipovans. An Old Believer author writes in his book *Youth's Spiritual Rest. A practical Manual for Learning of Znamennoe (Solevoe) Chant*: "Church znamennoe chant is our sacred past, our precious symbol of antiquity, our living connection with the remote past. It is the chant of those days when boyarynia Morozova was in chains, and people rose at the appeal of the greats for the liberation of the native land and holy Christian faith."²⁰

2.1. Religious symbols

All pre-Nikonian norms of ritual, liturgy, icons, scriptures, and outlook were viewed by Old Believers as the proper manifestations of the only true Orthodox Christianity, and any innovations were condemned. The culture of the Old Believers spared no effort in trying to be as independent of innovations as possible, even in the smallest details of the liturgical process.

The reforms of patriarch Nikon (c. 1652) were designed in particular to modify the provisions of the *Stoglavyi Sobor* (Hundred Chapter Council) of 1551. As mentioned earlier, while Russian Orthodoxy saw the changes merely as variations on a theme, Old Believers believed that a change in form equaled a change in meaning.

One form in particular that was changed by patriarch Nikon related to the configuration of the hand while making the sign of the cross: from the use of two fingers, which dated back to the ancient literature of Eastern Christianity, to the use of three fingers. The Old Believers argued that use of three fingers to make the sign of the cross on the body confused the dogmatic statement that both natures of Christ, but not the Holy Trinity, hung on the cross.

In their view, the canon on the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ had been degraded completely, as well as dogma on the Holy Trinity.

In the Old Believer system, the thumb, ring finger, and little finger were meant to represent the Holy Trinity, while the middle finger symbolized the Humanity of Christ and the index finger represented His Divine Person. Together they symbolized the dual nature of Christ (in accordance with the dogma of Chalcedon).

In the prayer “Alleluia, Alleluia, Glory to thee, o God,” Nikon added a third “alleluia” to the sentence to make it a threefold glorification of the Holy Trinity. Old Believers, however, claimed that the original meaning of “alleluia” was itself “glory to God,” and thus the addition of one more “alleluia” would not glorify the Holy Trinity, but some fourfold godhead.

In addition to this, Old Believers rejected a number of other innovations. They rejected the new version of the name “Iisus” in the revised editions of the *Stoglav* and Holy books, and continued in their use of the Old Slavic version “Isus”.

A Pre-Reform Orthodox Church service would last for some six or more hours, with each of its parts performed separately (*yedinoglasie*, i.e., chanting each part in unison). The reformed Church made possible a shorter service and canonized the chanting of the different parts of the service simultaneously (*mnogogolasie*). The practice of moving around the amvon or the church during the procession in the direction of the sun (*posolon*) was changed such that the movement was against the sun, and this was considered by the people as an unnatural distortion of the proper ritual behavior.

Sign of the Cross

The cross is a symbol of suffering, and it is given special significance in Old Believer rites. The very structure of the liturgy makes the participants concentrate on making each sign of the cross.

The way the sign of the cross is made using the right hand is essential to Old Believers because it is one of the most important means for creating the spiritual temple. It is made more frequently by Orthodox Christians than anyone else, during the Divine Liturgy, the other Services of the Church and in daily life.

The Apostles and early Christians were known to make the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads, mouths, and chests with their fingers. They also used the sign of the cross to bless their food and water and everything else they used.

The earliest form of the Cross included the "X" sign, the first letter of Christ's name in Greek. During the Roman persecutions, Christians developed numerous secret symbols that they used to identify themselves and protect their religious beliefs.

It was against the backdrop of the development of mystical rites under persecution that the "Christogram" came into being. Priests and Bishops would bless their flock by holding their fingers to form the first and last letters of our Lord's Name, "IC XC". The index finger would be extended for the "I", while the middle and last fingers would be curved to represent the "C" and the thumb would cross with the second before last finger to form the "X".

In Russia, the two-fingered form of Christogram became the standard rite for blessing oneself for both clergy and laity. As with Blessed Theodoret, the Russian Patriarchs explained this rite thus: to bless oneself using this

form, one extends the index finger with the middle finger of the right hand, indicating the Human and Divine Natures of Christ. The middle finger is slightly bent to indicate that the Son of God bent the Heavens and came down to Earth, as sung by the Psalmist. The thumb and the remaining two fingers are joined together to symbolize the Holy Trinity. This rite is accompanied by the Jesus Prayer. Touching the two fingers to the forehead, one says, "Lord" to show that Christ is the Head of the Church. Then, touching the belly, one says, "Jesus Christ" to show that He became Man of the Virgin Mary. Then, touching the right shoulder, one says, "Son of God", to show that He sits at the Right hand of the Father. One then touches the left and says, "Have mercy on me sinner", to be pardon for one's offenses.

This method is outlined in Old Believers' prayer books, where the instruction can also be found that one should wait until the Sign of the Cross has been completed before making the accompanying bow.

Orthodox clergy still bless their flocks with the Christogram. In the Roman Church, only the Pope blesses in this way, though an increasing number of Latin clergy are now also employing this form.

In fact, The *Stoglav Sobor* (1551) of the Muscovite Church made the two-fingered Sign of the Cross mandatory, going as far as pronouncing an anathema against those who dared do otherwise.

Before their deaths, the famous Archpriest Avvakum, Boiarynia Morozova, and all other martyrs would raise their hands defiantly in the form of the two-fingered Sign of the Cross, and this became the banner of the Old Believers.

In Old Believer tradition, the two-fingered Sign of the Cross is an extremely powerful prayer and guard against evil. Upon rising, or retiring, before and after work, study, meals, journeys, important tasks and throughout the Divine Liturgy, even before drinking or tasting food or drinks, the Sign of the Cross represents the Shield of faith and protection.

Crosses

Three-Bar (eight-ended) Crosses are well-known throughout Christian antiquity. The Icon of the Mother of God of the Passion (Our Lady of Perpetual Help) was said to have been painted by the Apostle St. Luke. If this is true, then the cross, which appears in the upper right hand corner of that Icon, was known to the Apostles. The Three-Bar Crosses were also well-known to later Church Fathers.

Origen, a Coptic Church teacher and writer in early Christianity, wrote that all crosses used in the Roman Empire for purposes of execution had a foot-rest. He described the foot-rest where Christ's feet had been nailed as well as the board above Christ's Head on which the charge against Him had been written by Pontius Pilate. That sign-board was later divided into three parts and sent to three different Churches.

Crucifixion was a form of hanging where the victim died of asphyxiation due to his or her position of being tied or nailed to a cross. The Phoenicians and Greeks practiced it and the Romans developed it further. There were so many crucifixions in Roman times that the Church decreed all Crosses made for liturgical and other uses be inscribed with the Christogram: *IC XC*. This served to identify the Cross with that on which Christ died, and no other. Later the letters *NIKA* were added, being the Greek for "He conquers."

The use of other Crosses was later adopted for various purposes, such as Good Friday services and the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. The Cross of Golgotha in the East consisted of three horizontal bars representing, from the top to bottom, the title on which the charge against Christ was written ("Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"), the arm bar where the hands of Christ were nailed and the slanted foot-rest to which Christ's feet were nailed.

The foot-rest is slanted with the part on Christ's right pointing upward and the part on Christ's left pointing downwards. Orthodox liturgy makes mention of the foot-stool as a kind of moral "weighing scales" in which God's Grace triumphs over sin. The Good Thief (known by tradition as St. Dismas) defended Christ and received Him as Lord and was promised eternal salvation by Him from the Cross. Christ is therefore shown inclining toward him, putting pressure on His left foot and releasing His right foot. The Bad Thief mocked and rejected Him. This reminds Christians about the choice they called to make: receive or reject, follow or do not follow.

The foot-rest is often said to reflect the Cross of St. Andrew, which is an "X" Cross. St. Andrew was the Apostle who founded the Holy Church of Kyiv. This very meaningful and mystical representation of the Cross of our Lord became very prominent in the life of the Kyivan Church. The Muscovite Church, being a spiritual daughter of Kyiv, also adopted it. In an expression of great veneration for the Three-Bar Orthodox Cross with the slanted foot-rest, the Muscovite Council of the *Stoglav* decreed its wider use, including its use as the official Cross from then on. It was to be put on top of Churches and used extensively throughout the Church.

The Old Believers refused to recognize the six-ended cross as incomplete. They would draw the four-ended cross only on specific items and made particular point of preserving the traditional three-bar or eight-ended cross.

The Old Believers were so firmly attached to the Three-Bar Cross that they regarded other forms as “Latin Chrismons”. During times of persecution, the Three-Bar Orthodox Cross became a national cultural symbol of their religious identity.

Russian Lipovans keep a small iron Three-Bar Cross above their doors and in the icon corner if there is no icon. A big Three-Bar Cross from wood or from marble is put on graves in cemeteries. This Cross is in fact the distinguishing symbol of Russian Lipovan churches and cemeteries.

Icons

The respect of Old Believers for their icons is well known. Icons are usually placed in the “beautiful corner” (*krasnyj ugol*) of every room of the house on the *bozhnichka* (*ikonostas*). In the old style, this corner is decorated with embroidered towels that indicate the “Mantle of Protection”. The willow branches of Palm Sunday are also used to decorate around the icons. The new style of iconostasis is made from sculptured wood. Votive lamps with oil may also be hung in front of icons. It is common to have a shelf or stand near the icon corner where prayer books and other devotional materials are kept, as well a container of Holy Water. A small icon should be placed outside entrance doors, though this may be a cross.

Finally, the use of tobacco is regarded as a great sin. One is not allowed to smoke in the house of a Russian Lipovan or in the vicinity of a church or icon.

The Church

The most important building for the Russian Lipovan community is the church. This contains certain elements that can be found in other orthodox churches, but has many specific features, such as the cross with eight extremities. Another unique element of note is the wider side for the main spire, situated above the *pronaos*, where, in the vaulted arch of the spire, there appears a large and pronounced image of Jesus Pantocrator.

The form of a Lipovan church is similar to that of other Orthodox churches, with the altar in a semicircular form and facing east. At the western end of the structure is the vestibule (*papertya*) that functions as a type of buffer between the profane and the holy and marks the passage from secular to sacred space and time, from worldly concerns to those of the divine.

In the next cell eastwards from the vestibule lies the nave, the body of the temple. Here, where the walls are adorned with icons or biblical inscriptions, the congregation celebrates the service. According to the traditional form, the room is divided in halves, east to west, with women standing to the north side and men to the south.

In front of the nave, divided by a small screen, stands the choir (*kliros*), as in the tradition of ancient Russian Orthodox churches. Beyond the *kliros*, there is an iconostasis with royal and deacon doors, with an altar behind them.

Other Religious Items

There are a few essential religious items used by the faithful during their prayers in church or at home in front of the icons: the *lestovka*, the *podrushnik*, and the *poyas*.

The *Lestovka* or the *Vervitsa*

The *Lestovka* or Ladder is a type of prayer rope, commonly made of leather, which was in general use in old Russia and is still used today by pious Old Ritualist Orthodox Christians. It has four *Lapostki* (leaves or flaps), symbolizing the four Evangelists. The stitching around the leaves symbolizes the teaching of the Gospel. Between the leaves are seven movable pieces, a token of the seven sacraments (mysteries) of the Church. Where the *Lestovka* joins together there are three steps at each end, and on the *Lestovka* itself there are three more large steps, for a total of nine ranks of angels and also the nine months during which the most pure Mother of God carried in her womb the Infant Who is before all ages. The empty space after the juncture represents the earth. Then there are twelve knots (*babochki*) signifying the twelve Apostles who walked the earth with the Lord. Then there are thirty-nine knots for the thirty-nine weeks and two days in which the most pure Mother of God carried Christ in her womb. The next thirty-three knots represent the thirty-three years the Lord walked on earth, which are in turn followed by seventeen knots symbolizing the seventeen prophets

who prophesied matters concerning Christ.” (Old Orthodox Prayer Book, p. 368)

Thus, an Old Believer carried with him on his person a shorthand account of God’s New Testament with humanity. Revered as a symbol by Old Believers, a *lestovka* is taken during private devotions and public prayers to facilitate the counting of prayers and bows and to focus attention on it. The beads, or knots, to be counted remind the believer of both an important article of faith and the number of bows to be made. There is a total count of 110 knots. After confession or failure to attend the liturgical cycle, the Spiritual Leader may assign a sinner to recite one or more *lestovka* with bows as penance.

Podrushnik

The *Podrushnik* (a cloth for under the hands) is a square, flat pillow that is placed upon the floor in order to guard the forehead from contact with the ground and to keep clean the hands while accomplishing down-to-earth bows or prostrations. The ‘clean’ side of colorful fabric is for the hands, and the other, plain side is placed on the floor.

Poyas

The *Poyas*, a woven belt fastened around the belly, is a symbol of a Christian blessed by the priest or *nastavnik* during the baptism and supposed to be worn at all times.

Bows

In the Old Belief, bowing for forgiveness was and is a central part of clerical interaction with the community. During services, a reader first asks the priest for a personal blessing. He/she then turns to the assembled men and women of the faithful and asks for the blessing of the entire congregation, then crosses him/herself while opening the holy book to read the appointed passage.

In the family, bowing is the expression of a deepest respect for the elders. Children are taught from their early childhood to bow after evening prayer before going to bed. And when a woman or a child leaves the

house, or comes home after a long trip, she/he must cross her/himself in front of the icons and bow to the husband/parents, asking for forgiveness.

2.2. Ethnical symbols

The Symbol of the Island

The archetype of the Island has its symbolic roots deep in Russian culture. In the seventeenth century, keeping this concept-ideal of heaven on the earth in their soul and mind, the ancestors of Russian Lipovans started on their way to martyrdom all over great Russia. At first, they were monasteries or isolated locations in deep forests or marshes. Later it was real islands that became the fortresses of the Old Belief: in the North, the heroic and tragic Solovki; in the South-West, the famous Vetka – the main center of fugitive priested concord and the origin of Russian Lipovans in Romania; and in the East, many Siberian island locations.

The island is a territory of freedom, and at the same time, of banishment. In the mythical consciousness of many people, the island is associated with primordial nature, unpolluted by the hands or actions of sinful men.²¹ Life on this kind of island in a close relationship with nature was associated with the idea of spiritual and corporal cleanliness, something which is forever the dream of all zealots in pursuit of their faith. A symbolic island is a utopia of salvation, but also a place of resistance to the forces of history. This has a direct relationship with the idea of lost heaven that for Old Believers is equivalent to a traditional and patriarchal way of life in a village. The island, or the peninsula, bounded by water, is reminiscent of Noah's Ark and is associated with the Church as the ship of salvation for Christian believers.

In observing the places where the Russian Lipovans (and Old Believers, in general) came to settle, we notice the particular island configuration of these locations. In the Danube Delta, many groups of Old Believers hid on islands to avoid persecution in the earlier days. All three arms of the Danube were populated by Old Believers. The largest settlements of Russian Lipovans (e.g., Jurilovca and Sarikioi) are to be found in the complex of the Razelm-Sinoe lagoon, known locally as Razin, in memory of the legendary ataman Stenka Razin. Many large villages and entire areas of towns (e.g., Braila and Tulcea) are situated on the shores of the Danube or other rivers. There are also Russian Lipovans villages located in forests, representing, in a way, another sort of island.

Lotca (boat)

Boats can also be considered synonyms for the archetype of an Island. A boat is a floating house, a Noah's Ark in miniature that saved mankind from the universal flood. For Russian Lipovans, *lotca* was, and still, is the main "means of production". Fishing is their life, their traditional, sacred occupation. Al. Marthineanu, in talking of the first Old Believers who arrived in Dobrogea in the seventeenth century, remarked that:

The passionate religious belief in combination with the almost blind conviction that a Slav fisherman who perishes in agitated water will go directly to the Kingdom of God, gave Rasskolnicks and to Khokhols (Ukrainians – my note) amazing courage. They would brave the most terrible storms of the Black Sea fearlessly. The listless and fearful nature of Muslim fisherman was in stark contrast with the real fishing manliness of the Old Believers.²²

In 1990, the non-government organization, the Community of Russian Lipovans in Romania, was founded and *Lotca* became the symbol used in seals and official papers.

Household

The architecture of a Russian Lipovan household is characterized by an orderly arrangement in the form of an upside down letter "L". The narrow side runs along the street front, with development of the other rooms extending back in depth from the street. In the past, the roof of the house would be made from reeds, but with the prevalence of fires, tile has replaced the reeds.

The traditional house has three or four rooms set in a wagon style with a kitchen and a pantry beside it at the rear. The front room, nearest the street, is a special room and is kept permanently clean: it is the room for guests, for special family occasions, etc. Prior to a burial, the deceased is kept in this room for 2-3 days and the Psaltery' is read in front of the icons.

In the kitchen and living room there is a *lezhanka* – a platform just in front of the oven on which a person can lie down to rest and keep warm in winter. It is often occupied after a steam bath in the *bania*.

Bania (Steam bath)

The *bania* is a traditional building that plays a very important role in a Russian Lipovan's life. The *bania* is the first of the annexes of an Old Believer household. It is the real hearth (fireplace) of the home and is considered sacred and demonic (unclean) at the same time. It represents a compulsory episode in a series of ritual customs in peoples' lives. The hot *bania* is a place for hygienic bathing and a sanatorium. It is also an ethnical institution that is used ritually to emphasize the days of the week and the calendar of religious feasts.

The structure of the building is simple. There are two rooms: the *predbannik* – a small dressing hall where people leave their clothes – and the *bania* – a steam bathroom like a sauna that is heated with a fireplace (*kamenka*) covered by rocks from the river. On the rocks there are large containers holding water heated by the fire.

The way the fire is made determines the type of *bania*. A *chjornaja bania* (black steam bathroom) is the more archaic type, in which the fire is set inside the *bania* room to heat the rocks, giving off smoke that blackens the walls. When the fire dies, the smoke is let out through two small windows and the *bania* is ready for use. The *belaja bania* (white steam bathroom), a more modern type, uses a stove to heat the rocks in the *bania*, but the fire is fed from the *predbannik*. The smoke leaves the stove through a chimney, allowing the walls in the *bania* room to remain clean and white. In both types of *bania*, steam is obtained by sprinkling water on the hot rocks.

There are two kinds of benches in a *bania*: the *polok* that is higher and wider like a bed. Here a person can sit or lie down to rest and enjoy the heat. The other, the *lavochka*, is lower and narrow. Here a person can wash or take relief when the steam on the top bench becomes too strong and hot. It is common during the *bania* to massage oneself by beating with a brush (*venik*) made of branches of oak or birch leaves.

On the floor in the *bania*, away from the rocks, is a container with cold water used to dilute the hot water and is only for washing. This water may not be drunk as it is considered *poganaia voda* (polluted water).

The *bania* is an unclean place that is protected by the "spirit of the *bania*" (*bannik*). This spirit can be very bad to people who don't respect the rules of behavior in this kind of room. After washing, the water jug and the washbowl must be turned upside down, the brush placed "with prayer" in its special place, and the remaining water in containers covered

or poured away. After the *bania* and before entering the house, it is necessary to wash one's face and hands with clean water taken from the fountain or from the faucet, saying a prayer.

The *bania* steam bath is not only a hygienic process. It is also a rite of purification, of "washing" away the impurities of the surrounding, sinful world. It is taken regularly every Saturday before the Vespers and Sunday services, and also required before every religious Holy Day, festivity and big event. It is a compulsory part of the preparation for the sacrament of communion. The person taking communion must not only be spiritually clean by keeping fasts and praying, but also physically clean.

The ritual of steam bathing is also practiced in preparation for marriage. The bride is given a ritual bathing the day before the wedding. A newly wedded couple takes a *bania* after wedding. The *bania* is also the place for the event and ceremony of giving birth.

Dukhovno Chisty (Spiritually Pure) – Poganyi – Skvernyi (Polluted)

In their everyday life, Old Believers try to maintain a spiritual cleanliness that has been blessed by a priest or spiritual leader. Behavior and activities outside of this realm are considered polluted.

Their social and family organization has for centuries been based on an attitude of cleanliness based on self-isolation and alienation from the *mirsky* (worldly). Each had his or her bowl for food and drink and never parted with it. This is still practiced by some more conservative priestless Old Believers.

Priested Old Believers no longer observe this custom. Instead, they ask the priest to read them the purifying prayer before they enter and attend a religious service in the church after having associated with non-Christians and other people considered polluted.

2.3. Life crisis events

In anthropology, life crisis events are defined as those events in a person's life, which mark important changes in personal development and socialization, as well as corresponding changes in the relationship of the person with all others of his/her cultural understanding. The events are usually marked by rites of passage, which facilitate the transition from the old status to the new. For Lipovans, various important parts of an

individual's life cycle, in addition to the variety of Holy Days and fasts, are marked by Church-related ceremonies and sacraments.

Giving birth

Until the early 1960s, Russian Lipovan women used to deliver at home with the assistance of a midwife (*babki povitukhi*), taken from the community and educated by older female relatives. They had no professional training, only experience. Delivery would normally take place in the well-heated steam bath (*bania*) so as not to soil or violate the cleanliness of the house. Mother and child would first be washed before they could occupy a specially prepared room of the house. The midwife would stay with them until the baby's baptism and sometimes longer and would take care of mother and child, washing and massaging them every day in this period. Even today, when women deliver in hospitals, they ask that an older woman come to the *bania* to wash and massage mother and the newborn.

Baptism and christening

After birth, the next major event is the christening, conducted for the most part by the priest, together with the chosen godparents.

From a Christian perspective, and in particular from an Old Believer perspective, the only really indispensable sacrament is baptism (*khreshchen'e*). Without it, salvation and membership of the Old Believer community could never be achieved. It is for this reason that the baby baptism is performed as soon as possible, preferably, within eight days after birth, to avoid any health complications. It is believed that a baby that has not been christened will not see the face of God.

The baby's name is chosen by his parents after consultation with the priest or the elder (*nastavnik*). The name should commemorate one of the saints celebrated on the day of birth or on any other day within two weeks before or after the birth. Nowadays, many parents give two or even three names to a child— a Christian name for the use in the church only, and other names for the official papers and daily use.

The day of the Saint after whom the child is named becomes the child's name-day. This day is used for yearly celebration of the child's birth in much the same way a European birthday is observed. More recently, the biological birthday may also be celebrated.

At the christening, the naked baby is wrapped in a blanket and brought to the church or prayer house by the father of the child and the godparents. The mother does not participate in this ritual because she is considered unclean until the priest reads her the purifying prayer on the 40th day after giving birth. The christening usually occurs early in the morning, as the priest performing the ritual is not permitted to eat before the ritual.

At the beginning of the ritual, the priest asks the godparents to renounce the devil. The baptismal basin is filled with pure water (taken directly from the river or from a fountain). Four candles are lit and attached to its upper border in the shape of a cross. In the presence of the godparents, the priest baptizes the baby with complete immersion carried out three times in the basin of blessed water. He calls the baby by the chosen name, and blesses it in the name of the Father (first immersion), the Son (second immersion), and the Holy Spirit (third immersion).

After the immersion, the godfather takes the child and gives it to the godmother who holds it for the remainder of the christening. The priest anoints the baby's forehead, lips, eyes, nose, ears, hands, and feet three times with holy oil. Then the godmother, with the godfather's help, dresses the child in the three blessed items of ritual value that define its Christian status: a small pectoral cross (*krestik*), placed around the neck, a white shirt (*rubashka*) and a woven belt (*poyas*), placed around the waist. The godfather then takes the child and follows the priest to venerate with a kiss the two icons on the Doors of Emperors (*Tsarskie Vorota*, the central doors of the altar). If the baby is a boy, he is taken inside the altar area.

Following the baptism and christening, the baby is not washed for the next eight days so as not to wash away the chrism, though he is wiped with a moist towel used only for this purpose.

If the baby is born unwell and unlikely to live the eight days until the christening, or if there is no priest available, any person may perform the baptism by immersing the child three times in the water and reading the necessary prayers. If the baby recovers its health, the parents ask the priest to repeat the christening. If it dies, it will have had the benefit of the baptism and the parents will not carry the sin in their souls of failing to baptize their child.

After christening, the child will be given communion (*prichashenie*) in the first Liturgy, and as often as possible until grown up. Once able to pray and keep fasts, the child takes responsibility of meriting this communion.

After the christening ritual and communion, a special party for the newborn child is held. In the past, the relatives and friends used to come uninvited to see the baby and to bring gifts.

The Russian Lipovans recognize baptism accomplished by other orthodox Christians, but supplement it with prayers. For the non-orthodox who wants to join the Old Belief, they must receive a new baptism by christening in a river or lake.

The priestless groups of Russian Lipovans have an incomplete baptism due to having no priest to bless the holy oil required for christening, which can be blessed only by a priest.

The selection of godparents is also an important event. The godmother and godfather must be Old Believers and are usually chosen from close blood relatives or friends who are not married to each other. After the baptism, they are both considered to be close kin to the entire family. Their children are not allowed to marry within the family of the godchild, even if they are not blood relatives. Such a marriage would be considered incestuous and therefore unholy.

Godparents are enjoined to teach the child right and wrong and to consider themselves responsible for the child as much as the child's biological parents.

There is a new custom of the Russian Lipovans that was taken from the Romanian people and which is performed when the baby becomes one year old. It is called *motz* and means "the cut of the tuft". It is a very special evening party organized for the child. Many items are put in front of the child, and, they say that one can guess its future (profession) according to the significance of the item the child first selects.

Coming of age

The coming of age is defined by the time when a child begins to take an active part in religious services: reading during services, or other actions.

Performance of these acts is preceded by teaching of the child together with others the history and importance of the Old Rite, as well as long hours of learning to read the Church Books in Church Slavonic, an early form of Slavonic languages. The lessons are supervised by a parent or older sibling or an elder of the community.

Marriage

The rite of passage of marriage is a central focus of Old Believer life, not just for the families involved, but also for the community. The marriage consists of several separate ceremonies. The ceremonies have a very strong social meaning and are meticulously prepared.

The first ceremony, *svatavstvo* (engagement), is organized by the young couple agreeing to marry. The future bride and groom bring together their respective parents, godparents, and very close relatives to announce their intentions. This gathering takes place in the home of the bride's parents. It is also the moment to establish a date and discuss organization for the wedding. Provided they agree with the proposed union, all the parents confer a blessing on the young couple, followed by three collective prostrations before the icons.

The time for marriage is regulated by the Church calendar. A wedding is never arranged during a fast, or on the day before a religious holiday. Thus, marriages are not permitted on Christmas holy days (from January 7 to January 17 inclusive); on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (being the eves of Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays) throughout the year; on the eve of the twelve-major, patron, grand-vigil and holidays set in the calendar under specific dates; on the eve of Saturdays, Commemorating the Departure (on Fridays of the parental weeks); on Meat-fare Sunday and Cheese-fare week, including Dormition and Christmas; Bright week of Easter (Paskha); nor on the holidays of Beheading of St. John the Forerunner and Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Russian Lipovans perform their weddings on a Sunday, following the morning service. In the past, ceremonies were performed as a transitional stage before the wedding. For example, the *devishnik* was held between the time of the engagement and the wedding, when the bride's girlfriends would come to her home to help make handkerchiefs to be given as a symbol of her separation from girlhood status. It would be the last time the bride spends as a girl with her friends and an opportunity to remember and practice the special songs for the coming events.

The day before the wedding, the bride and her best girlfriend would fix two handkerchiefs to their chest and a tie red ribbon in their hair. All the other girls, dressed in beautiful clothes, would gather at bride's home, singing of the event. Holding arms, the girls would proceed through the village to the house of the groom, singing of the wedding and the couple,

also mentioning their names. It was a way to announce the coming event to the community. After a short party, they would leave the groom and go to the bride, singing all the while songs announcing the good news. The bride and her best girlfriend would meet them with ceremony. Later, the groom, his friends, and some of his relatives would join this party.

Today, this ceremony is just a memory for older people who remember well the characteristic songs of the ritual. After 1990, efforts were made to revive this ritual, but only on a local level.

There used also to be another ceremony, called *akolishna*, which was performed only by the boys. According to this custom, the groom had to pay the boys for taking the girl with a *vadra* (or *vedro* – a 10 kg container) of wine. There were also special songs for this moment. However, it is very rare to meet somebody today who can remember these.

The day of the wedding is the best preserved moment of the marriage ritual. It starts very early in the Sunday morning (4 a.m.) when the groom and his relatives come to the bride's home, singing special songs, pretending to be hunters in search of a deer hiding there, or are merchandisers looking to buy something very special. They try to enter the home, but nobody opens the doors. During this, the bride's relatives also sing songs on the other side of the door until the knocking on the door becomes too loud. The dialog that follows will make them open the door, though it is not the end of the theatrical drama.

The best man (*svat*) and the bridesmaid (*svakha*) must then to negotiate with the bride's youngest brother or sister and with her best girlfriend the price for selling the bride. After some joking and witty negotiation, the bride, who all this time remains hidden, is sold; she is then dressed by her girlfriends (*podrushki*) and prepared for the church.

This moment is charged with great emotion, especially when the mother dresses her hair into a braid – the symbol of unmarried woman. The words of the song during this ritual are very touching and cause people to cry. When the bride is ready, the groom is invited into the room. He must place a pair of shoes containing poppy seeds on the bride's feet in order to protect her from witchcraft on her way to the church.

After the ceremony of blessings, benediction and the 'beginning' prayer (*nachal*), everyone leaves the house for the church in a given order. The procession is led by the best friend of the groom and the best girlfriend of

the bride, both holding large candles. They are followed by the best man and bridesmaid who walk arm in arm with the bride and groom.

In fact, all the active participants of the wedding must themselves be married, and the best man and the bridesmaid, while married, may not be married to each other.

After participating in the Liturgy, the wedding party awaits the priest in the entrance room of the church (*papertia*), which is normally designated a place for those not eligible to enter the church – for example, non-Old Believers or Old Believers considered unclean. It is here that the betrothal takes place. After this, they are allowed to enter the central part of the church, where the full ceremony of crowning (*venchanie*) is performed. This sacrament involves the placing of crowns upon the heads of bride and groom. If one of the couple had been married previously in a church, the crown is placed on his or her right shoulder.

Following this, the bride is taken to the back of the church where the bridesmaid (*svakha*) removes the kerchief, undoes the single braid of hair and arranges it into a double braid, covering it with a special cap (*kitchka* or *chipchik*) topped with a triple cover of thin fabric (the symbol of the Trinity) and a scarf to represent married status. All these items are blessed by the priest during the ceremony. According to traditional decree, all married women must wear their hair covered and never show their hair to any other man than their husband.

The bride then returns to the groom, bowing before him. This indicates symbolically that she now belongs to him will be submit to him for the rest of her days. The groom makes a short bow to her and they kiss three times in front of the wedding party.

After the wedding ceremony is completed, the wedding party, comprised of the *svat*, *svakha*, and the newly married couple, walk arm in arm, following their respective best friend and girlfriend who carry wedding candles in front of them. They proceed to the house of the groom where they are welcomed by his parents with icon, bread and salt, and given lunch.

After lunch and a short rest, the celebration of the marriage begins and it continues through the night. At some point, in the middle of the night, a group of boys steal the bride (with her agreement). The groom must negotiate the price for her return (often a dozen beers). This custom appears to have replaced the *akolishna*, previously performed in the days before the wedding day.

Funeral

The death of a righteous Old Believer is commemorated in the Church or Prayer Hall and in his or her house. After the deceased is washed and dressed in a new shirt (*rubashka*), with belt (*poyas*) and cross (*krestik*), wrapped in a shroud (*savan*, a white cloth that resembles a sleeping bag covering the entire body except the face), which is tightened in the form of three crosses around the body, and covered with a beautiful rug, the body is kept for two or three days in the first room of the house from the street. A man or a woman reads aloud the *Psaltyr* all day long beside the deceased until the burial ceremony. A votive light in front of the icon is kept burning for 40 days after the death and burial. During these 40 days, which are a period for ritual purification when the soul is on its journey to the gates of heaven, the *Psaltyr* is supposed to be read forty times. This reading is known under the name of *Sorokoust*.

The forehead of the deceased is decorated with a small wreath made of a paper band with three eight-corner crosses drawn in red (black) ink. The body is put into the prayer posture, with arms crossed, and a *lestovka* is placed in one hand.

Friends and relatives accompany the deceased “on the last path” to the grave and participate in the burial. In the country, the coffin is carried by six people of the same sex as the deceased. In urban locations, a car is used. In both cases, however, other people in front of the coffin carry two icons on poles (*herugvi*), the cross and the *kutia* (a sweet porridge, made from boiled wheat and honey). The procession stops three times on its way to the Church and to the cemetery for the priest to honor the casket with incense.

After specific prayers recited before closing and lowering the coffin into the grave, the priest-confessor puts into the right hand of the deceased a certificate signed by the priest (*rukopisanie*), which is similar to a passport that attests to the righteousness of the deceased, his or her Christian status, and the forgiveness of sins. If the deceased had been to confession for a long time before death this paper is not given.

The body must face east, the direction from which the Resurrection is believed to come. The grave is marked with a large eight-ended cross made of marble (in early times made of wood).

“You are from soil, and to soil you go.” – is a Christian philosophy strongly respected by Old Believers. Thus, a Russian Lipovan will never accept cremation.

During the funeral and memorial services, the sweet *kutia* is blessed. Wheat and honey are elements symbolizing life and rejuvenation. It a very important foodstuff at a funeral and in the following services performed in the memory of the deceased (*ponikhidy*). No other substitutes, such as sugar or candies, can be used for honey in the making of *kutia*.

A memorial service (*ponikhida*) is held after death and is named after the number of days elapsed: *tretinki* (three days), *devjatinki* (nine days), *sorotinki* (forty days). It is also performed after the first year and the seventh anniversary. Following the memorial service, a remembrance lunch (*obed*) is usually held at the home and a gift (*milostynja*) is given by the family to the participants to remember the deceased by name in their prayers.

III. RUSSIAN LIPOVANS IN THE PRESENT DAY

With the end of the First World War came the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Russia was in the throes of revolution and Bucovina was incorporated into a greater Romania. Largely Orthodox, Romania had no objection to the many Lipovan communities located along its eastern borders. Thus, Belaia Krinitsa (which then became Fântâna Albă) remained the center of the Belo-Krinitzky agreement between the Old Orthodox Church and clergy under Romanian rule from 1918 to 1939. 1940 saw the extension of Soviet rule into much of Bucovina and Bessarabia, as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. The Old Orthodox Metropolitan and its clergy, in rejection of Soviet government atheistic policies, left its stately Cathedral and monasteries (six Churches in total) and moved south to Brăila, Romania, much as its predecessors had forsaken Russia to escape from Tsarist dominance. They were never to return as, towards the end of the Second World War in 1944, Soviet forces were once again to occupy this territory and borders were re-drawn. Belaia Krinitsa was now located just inside the borders of the Soviet Union, a highly restricted area.

A certain amount of "drift"²³ among Russian Lipovans was noticeable in terms of integration in the host society and acculturation of younger members.

The period of atheistic communism in Romania marked one of the most difficult times in history for the community of Russian Lipovans. It

forced this religiously conservative community to dissociate from its ethical church traditions.

The moral and social degradation effected in hidden ways destroyed the communities by outward means of conflict and anarchy. In response to this power, the local communities found themselves unarmed and helpless. The atheistic propaganda of so-called “scientific materialism”, which was nothing more than a simplistic philosophical doctrine, damaged all Churches and confessions in Romania. However, it caused most moral damage to the Russian Lipovans, who came close to losing their centuries-old spiritual existence as the community.

To them, the beliefs of their ancestors had always formed the backbone of the ethnical conscience, spiritual devotion and the moral purity of the community. Apart from religious books, icons and folklore, Russian Lipovans possessed no other forms of culture, particularly no written forms, which could maintain the Christian spirit and the supreme morale values of their ethnus. Those who detached themselves from the foundations of their religion were easily manipulated. The emptiness in their souls was filled with the poison of hate and intolerance of class and religion.

Even today, some sources label Russian Lipovans as sectarians. In response, it should be pointed out that this ethnic group loathed deviation from Christian Orthodox dogma and tolerated sectarian practices even less. In view of their adherence to their faith, accusations of association with mystical sects appear totally unfounded.

In many respects, Old Believers are striving to maintain a seventeenth century ethic, in which religious practices and a traditional way of life are deeply interrelated. As technology progresses and workplaces become more integrated, as convenience replaces the hand spun ways of old in the workplace and in the home, there is a natural “drift” away from seventeenth century handicrafts, tools, methods of communication and transportation. Many of these features of the traditional way of life have little to do with Old Believer religious doctrine, except in that they conform in some respects to a traditional religious view of ritual cleanliness.

After the collapse of communism in 1989, Old Believer Lipovans were free to establish a civic organization to protect the interests of their minority group in Romania. After much disagreement between the founding members concerning the official name for the organization, the

compromise of “Russian Lipovans” was reached. This name differentiates the common ethnic group of Russians in Romania, whether non-Old Believer Russians or Russian Lipovans. The latter of the two are in the majority. However, the question of changing the name is raised without fail at the National Conferences of the Lipovan Community, which takes place every two years.

In order to preserve and encourage knowledge of the Russian Lipovan culture, the Lipovan Community receives the support and cooperation of the Romanian Government in organizing various activities. National and international scientific conferences and seminars on Old Believerism are held periodically; national festivals of song and dance are staged, featuring traditional costumes and folkways; a Romanian Olympiad Russian language competition is held regularly, with of the participation at the international Olympiad of Moscow. These activities contribute to the preservation of the Russian and Slavonic languages, Lipovan folk traditions and native costumes. Furthermore, Russian Lipovan scholars are permitted to conduct their own studies in the fields of history, linguistics, cultural anthropology, and religion, etc. and to publish their own books.

Romanian Law also allows for Russian Lipovans, like other national minorities, to elect their own representative to serve as a Deputy in the Romanian Parliament. This Deputy can express their wishes, protect their interests, and resolve problems.

The challenges of new times have different consequences for the profile of this community.

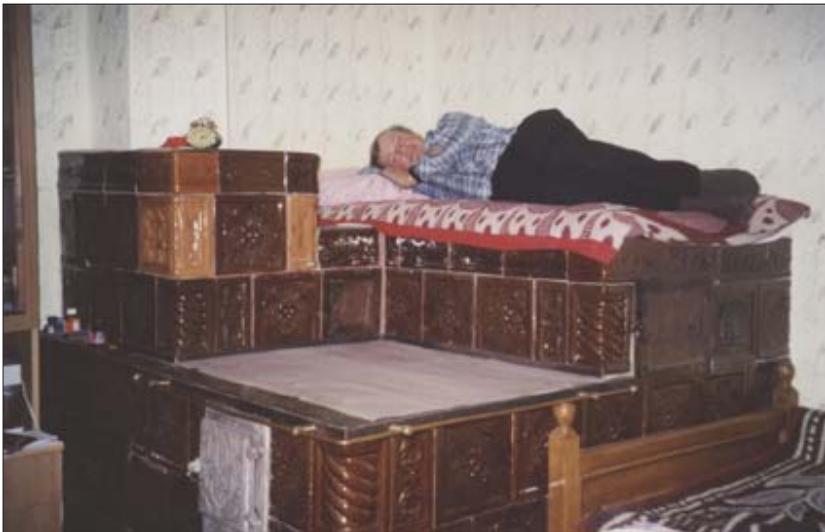
As the traditional structure of community life is becoming less and less stable and the use of Russian is generally restricted to use in the family, or possibly in the village, the young are losing their interest in maintaining the traditional ways. There is less interest in becoming skilled in Russian or Church Slavonic. Romanian and western languages hold more promise for economic wellbeing. Proficiency in Russian or religious training, including reading in Church Slavonic and singing the *Znamenny Chants*, depends greatly on parents and grandparents. However, those concerned with religious life and with the opportunity of maintaining contact with the Old Orthodox Metropolitan and monasteries in Romania, can practice their religion to an unlimited extent.

Nevertheless, the profile of the Russian Lipovan community is undergoing changes in response to the challenges of the present day

world. Economic issues are paramount. The frequency of unemployment and the everyday struggle and lure of urban and foreign employment have left many a Russian Lipovan village near empty. As often pointed out by researchers of the Old Belief, Old Believers have often achieved prosperity despite persecution and a hostile natural environment by dint of hard work and the careful marshalling of their resources.

In search of work, many Lipovans head abroad, in particular for Italy, Spain, Greece, and Israel. However, true to their heritage, they organize themselves into communities where possible. In Italy, for example, a *popovtsy* community in Turin has requested the permanent assignment of a priest from the Belokrinitsky Hierarchy.

Over some 300 years, Russian Lipovans have hidden, survived, settled, labored and developed, established villages and communities, founded a priested hierarchy of Old Believers, preserved their language and culture, expanded their influence within Romania, and represented themselves in international scholarly academic activities, as of late. As such, they have served as loyal citizens of prevailing governments and, at the same time, been true to their unique religious principles and values. Though the future holds many unknowns, this remarkable minority group has maintained and preserved its language, culture, folklore and, above all, its pre-seventeenth century religious Rite, with its sound ethics and values, into the modern day of the twenty-first century. The richness of their cultural history has been preserved in oral folklore, writing, articles of the Lipovan newspaper *Zorile*, and in the books of various scholars. May the information presented in this paper serve also to record important features of the remarkable phenomenon of the Russian Lipovan Old Believers in Romania.







NOTES

- ¹ There are many controversial theories that explain the origin of the name “Lipovan” given to Old Believers in the territories of present day Romania, the Republic Moldova, Bukovina, and Bessarabia. I will mention but a few. The term ‘Lipovan’ may come from:
- a) The name *Philip*, leader of a priestless concord that practiced self-immolation as a protest against reforms, as a form of baptism through fire and volunteer martyrdom for purification. People who agreed with this way of protesting and followed his example were priestless and became known as *Philipovtsy* or *Philipony*, or *philipovskoe soglasie* (concord). They started to settle in current day Poland and the Baltic states immediately after Philip’s death in 1742.
- The Old Believers living today on Romanian territory are of the priested concord and came from the place called Vetka. They never accepted suicide in any form. The name of “Lipovan” was already well known and used long before the appearance of Philipovtsy.
- b) The Russian name *lipa*, which means lime-tree and is considered a holy tree, was given to Old Believers by their Romanian neighbors. When Old Believers arrived in these territories, they would hide in lime-tree forests. The wood of lime-tree is used by Lipovans, especially for the painting of icons and for making household instruments. In Dobrogea, the two existing monasteries and the two nearby villages of Russian Lipovans are located in the lime-tree forests. This version may be much closer to the true explanation of the term “Lipovan”.
- ² This does not apply to the ancestors of the Romanian group.
- ³ Zenkovsky, S., p. 3.
- ⁴ Present day, Romania.
- ⁵ Fenoghen, S., “Neskol’ko soobrazhenij ob “ischeznovenii” kazakov-nekrasovtsev iz severnoj Dobrudgi”, in *Kul’tura russkikh-lipovan (staroobradtsev Rumynii) v natsional’nom i mezhdunarodnom kontekste*, Kriterion, Bucharest, 2001, p. 138.
- ⁶ Zenkovsky, S. p. 9.
- ⁷ Austrian and Romanian documents prove the existence of the ancestors of Russian Lipovans in Bucovina from the time when the territory was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. See Chirila, F., “Staroobradttsy, starovery, lipovane. Istorico-etimologicheskoe issledovanie”, in *Kul’tura russkikh staroobraidtsev v natsional’nom i mezhdunarodnom kontekste*, Kriterion, Bucharest, 2001, p. 213 and Chirila, F., “Russkaja Lipovanskaja Obshina v Rumynii”, in *Traditsionnaja duchovnaja i material’naja kul’tura russkikh staroobradcheskich poselenij v stranach Evropy, Azii i Ameriki*, Novosibirsk, 1992, p. 271.
- ⁸ Lahovari, G. I., et al. 1902.
- ⁹ Fenoghen, S., *Sarichioi. Pagini de istorie*, p.101.

- 10 Ipateov, F., p. 28.
- 11 Fenoghen, S., p. 154.
- 12 According to Cossack rules, the ataman was elected every year by the *krug* (council).
- 13 The book of the Vow requirements was lost, but some of these requirements are kept in the collective memory of people. The most well known are: not to obey to the Tsar, and to not return to Russia during the tsarist regime; in the war with Russia, never shoot at Russians, but fire over their heads; treason to the Cossack army punished by shooting without trial; it is forbidden for Cossacks to merchandize and own stores; a Cossack is not supposed to work for another Cossack; Cossacks are supposed to work and make trade; Cossacks must keep the Old Belief; the punishment for blasphemy is death or excommunication from the community; Cossacks must respect older people; Cossacks are supposed to love and respect their wives; a man who injures a woman will be punished by the *krug*; a Cossack is not supposed to marry a Muslim woman; a woman-mother is under the protection of the *krug*; without the permission of the community it's forbidden to move to another place. There are others.
- 14 Fenoghen, S., p. 116.
- 15 In the "Story of the Old Believers from Moldavia" there is information about a case that took place in 1742 when a group of Old Believers from Socolinty was asked to come to Iasi, the capital of Moldova, and speak in front of the Council and the prince about who they were and what was their belief. The words of their representative, the monk Tikhon, are very well-known: "We came to this Voloshyna (Valahia=Romania – my note) in the year of 7232 (read 1724) during the reign of the prince Mikhail (Racovitza) – the vojevoda of all Moldavia."
- 16 "Handbook of documents on the history of Old Believer settlement in Bucovina, 18th to 20th Century", Translation from German into Russian, commentary by Mikhail Saiko.
- 17 Robson, R. Roy, p. 15.
- 18 There were already four monasteries belonging to Russian Lipovans: two in Dobrogea, near the villages Slava Rusă and Slava Chercheză, and two in south Bucovina, near Manolea-Fălticeni.
- 19 Richard, A. Morris, p. 4.
- 20 Murnikov, L., cited by Ponomarjova, G., in *Russkie starovery Estonii*, Tartu.
- 21 Evseev, I., "Lipovane-rybaki. Dukhovnye osnovanija odnogo traditsionnogo remesla", in *Romanoslavica XXXI*, Bucharest, 1994, p. 74.
- 22 Al. Marthineanu, *Razimul: Marele Dictionar Geografic al Romaniei*, vol. V, Bucuresti, 1902, p.189, cited by Evseev, I.
- 23 The term belongs to Richard Morris. "Drift" is here defined as a separation of integrated contact resulting in inconspicuous differences gradually arising in customs, language, and general way of life. (See Morris, R. A., *An Ethnographic Look at Two Drifting Lipovan Old Believer Villages in Bukovina*, in "Zorile", No 2, Bucharest, 2002, Translation into Russian by Xenia Crasovschi).

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