

# Russian Mormonism: Geographic and Historical Foundations

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## Article Summary

Missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (popularly known as the LDS or Mormon Church) began activities in Russia during the early 1990s. Reports soon came to American Mormons living in Russia that native "Mormon" communities existed elsewhere in Russia. By 1998 researchers had begun to document the sect in an attempt to understand why "Mormonism" appeared in Russia in the absence of American Mormon missionary work before 1991.

Two important antecedent movements combined to create the Russian Mormon movement. The first, Khlystism, began in the mid-1600s as a mystical peasant-based sect focusing on living revelation and liberal views regarding marriage and family. The second, Molokanism, grew out of the Khlysts and spread as a Bible-based religion with a more traditional way of life, abandoning some mystical Khlyst elements (such as spiritual marriage) but preserving the tradition of visionary prophets and apostles.

Khlystism and Molokanism eventually influenced one another to such an extent that a new religious idea arose, a hybrid movement that capitalized on the energy of the Khlysts and the rationality of the Molokans. This dynamic mixture of the two sects appeared in two prominent movements, both of which were known as Mormonism.

The first group to be called Mormons developed in the Novouzensk region, situated between present-day Kazakhstan and the Volga River city of Saratov. In 1855, a charismatic Molokan named Ivan Grigorev Kanygin began gathering followers to a new faith. Grigorev was raised among Molokans practicing a form of communism taken from the New Testament. He incorporated his early ideas of communal property with the less restrictive lifestyle of the Khlysts, forming several communes throughout the Novouzensk region before his death in 1872. Grigorev's followers called themselves Communists or Methodists, the latter designation deriving from Grigorev's exposure to Methodist teachings near Odessa, Ukraine. The Methodists were criticized by their enemies as being libertines and notorious drunkards, in addition to rumors that their communism extended to a community of wives. An Orthodox priest by the name of Khrisanf Rozhdestvenskiy saw in the Novouzensk Methodists many similarities to the American Mormons, known across the world for their communal idea of Zion and their rejection of traditional marriage roles. Rozhdestvenskiy is first known to have applied the name of Mormonism to Grigorev's Methodists in 1869.

The second instance of Russian sectarians being called Mormons occurred in the area immediately southeast of the Volga city of Samara. The Samara Mormons developed separately from the Novouzensk Methodists. However, based on the precedent established by Rozhdestvenskiy in 1869, by the 1870s the term "Mormonism" had spread throughout Samara Province as a popular label for sects that incorporated a mixture of Khlystism and Molokanism. The first Samara Mormon groups appeared in the 1870s, and by the mid-1890s had become a powerful religious and social influence in many villages. Unlike Grigorev's Methodists, this northern sect's members were popularly known as Mormons. Some of their leaders practiced polygamy. The Samara Mormons were organized into tight social units based on communal cooperation and led sober lives free of alcohol or tobacco. The unified Mormon communities became wealthy through various joint enterprises, and the sect attracted many followers by reason of both its teachings and its material prosperity. Faithful Mormons were under oath never to reveal the tenets of their religion to unbelievers, but were quick to capitalize on opportunities to win converts. Each Mormon community was governed by "apostles" and "prophets," with most groups recognizing a central "Christ" figure as the highest religious authority of the sect. Because the Mormons incorporated both the charismatic worship services of the Khlysts and the rationalistic approach to religion fostered by the Molokans, the sect had great success among other sectarians and their Orthodox neighbors. By the early 1900s, more than 40 villages contained members of the Mormon sect. However, two factors eventually led to the demise of most Mormon village communities.

First, the decentralized Mormon religious structure tended toward division and fragmentation. Although remaining remarkably unified between 1890 and 1910, Mormonism fragmented into many local sects during the early twentieth century. The second factor contributing to the almost complete demise of Samara Mormonism

was the Bolshevik Revolution. The Soviet policy of collectivization in the 1920s and 30s tore apart the ages-old fabric of Russian village life, dislocating established families and destroying the infant capitalistic trends of many successful rural communities. Famine, deportation, and organized assassinations depopulated most Mormon centers. Surviving Mormon descendants assimilated into secular village life or moved to the rapidly expanding urban periphery, abandoning their village heritage. Exiled and emigrating Mormons established new communes in several areas of the Russian Empire, including Omsk and Barnaul in Siberia, Birobidzhan in the Russian Far East, and the Caucasus.

Not all Mormons succumbed to the policies of the early Soviet leaders, however. Several groups survived in various forms. One of the largest Mormon groups today is concentrated in the suburbs of the city of Samara. According to local sources, the Mormon population currently consists of about 300 people. They are known variously as Mormons, Khlysts, or Old Believers. The Samara suburban Mormons continue to practice their beliefs, meet together for religious services, and are noted for their exceptional unity and abstention from alcohol, tobacco, and swearing. They engage in joint business ventures and are generally envied for their material prosperity. Unfortunately, little can be ascertained regarding their beliefs due to their persistent refusal to share information, based on a religious code of silence.

Another prominent surviving Mormon population is located in Orenburg Region. The Orenburg Mormons descend from religious Mormon groups and continue to adhere to some religious tenets of Mormonism. However, the Orenburg Mormons are best known for their business and criminal activities as one of the city's most powerful mafia organizations. The Mormons are feared and respected for their power and lifestyle.

At least two appearances of "Mormon" sects in Russia can be attributed to direct influence from American Mormonism. In one case, a religious sect in the Caucasus called itself Mormonism and possessed printed papers and books that outlined Mormon teachings. These Caucasus Mormons held to several beliefs closely tied with the American Mormon Church, and likely derived their name solely from that association. In another village in the Crimea, Molokans who began practicing polygamy were called Mormons in derision by their neighbors.

## Introduction

This paper is a response to the inquiries of many people as to the specific origins and beliefs of what is now called Russian Mormonism. Since the “discovery” of Russian sectarians called Mormons by American Mormon missionaries in the 1990s, many people within the religious and academic community have expressed interest in learning more about the sect. One of the most fundamental challenges has been to find out when and why the name of “Mormonism” was assigned to rural religious dissenters in pre-Soviet Russia. As a Russian Orthodox writer observed in 1898:

Even the very name of the sect—“Mormonism”—still remains an unresolved puzzle, since a connection between Russian Mormonism and American Mormonism cannot be proven in any way: neither in documentary data, nor in oral tradition are there any indications of when, by whom, or why our sectarians were given the name of an American sect. Thus the question of Russian Mormonism’s first appearance—an interesting issue in the scientific sense—can be resolved only hypothetically.<sup>1</sup>

Research over the past three years has finally produced documentary evidence to conclusively respond to this challenge. The purpose of this article is to answer a simple series of questions: When, where, and why were Russian sectarians called Mormons, and who are these sectarians? Unfortunately, a full account from the wealth of information provided by archives and oral accounts cannot possibly be included in this short work. Those seeking more specific information are invited to visit [www.insighttranslation.com/mormons](http://www.insighttranslation.com/mormons), a site designed to make research on Russian Mormonism available to those interested in this enigmatic sect.

I am indebted to many people for the conclusions and research presented in this paper. Gary Browning has been especially supportive of continued research on Russian Mormonism, and his thoughtful advice and direction have been invaluable. Likewise, Tania Rands Lyon and Eric A. Eliason have contributed important details and excellent fieldwork research on Russian Mormonism.

## The Meeting of Two Mormonisms

The first permanent missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (popularly known as the LDS or Mormon Church) arrived in Russia October 24, 1990. Gary Browning, a professor of Russian literature at Brigham Young University, had been called to preside over the newly formed mission to Russia in July of that year. By 1992, several large cities had been opened to proselytizing, and plans for new missions to cover Russia’s immense geographic expanse were being carried out.<sup>2</sup>

Rumors about “other Mormons” quickly reached Browning in Moscow. In August and October 1991, a newly baptized Latter-day Saint named Vyacheslav Postnov reported rumors that “four thousand Mormons still lived in Orenburg in south-central Russia on the Ural river.” Seeking to investigate these claims, Browning paid Postnov’s round trip airfare to Orenburg in order to gather more precise information. “The results were disappointing,” explained Browning in his book, *Russia and the Restored Gospel*. Postnov located only a few Mormons who “maintained that they were followers of an ascetic Russian Orthodox monk by the name of Mormon.” Ignorant of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, or other fundamental American Mormon teachings, the Orenburg Mormons seemed reluctant to give specific information. Postnov did manage to learn that the sect’s adherents attended Russian Orthodox services but did not smoke or drink.<sup>3</sup>

Other reports confirmed the existence of Mormon populations in southern European Russia. On July 20, 1992, Browning reported that Arkadiy Shubin, a *Pravda* news reporter from Kazakhstan, visited him in his Moscow office. During their conversation, Shubin asserted that “his grandmother had told him she had seen hand-written copies of the Book of Mormon among Mormons living in Samara.” When missionaries arrived in Samara on September 22, 1992, they began hearing similar rumors but were unable to substantiate them with actual evidence.

The first known contact between missionaries of the Mormon Church and the Russian Mormons occurred in Samara in May 1993. Two Mormons invited Daniel Jones and his companion to their home in the

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<sup>1</sup> “Mormonstvo Samarskoy eparkii v ego otnoshenii k molokanstvu i khlystovstvu [Mormonism of the Samara Eparchy: Its Relationship to Molokanism and Khlystism]”, *Samarskie eparkhialnie vedomosti* [Samara Eparchial Bulletin] (15 June 1898, No. 12), 529-530. Hereafter *SEV*.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Browning, *Russia and the Restored Gospel* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1997), xv-xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Browning, *Russia*, 344-345.

town of Mekhzavod, situated just north of the Volga city of Samara. According to the account of Tania Rands Lyon, a graduate student from Princeton University, the missionaries met with a small group of adults in their thirties and forties, along with one elderly woman. Jones learned that this group represented a larger Mormon population, and that some of the Mormons had been opposed to speaking with the Americans at all. After sharing the basic principles of the LDS faith, communication between Jones and the Mormons broke down when each side became unwilling to share information about their sacred worship services. The Russians inquired specifically about LDS temple worship, which according to LDS practice is kept secret. In turn, the Russian Mormons were unwilling to divulge details of their worship services. Lyon reports that one or two of the Mormons later visited LDS church meetings, but eventually stopped their investigation of the American church.<sup>4</sup>

Interest in Russian Mormons became widespread in 1998 when Sheridan Ted Gashler, a charismatic international businessman, became president of the LDS Samara Mission. Gashler, intent on expanding missionary work from its urban base to the surrounding countryside, began planning to send missionaries to the village of Bogdanovka, 53 miles (85 kilometers) southeast of Samara. On Thursday, June 10, 1998, Gashler, along with two young missionaries and the mission driver, visited Bogdanovka's mayor to discuss the possibility of proselytizing. After learning about the Book of Mormon, the mayor interjected: "There are already Mormons in my village."

Upon returning to his office in Samara, Gashler questioned missionaries serving in the city about the existence of these Russian Mormons. One young Russian missionary from the city of Voronezh, Dmitriy Slinkov, reported that he had heard similar rumors in his proselytizing area of Samara. Slinkov's former missionary companion, Chad Dansie, confirmed that these Mormons lived in an area called the Ninth Microdistrict, but refused to speak to him about their religion.

My missionary companion and I were serving in the mission office at the time these reports began to surface. We had coincidentally experienced the Samara Mormon phenomenon just the day before President Gashler visited Bogdanovka. On June 9, 1998, while knocking on doors in the wooden shacks of Samara's old town, Nielsen and I spoke with a woman named Anya, who claimed that there were many Mormons living in the neighborhood of her sister. She had explained to us how to reach this area, called Nineteenth Kilometer, but we had disregarded her report, thinking her claim to be misinformed.

Upon hearing Gashler's experience the next day, we quickly volunteered the information Anya had given us. Gashler, intrigued with the recurring reports of Mormon findings, commissioned my companion, John Nielsen, and me to investigate these reports and document our findings.

Beginning on June 12, 1998, and continuing through the middle of August, Nielsen and I made several trips to Nineteenth Kilometer. We discovered that the village contained at least several hundred people popularly called Mormons. However, those reputed to be of this sect refused to speak with us openly about their religion, and denied the allegation that their beliefs differed from those of their neighbors. Our efforts to document the sect ended when I left to serve in nearby Novokuybyshevsk on August 19, 1998. Throughout the next several years, missionaries occasionally visited Nineteenth Kilometer to try to speak with the Mormons, but without success. Today they are extremely suspicious and even hostile to Americans seeking to learn about their religion.

In July 1998, Tania Rands Lyon, a Princeton graduate student doing research at Saratov State University, traveled to Samara when she heard rumors that Russian Mormons had been discovered in the area. Her experiences seeking out the enigmatic sect are recorded in an insightful article published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*.<sup>5</sup> Lyon established contact with an actual Russian Mormon, an elderly woman named Nadia. While Nadia could not provide specific information on the origins of her faith, Lyon's contact with her and other research established basic hypotheses about the origin of Russian Mormons and their beliefs. Her groundbreaking work set a solid foundation for future research efforts. However, Lyon was unable to determine if the Mormons living in the Samara region had any relationship to the American Mormon movement.

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<sup>4</sup> Tania Rands Lyon, "The Discovery of Native 'Mormon' Communities in Russia", *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 1, Spring 2000, 23-24.

<sup>5</sup> Lyon, 1-24.

Browning and Brigham Young University folklore professor Eric Eliason undertook a research trip to learn more about Russian Mormonism in May 2000. After visiting several sites in Russia, including Orenburg and Samara, Browning and Eliason coauthored a research report entitled “Russia’s Other ‘Mormons:’ Their Origins and Relationship to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”, published in *BYU Studies*.<sup>6</sup> While Lyon provided detailed reports of Russian Mormon folklore and current belief, professors Browning and Eliason began the task of piecing together the history of the movement. Thanks to the contributions of Professor Eugene Clay of Arizona State University, Browning and Eliason located the first substantial documentary evidence proving the existence of historical Russian Mormon populations. Based on the information gained through field research and these sources, they proposed a theory for the existence of Russian Mormonism so far from the center of the American Mormon Church. They concluded that the Mormons had developed from a group of mystical sectarians called Khlysts and had been labeled Mormons in derision by their Orthodox neighbors. According to the opinion of Russian religious experts consulted during their research trip, Browning and Eliason conjectured that the term Mormon was used in Russia as a general designation for unusual religious sects, and that Russian Mormons had only an accidental connection to the unrelated American Mormon movement. The basic arguments of this conclusion have remained intact through further research.

However, specific information about the history of Russian Mormonism and its current extent was still missing. Thanks to generous funding from Brigham Young University and Gary Browning, I spent three weeks in May 2001 living among villagers in historically Mormon areas and gathering information at government archives in Samara. My most significant discovery occurred at the Samara Regional Archives and the archives of the Samara Eparchy, where I found an important publication entitled *Samara Eparchial Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* was published by local Orthodox priests between 1866 and 1918. During my research at the archives, I obtained photocopies of hundreds of pages written by first-hand observers of the Russian Mormon movement between 1894 and 1914, including specific chronological and geographic data.

This wealth of archival information made possible this paper, the first comprehensive history of Russian Mormonism from its roots in the nineteenth century to the present day. This article attempts to add historical and contextual specificity to the earlier research conducted by Lyon, Browning, and Eliason, confirming and expanding upon their theories and ideas.

Russian Mormonism can be distinctly divided into two separate movements, based on the district of origin: Novouzensk Mormonism, founded in 1855 by Ivan Grigorev Kanygin and often known as Novouzensk Methodism; and what I call Samara Mormonism, which had its origin in the 1870s in the Nikolaevsk, Buzuluk, and Samara districts. After presenting a brief overview of political and social forces preceding Russian Mormonism, this paper will review antecedents to the two movements and then analyze both Novouzensk (Southern) and Samara (Northern) Mormon groups in detail.

## **Antecedents and Environment**

### **Political and Economic Evolution**

Russian Mormonism arose in a dynamic environment of constant political, economic, and religious change. The region that in 1851 became Samara Province was a historical gathering place for those seeking to escape the social and religious oppression of Muscovite Russia. The vast expanses of steppe, the fertile black soil, and the distance from Moscow all contributed to make Samara a haven for the fringes of Russian religious and social life. In the fourteenth century, Moscow had begun to unite the divided feudal princedoms of Russia under one banner. Through intrigue, war, and alliance, the Muscovite princes occupied the Volga down to its junction with the Sura River by the mid-1400s. However, efforts to expand eastward were frustrated by the powerful khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan. Relics of the Mongol invasion that had shattered Russian civilization two centuries before, the khanates posed a serious threat to Russian political development, and many Russian princes were still dominated by their Asian overlords. Although the khanates were ruled by Muslim Tatars, they also included the Mari-el, Chuvash, Mordva, Udmurt, and Bashkir peoples—some adhering to Islam or Christianity, others preserving their native pagan religious systems.

Ivan the Terrible conquered the Khanate of Kazan in 1552, and Astrakhan fell in 1556. The conquest of

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<sup>6</sup> Eric A. Eliason and Gary Browning, “Russia’s Other ‘Mormons:’ Their Origins and Relationship to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”, *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1, 2001, 6-34.

the Tatar forces opened the way for a flood of Russian expansion and settlement along the Volga south of Kazan. Tiny, isolated settlements sprang up on the fertile steppe and along the slow, winding streams and oak forests of the new lands. Samara was built in 1586 as part of a line of forts intended to defend the newly conquered lands. The fort was constructed on the apex of a long bend in the Volga, and was designed to protect the exposed eastern salient of the river for Russian trade to the south. Other forts followed, including Saratov to the southwest in 1590. Under pressure from feudal oppression, many peasants saw the Volga lands as an opportunity to escape serfdom and control from Moscow. Early groups of runaway peasants called Cossacks were responsible for expanding Russian influence east of the Volga. The Cossack bands often proved difficult for the government to control, however. Samara and the surrounding lands sided with the peasant rebellions of Stepan Razin and Yemelyan Pugachev in the 1700s, both of which were popular military movements against the domination of the state and its feudal ally, the church.<sup>7</sup>

Samara Province (*Samarskaya Guberniya*) was organized by a decree issued December 6, 1850 from portions of the Saratov, Simbirsk, and Orenburg provinces. Samara Province was roughly equal in size to present-day Iowa: the province occupied an area of 58,156 square miles (150,624 square kilometers) with an initial population of less than 1.5 million. The Russians who settled the area mingled with the many native peoples who had been incorporated into the empire through conquest and Germans who had migrated to the Volga in large numbers during the 1700s. Samara Province developed a distinctive local culture from the melting pot of regional dialects, customs, and clothing.

### **Russian Religious Evolution: Old Belief**

Among the first settlers to arrive in the middle Volga lands were many groups of religious dissenters. Almost without exception, the villages that later harbored Russian Mormons were founded by Russians seeking to escape persecution in the more settled lands closer to Moscow. These sectarians had developed from three major religious movements: Old Belief, mystical sectarianism, and rational sectarianism.

The early seventeenth century was a time of transition for Russian Orthodoxy. The introduction of printing in the late 1500s led to a growing interest in religious literature, causing some Russian Orthodox scholars to seek guidance from the older Orthodox rites of the Greeks. Liturgical reform reached an apex with the appointment of Nikon to the patriarchy in 1652. The powerful patriarch angered many clergymen by instituting changes in the Orthodox rite to bring it into conformity with older Greek liturgical practices. Nikon also used his position in the Church estate to secure immense power. By 1667 the tsar and the nobility came out in open opposition to Nikon and deposed him during a Moscow council. Great conflict ensued between Nikonian reformers and those who held to the Slavic rites, with much of the lay clergy and lesser nobility supporting a Slavic interpretation of Christianity as opposed to Nikon's Westernizing views. These protestors against the reform became known as Old Believers or Old Ritualists (*starovery* or *staroobryadtsy*).<sup>8</sup>

Old Believers were divided into numerous sects, some of which retained a similar religious position to mainstream Orthodoxy, and others that developed unique religious beliefs and practices. The Priestist Old Believers (*popovtsy*) maintained a hierarchical priesthood and is in many ways indistinguishable from the Russian Orthodox Church today. Other Old Believers became Priestless (*bezpopovtsy*), rejecting the priesthood altogether and relying on informal leadership. The Priestless Old Believers had a very significant impact on the development of mystical Christianity in the lands near Samara. Old Believers of several different sects constituted the first wave of Russian settlement on the Volga in the late 1700s, and Old Belief practices and ideas were a major contributor to the religious revival that produced Russian Mormonism in the nineteenth century.

### **Mystical Sectarianism**

Mystical Christian sects had existed in Russia since Prince Vladimir's conversion to Christianity in AD 988. The Pre-Christian ideas of animism and nature worship, together with esoteric interpretations of scriptural passages by semi-literate monks and peasants, provided fertile ground for imaginative and charismatic religious leaders. The most important of these early mystical sects was founded by the monk Kapiton in the Kostroma Region of

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<sup>7</sup> V. P. Skobelev, ed., *Samara: Provincial Culture* (Samara: IBT International, 1995), 29-36.

<sup>8</sup> Serge Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 46-57.

the upper Volga. In 1634 Kapiton established a religious commune with state approval, but five years later the commune was closed. Kapiton then joined groups of runaway peasants in formulating a new religious idea that rejected the official Orthodox Church and the authority of the Russian tsar.

The followers of Kapiton were often called Christ Worshipers (*khristovover*) or the People of God (*lyudi bozhie*). The Christ Worshipers believed that divine revelation and ascetic religious worship defined true Christian belief, and members of the sect engaged in secret rituals and meetings that scandalized the imaginations of their Orthodox neighbors. As a central principle of the sect, Kapiton's followers believed that Christ and the spirits of apostles, prophets, and other saints could enter into the body of the worshiper. As an early *Khristovover* song declares, "The Lord God himself, the heavenly tsar... the Lord, he is in human flesh."<sup>9</sup> Members of the spiritual community thus were called "christs", "apostles", "prophets", or "virgin mothers". The Christ Worshipers practiced extreme asceticism and engaged in ecstatic religious experiences called *radenie*, roughly translated into English as zeal or fervor.<sup>10</sup> During *radenie*, believers gathered in prayer and singing, accompanied by twirling dances and speaking in unknown tongues. The physical exhaustion of *radenie* was designed to lead the believer to a receptive state for the spirit of Christ and other heavenly beings to enter.

Early Christ Worshipers generally preserved outward relations with the Orthodox Church, visiting services regularly and preserving ritualistic objects such as icons. The beliefs of the sect were kept hidden from the clergy by requiring an oath of secrecy to "keep these commandments hidden, revealing them neither to father or mother."<sup>11</sup>

Followers of the mystical Christian teachings were most widely persecuted for their rejection of traditional marriage roles. According to legend, the sect's early followers enunciated this foundational doctrine: "Marry not; and who is married, live with your wife as with your sister. The non-married shall not marry, the married shall be un-married."<sup>12</sup> Rumors of sexual debauchery and lawless cohabitation characterized early trials of *Khristovover* followers. In reality, the majority of the Christ Worshipers practiced sexual abstinence, and family life in the traditional sense was severely restricted. Aleksandr Klibanov, a leading Soviet scholar in the field of Russian sectarianism, wrote:

Of course, one cannot exclude some cases of sexual debauchery among the *Khristovover*. In the history of religion we know of numerous cases of sexual crimes committed for religious reasons. But if we speak not of exceptions but of the rule, then the *Khristovover* were characterized by the demand for sexual abstinence, which they more or less faithfully followed.<sup>13</sup>

Over time, some Christ Worshiper groups rejected abstinence from marital relationships and advocated a spiritual marriage system. Under such an order, marriage partners chose each other based on personal preference or bonds of common spiritual feeling. No church marriage ceremony was performed, and partners were allowed to leave the relationship at will. This "free love" system was severely condemned by the Orthodox clergy, often evincing exaggerated descriptions and generalizations by the Orthodox press of the period.

The mysticism of the Christ Worshipers gave rise to hundreds of small religious sects throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In attempting to categorize and denounce this mystical movement, Russian Orthodox observers called the mystics *Khlysty* (*khlysty*), a word that meant "flagellant"—making reference to the mystics' ascetic practices—and was possibly a corruption of "Christs" (*khristy*), a reference to the pantheistic beliefs of the movement. Despite this very popular designation, those who were called *Khlysty* did not represent a unified belief system and cannot be classified as one sect. Some mystical Christian groups rejected Christ Worshiper beliefs regarding the transmigration of spirits and mysticism associated with *radenie*, while others modified the structure or doctrinal teachings of earlier Christ Worshipers.<sup>14</sup> In time, local

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<sup>9</sup> I. G. Aivazov, "Khristovschina", *Materialy dlya issledovaniya russkikh misticheskikh sekt* [Materials for Research on Russian Mystical Sects] (Petrograd: 1<sup>st</sup> ed.).

<sup>10</sup> Christel Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union: A Sociological Study* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978), 92.

<sup>11</sup> Aleksandr Etkind, *Khlyst: Sekty, Literatura i Revolyutsiya* [The Khlyst: Sects, Literature, and Revolution] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1998), 25.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Aleksandr Ilich Klibanov, trans. Ethel Dunn, *History of Religious Sectarianism in Russia (1860s-1917)* (New York: Pergamon, 1965), 53.

<sup>14</sup> T. I. Butkevich, *Obzor Russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov* [Review of Russian Sects and Their Doctrines] (Kharkov, Ukraine: Government Printing Press, 1910), 27.

sectarian movements were designated as being Khlyst if only on the basis of a mystical interpretation of religion or the existence of a charismatic leader. Klibanov writes: “It goes without saying that *Khristovoverie* was not the same thing at various times and in various economic regions.”<sup>15</sup> As one author described, “[Khlyst] sects emerge one after another in a numberless concourse; sometimes they appear for no apparent reason, or simultaneously emerge in the same character in different parts of Russia.”<sup>16</sup> T. I. Butkevich, a prominent anti-sectarian missionary, remarked on the rapidity with which Khlyst teachings evolved:

A unique characteristic of the Khlyst movement in our time is its disintegration into a multitude of variations or movements.... The Khlysts are prone to very rapid changes in both their dogmas and their worldview.... In recent times, a great many movements have separated themselves out of Khlystism, which already have almost nothing in common with the original Khlysts, or that at least are significantly divergent from it in their understanding of fundamental religious tenets.<sup>17</sup>

This paper will use the term Khlyst to describe these various and sometimes unrelated mystical movements, but care must be taken to understand that the word refers not to a specific sect, but to the movement of mystical Christianity within the Russian Orthodox Church.

### Rational Sectarianism

Gradually some mystical Russian Christians completely repudiated all religious rituals and objects associated with the Orthodox Church. These “Spiritual Christians” taught that “it is in itself sufficient to pray to God in some place other than a church,” and denied all “sacraments, miracles, saints, icons, holy relics, church ritual and ceremonial... and the Church itself.”<sup>18</sup> Early Spiritual Christians did not immediately break from their parent Khlyst communities, but gradually de-emphasized *radenie* and the mystical elements of the faith. Over time the Spiritual Christian movement split into two major sects, commonly called Dukhobors and Molokans. The former group remained small but came to the attention of the world community through Count Leo Tolstoy’s efforts to help some of them immigrate to Canada. However, the Dukhobors never made significant inroads to the east of the Volga, and were the smallest of the Russian sects. The study of Russian Mormonism primarily concerns the Molokan branch of Spiritual Christianity.

Molokans probably received their name from the fact that they did not observe the Orthodox restriction on drinking milk (*moloko*) during Lent, but more often continued to refer to themselves as Spiritual Christians (*dukhovnye khristiane*). Unlike the Khlyst and Dukhobor movements, Molokanism largely rejected mysticism and focused on rational interpretations of the Bible. Instead of employing a complex church hierarchy, Molokans were led by locally ordained presbyters, and home worship was emphasized without the ecstatic worship of *radenie*. Molokan preachers often focused on the impending end of the world, and mass movements to prepare for the second coming of Christ were common. The Molokan movement eventually became Russia’s largest sectarian division, possibly numbering up to one million adherents in 1913.<sup>19</sup>

Molokanism quickly spread from its center in Tambov Region to the sparsely populated regions of Saratov, Samara, and Orenburg in the early 1800s. In 1842, 9,553 Molokans lived in the Saratov Region, which at that time included Samara and the surrounding towns.<sup>20</sup> Molokans were responsible for settling many villages—some of which later became Mormon strongholds—including Tyagloe Ozero, Yablonovyy Ovrage, Konstantinovka (Barsukovka), Bogdanovka, and Sukhaya Vyazovka.<sup>21</sup> They played a major role in developing the economic and social conditions of Samara’s border regions, and in settling previously uninhabited areas of the southeastern steppe.

The rationalistic Molokans were the harbinger of a rational trend in Russian sectarian thought that intensified in the nineteenth century. Western rationalist religious missionaries, including Baptist, Stundist, and Seventh Day Adventist societies, began to penetrate deep into the Russian heartland beginning in the 1800s. The new foreign sects often found their most willing converts came from Molokanism.

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<sup>15</sup> Klibanov, *History*, 70.

<sup>16</sup> H. M. Nikolskiy, *Istoriya Russkoy Tserkvi* [History of the Russian Church] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1983, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), 269-270.

<sup>17</sup> Butkevich, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Klibanov, *History*, 56.

<sup>19</sup> Christel Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union: A Sociological Study* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978), 101.

<sup>20</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya sotsialnaya utopiya v Rossii* [The Popular Social Utopia in Russia] (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 224-25.

<sup>21</sup> *History of Sukhaya Vyazovka*, village school library, Sukhaya Vyazovka, Russia.



Old Believers, mystical Christians, and the rational sectarians were attracted to the middle Volga by economic opportunity and the lure of freer religious practice. Thousands of peasants fled harsh economic and religious oppression and settled the vast expanse of open steppe. Each of these groups contributed in important ways to the development of Russian Mormonism. The next section of this article will detail the development of the two major Russian Mormon movements and the mystical and rational sects from which they sprang.

## Novouzensk Mormonism

### The Obschie (Communalists)

The fluid nature of both Khlystism and Molokanism led to a predictably high level of religious inbreeding and exchange of ideas. The uneducated peasants, whether formally adherents to Orthodoxy, Old Belief, Molokanism, mystical Christianity, or Islam, often adopted practices and beliefs from several different religious traditions. Major efforts were made by the Orthodox administration to curtail this eclectic exchange, and the religious literature of the period contains strong denouncements of sectarian and schismatic doctrines. Several missionary societies sprang up in the late 1800s to combat the growing diffusion of heretical ideas among Orthodox believers and to strictly separate the various religious dissident groups from Orthodox and civil society. However, sectarianism continued to grow in Samara Province up through the disruptive events of 1917. For example, the official number of Old Believers and sectarians in Samara Province grew from 52,555 in 1879 to more than 100,000 by 1883; these figures were probably grossly underestimated by the Orthodox authorities.<sup>22</sup>

The intermingling and constant evolution between sectarian groups led Molokanism, like Khlystism, to fragment into many local followings. One of the most important subgroups in the Molokan faith to contribute to Russian Mormonism was the Obschie movement. The Obschie originated in the village of Tyagloe Ozero on the Bolshoy Irgiz River, northeast of Nikolaevsk (present-day Pugachev) and 43 miles (69 kilometers) south of Samara. Tyagloe Ozero was founded in 1792 by 448 Molokans from west of the Volga River, and constituted one of the earliest Molokan villages on the lands east of the Volga. In February 1832, Molokans in the Buzuluk and Buguruslan districts (east of Samara) received permission to resettle to the Caucasus. Many Molokans were fleeing religious persecution, while others believed that Christ would descend to Mt. Ararat in Turkey in 1836. The Caucasus was a frontier land on the periphery of the Russian Empire, a place perceived by many as being relatively free of persecution. In the autumn of 1833 a group of Molokans living east of the Samara area sold their land and homes and began journeying westward to the Volga, planning to eventually settle in the Caucasus. About 170 of these emigrating Molokans stopped in Tyagloe Ozero because of the onset of winter and crop failure in the regions through which they were traveling. At least 500 Molokans already lived in Tyagloe Ozero before the arrival of the emigrants.<sup>23</sup> Between November 1833 and May 1834, these Molokans rented quarters from other local Molokan groups and held frequent religious meetings.

During these winter months, Molokan gatherings often took place at the home of Mikhail Akinfeva Popov, an influential Molokan living in Yablonovyy Ovrage, north of Tyagloe Ozero. An emigrating Molokan, David Ivanov, declared at a meeting in Popov's house that "the Holy Spirit had descended upon him," and that the end of the world and Christ's second coming were now complete. Popov and others of the local Molokans believed Ivanov's prophecy, even after the emigrating sectarians left the area for the Caucasus in May 1834. In concert with Estigney Yakovlev Galyaev (a native of Tyagloe Ozero), Popov developed a document called the "Mutual Hope", describing the principles of communal property and religious community devotion based on Ivanov's prophetic declaration. By March 1836 those ascribing to the "Mutual Hope" were organized into socio-economic groups and were popularly known as *obschie* ("communalists"). In the same year Popov and Galyaev were exiled to the Lenkoran District of the Caucasus, south of Baku, where they established a new commune called Nikolaevka.<sup>24</sup>

Obschie teachings were distinguished by a doctrinal emphasis on the evils of private property and the practice, common among some Christians of the apostolic era, of having all things in common. Popov's "communist societies" were governed by twelve apostles (9 men and 3 women) who looked after the temporal

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<sup>22</sup> See *SEV* (1 November 1880, No. 21), 364, and *SEV* (1 May 1895, No. 9), 389.

<sup>23</sup> Klibanov, *History*, 168.

<sup>24</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 150-154.

and spiritual welfare of each commune. Local religious titles corresponding to members of Christ's body were also a distinctive feature of the Obschie: these designations included the "ear", "foot", "eye", and "tongue", all of whom were led by the local leader, the "judge" or presbyter.<sup>25</sup> Each member of the commune had specific religious duties regarding meetings of worship, singing, communal schools, and work management. Several families lived in large houses together, each of which was called a Party. Other religious teachings included a focus on the Bible as the foundation of the sect; interpretation of church rites and ceremonies allegorically; various forms of fasting without a set calendar or dietary restrictions; strict observance of the Sabbath; frequent prayers and singing, individually and as a group; and strict obedience to marital vows.

The Obschie presence in Nikolaevsk Uezd declined significantly after Popov and Galyaev were exiled to the Caucasus in 1836. Some joined other sectarian groups or assimilated back into Molokanism. Many later joined the Nikolaevsk Mormons.<sup>26</sup> However, the Obschie interpretation of Molokan teachings was preserved by several important Molokan families in Tyagloe Ozero and Yablonovyy Ovrag. One of these families produced a new religious leader, Ivan Grigorev Kanygin, the founder of Novouzensk Methodism and the first person to be called a Russian Mormon.

### **The Novouzensk Methodists**

Ivan Grigorev Kanygin was born in 1823 in Tyagloe Ozero, the same village that served as the center of the Obschie movement. His family was very active in the Molokan faith, and probably adhered to Popov's teachings and participated in the Obschie community. Due to persecution from the Russian Orthodox Church, Ivan's father Grigoriy was sent to a labor camp in Siberia. Nothing is known of Ivan's mother; apparently she died before Grigoriy Kanygin was sent to his frontier exile. Ivan had two older brothers: Trofim died in prison, while Dementiy moved to the Molokan gathering place in the Far East, Amur Kray. Both Grigoriy and his two oldest sons were convicted of manufacturing counterfeit money, a charge that one historian claims was often brought against sectarians in order to give pretense for their arrest and imprisonment. Ivan, being threatened with similar measures, fled to the Caucasus.<sup>27</sup>

Ivan Grigorev probably spent time in the Obschie communes at Nikolaevka, but at some point he traveled and lived in Asiatic Turkey, obtaining Turkish citizenship. He eventually was reunited with his father, who had returned from his exile in Siberia at some period before the early 1850s. The Kanygins settled in Tulcea (Russian *Tulcha*), an ancient Roman city on the eastern edge of the Black Sea in what is now Romania. In the 1800s, Tulcea was controlled by the Ottoman Empire and was the home to Lippovans, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Russians, Jews, and Armenians. The town's location just south of the border with the Russian Empire proved an attraction for those fleeing persecution or seeking economic gain. By the 1860s there were about 40 Russian Molokan families living there, part of the greater sectarian community of Galatz, Akerman, and Odessa.<sup>28</sup>

Ivan Grigorev's cousin, Ivan Ivanov, was the religious leader among the Tulcea Molokans and had great influence locally as a regional council member. Under his leadership, the Tulcea Molokans sent their children to the school of a Bavarian Methodist missionary, Fedor Ivanovich Floken. Floken had received his education in nearby Odessa, after which he left for America and eventually became a missionary for the Methodist Church. After a mission to Bulgaria he settled in Tulcea and opened a free school offering lessons in history, geography, French, German, English, and several other subjects. Graduation from the school entitled each student to a free ticket to America, paid by the Methodist mission. Floken invited his supporter and friend, Ivan Ivanov, to teach the lower grade level.<sup>29</sup>

Ivan Grigorev was no doubt acquainted with Floken, but his role in the Tulcea community is not clear. Despite the lack of specific records on his time in Tulcea, Grigorev was heavily influenced by the Methodist teachings of Floken. Grigorev claimed in a later police report that "he was of the Lutheran-Methodist faith," while another report read that he was "of the Christian faith, of the Methodist sect," both references to his time

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<sup>25</sup> Butkevich, 434-436.

<sup>26</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 265.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 224-25.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 221.

in Floken's community.<sup>30</sup> Later in the 1890s, adherents to Grigorev's teaching became popularly known as Methodists, and Grigorev himself may have used this designation in naming his following.<sup>31</sup> Thus, by this time his religious training included the rationalistic teachings of the Molokans, the communalism of the Obschie, western Protestantism, and exposure to Islam. Ivan Grigorev's extensive experiences with various religious ideas imbued him with the idea of founding his own religious communes in his homeland, Samara Province. In 1855, at the age of 32, Grigorev returned to the Volga.

Grigorev first taught in Aleksandrov Gay, a remote village southeast of Novouzensk, the central administrative city of Novouzensk District. However, local Molokans were opposed to his message, and he traveled north from Novouzensk to Orlov Gay. The Orlov peasants proved more receptive to Grigorev's preaching, and according to the words of a local villager, the charismatic teacher "led away the entire people."<sup>32</sup> One Orthodox missionary wrote of him: "[He] was a tall, stately man with a small, medium-sized beard and light-brown hair. One could glimpse a subtle cunning on his freckled face; his eyes looked about in a bold, penetrating way; one noticed a confident familiarity in the movements of his body and his manner generally—a manner accustomed to power."<sup>33</sup> Grigorev's "new Molokan heresy" quickly attracted the attention of local Orthodox clerics. Although Grigorev claimed to be in Novouzensk District as a merchant, local church authorities accused him of trying to spread heresy, and he was forced to return to Tulcea after only a few months of preaching in Russia.<sup>34</sup>

In April 1858, Ivan Grigorev again appeared in Orlov Gay, and evidently this time his coming was expected. He soon organized an entire communal structure reminiscent of Popov's Obschie, some of whom still lived north of Grigorev's own field of labor. Ivan Grigorev's communal hierarchy was known as the "United Brotherhood" and enthroned community of property as its central tenet.<sup>35</sup> Many Molokans were at this time endeavoring to relocate to the Caucasus, but Grigorev, who had personally seen the persecution directed against the Molokans of the south, "approved of this place [Novouzensk District], calling it the best refuge for this life, for there are persecutions everywhere."<sup>36</sup>

Grigorev's religious ideas were a creative mixture between the Bible-based rationality of the Molokans and the charismatic, often radical mysticism of Khlyst groups. Grigorev promoted the Khlyst ideal of spiritual marriage using Biblical language common among the Molokans. Donald M. Wallace, an American who lived among the Molokans of Novouzensk in 1872, wrote a villager's account of Grigorev's preaching in Aleksandrov Gay:

Though he professed himself to be a good Molokan and was received as such, he enounced at the weekly meetings many new and startling ideas. At first he simply urged his hearers to live like the early Christians, and have all things in common. This seemed sound doctrine to the Molokanye, who profess to take the early Christians as their model, and some of them thought of at once abolishing personal property; but when the teacher intimated pretty plainly that this communism should include free love, a decided opposition arose, and it was objected that the early Church did not recommend wholesale adultery and cognate sins.<sup>37</sup>

While Grigorev's marriage system allowed for less restricted intermingling between the sexes, his main focus was on destroying the "formality" of the Orthodox Church. Klibanov writes:

Grigorev called not for the destruction of marriage, but for the destruction of ecclesiastical marriage. Rather than introducing 'licentiousness', he freed marriage from the shackles of restriction by introducing his own version of the institution, in which the parties involved are motivated by their

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 218, 222.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 262, cf. 241. See also Vasilii Mikhaylovich Skvortsov, *Deianiia 3-go Vserossiiskago Missionerskago S'ezda v Kazani* [Acts of the Third All-Russian Missionary Conference in Kazan] (Kiev: Chokolov Press, 1897), 115, as well as S. V. Bulgakov, *Pravoslavie: Prazdniki i posti, bogoslužhenie, treby, raskoly, eresi, sekty* [Orthodoxy: Festivals and Fasts, Liturgy, Rites, Schisms, Heresies, and Sects] (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1994), 363. Bulgakov's work is online at <http://www.wco.ru/biblio/books/bulgak1/>.

<sup>32</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 262.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>37</sup> Donald M. Wallace, *Russia*, ch. 17. Online at <http://www.bookrags.com/books/rsdmw/PART18.htm>

common feelings of affection.<sup>38</sup>

As Grigorev was reported to have taught, “From [the time of Adam], nowhere do we observe that man should perform a marriage; only God should.”<sup>39</sup> Several examples of multiple marriage partners are recorded in historical documents. An elderly peasant named Yakov Nazarov was authorized by Grigorev to take his own maiden daughter as a wife, and Grigorev himself kept at least two spiritual wives, by whom he had two children—Ivan and Marya—who would later become prominent in the sect’s leadership.<sup>40</sup>

The Methodist worship services evolved over the years to include many elements of both rational and mystical sectarianism. Early meetings followed the Molokan tradition of meeting to read the Bible or other religious books, interpretative discussions, the singing of Psalms, prayer by the presbyter, and social mingling to discuss community issues. Over time, Grigorev introduced the practice of dancing during worship, borrowed from both the Khlyst and Obschie traditions, as well as prophecy and speaking in unknown tongues.<sup>41</sup> These new revelatory freedoms led some to claim titles as “apostles” and “prophets”, a Khlyst tradition. The elevation of others to high spiritual rank caused Grigorev to claim his title as “Son of God”.<sup>42</sup> Thus, strong mystical elements gradually began to mix with the group’s original Molokan traditions. After Grigorev’s death, Orthodox priests reported that his followers turned their worship services into street round dances, and religious meetings were accompanied by wine drinking, dancing to the accordion, and clapping.<sup>43</sup>

Having rejected the ascetic practices of Molokanism, Grigorev introduced other relaxations of traditional sectarian teachings. He rejected the Molokan and Khlyst teaching that drinking alcohol was sinful, claiming that wine and beer both come from bread, and are therefore harmless.<sup>44</sup> Grigorev reportedly reinforced these teachings by encouraging group drinking after each worship service.<sup>45</sup> These liberal teachings appealed to the common peasants, while Molokans and Khlysts saw in the new religion similarities to their own religious ideas.

The communal structure of the “United Brotherhood” followed a pattern very similar to the “Mutual Hope” of Mikhail Popov and the Obschie. It appears that Grigorev’s early preaching was not generally accepted among the Obschie living in his native village of Tyagloe Ozero and the surrounding countryside. However, this did not prevent Grigorev from adopting both social conventions and religious motifs common among the Obschie. While Popov’s communal homes were called “Home Churches,” Grigorev adopted the same idea and called them “Homes of the Saints.”<sup>46</sup> At the head of each commune was a presbyter, personally ordained by Grigorev and given responsibility to lead the religious and social endeavors of the community. The presbyter was aided in worship services by members of the community, whose religious titles corresponded to parts of the body (“foot,” “hand,” and “eye.”) These titles were directly borrowed from the Obschie.<sup>47</sup> These borrowings led many to identify Grigorev as the inheritor of the Obschie sect. Albert Heard, writing in 1887, recorded: “A small number among them [the Molokans], called “Obstchii” or “Communists,” carried their theories to extremes, and advocated community of women, as well as of property, but their views were never generally accepted.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the United Brotherhood eventually became synonymous with the earlier existing Obschie of Mikhail Popov.

Ivan Grigorev continued his proselytizing activities both in Russia and in Tulcea. In December 1858, Grigorev was exiled from Russia by the local authorities after spending time in the Novouzensk prison. Grigorev returned to the area of Tulcea and evidently lived in the nearby town of Galatz, where he corresponded with his followers in Russia.<sup>49</sup> An 1869 letter from an Orthodox missionary in Tulcea reveals several peculiar facts that may account for Grigorev’s activities in the Tulcea area between 1859 and 1861. The

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<sup>38</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 251.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 535-36. *SEV* (15 April 1895, No. 8), 93.

<sup>41</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 542-43.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 544.

<sup>43</sup> *SEV* (15 April 1895, No. 8), 94.

<sup>44</sup> Aleksandr Il’ich Klibanov, *Narodnaya Sotsial’naya Utopia v Rossii, XIX vek* (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 251.

<sup>45</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 544-45.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Butkevich, 600.

<sup>48</sup> Albert F. Heard, *The Russian Church and Russian Dissent* (New York: 1887), 279-280.

<sup>49</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 215.

missionary reported that “in 1861 a great ‘teacher of Spiritual Christianity’ appeared in Tulcea, Ivan Kondratevich. His teachings are somewhat similar to Methodism... Eloquent, cunning, well-read Ivan Kondratevich organized all the Molokans into one group.”<sup>50</sup> Kondratevich soon became friends with the American Consul, one Mr. Green, and many of the Molokans became American citizens. In an attempt to gain support for the Russian sectarians, Kondratevich traveled to Constantinople (capital of the Ottoman Empire, of which Tulcea was a part), where he lobbied for aid among “English, American, and Prussian ambassadors.”<sup>51</sup> After a scandal in which the daughter of Kondratevich’s host became pregnant, the preacher “hid in Russia, somewhere on the Volga, where he again was acclaimed as a great teacher of the church.”<sup>52</sup> The Tulcea Molokan community split in two: one half remained as “Constant” Molokans, adhering to their original teachings, while the other group (“Methodist-Molokans”) held to Kondratevich’s teachings and rallied around the Methodist missionary Floken and Ivan Ivanov, his supporter.

Several coincidences suggest that Ivan Kondratevich was either closely associated with Ivan Grigorev, or may have been the same person. Grigorev, like Kondratevich, was described by his opponents as a cunning public speaker. One Molokan who heard Grigorev preach said: “He has a wonderful gift of talking; never have I heard any one speak like him.”<sup>53</sup> Other sources describe Grigorev in much the same way that Kondratevich was portrayed: “A man of fiery and passionate imagination, imposing, well-read, and eloquent, Ivan Grigorev produces an indelible impression upon his hearers.”<sup>54</sup> Another parallel between Kondratevich and Grigorev is found in the claim to American citizenship. Ivan Grigorev later told the police that “he with his entire family, along with his cousin [Ivan Ivanov], became American citizens upon the arrival in Tulcea of the American consul.”<sup>55</sup> Soviet archives contained a record of Grigorev’s American passport, which was issued on 18 March 1861.<sup>56</sup> An important connection was also communicated by a later follower of Grigorev, who was queried by a historian as to specific details of Ivan Grigorev’s life. “We cannot give exact information... [but] he had a certificate of free discussion in Constantinople.”<sup>57</sup> Kondratevich also claimed to have visited the Ottoman capital. The date of 1861 corresponds to the year in which Grigorev returned to the Volga, and indeed “was acclaimed as a great teacher of the [Molokan] church” among his followers in Novouzensk District. Finally, the fact that Ivan Ivanov and the influential Methodist-Molokan leaders of the community (including Kondratevich’s host, the father of the impregnated young woman) continued to adhere to Kondratevich’s teachings after his public disgrace seems to indicate that their allegiance may have been based on kinship as well as religious affiliation. Thus I conclude that Kondratevich and Grigorev were very likely the same person. Such a conclusion helps to explain Grigorev’s activities during his two-year absence from Novouzensk District, and also gives us important information regarding his religious affiliations and the strength of his following.

In the middle of July 1861, Grigorev again appeared in Novouzensk District, where his enemies in the Orthodox hierarchy promptly “gave [him] over to the authorities.”<sup>58</sup> Arrested on August 3, 1861 after attending a meeting with his followers in Malyy Uzen, Grigorev spent the next three months in prison. It was at this time that Grigorev claimed to be a “Lutheran-Methodist,” accenting once again his ties with the Methodist-Molokans of Tulcea. On November 16, 1861, Grigorev was commanded to leave the district and stop spreading his “communistic” ideas. Grigorev ignored the verdict and continued preaching, but was forced to return to Tulcea in March 1862.

The 1860s marked a turbulent period in the history of Russia that encouraged the development of radical social and religious reforms like those advocated by Grigorev. Tsar Aleksandr’s Manifesto of February 19, 1861, technically freed Russia’s 50 million serfs, but the Great Reform proved to be less than its popular name implied. In March 1864, peasants along the entire Volga region agitated for immediate removal of all elements

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Wallace.

<sup>54</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 530.

<sup>55</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 219.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 226.

of serfdom, and in protest refused to sow their fields with wheat or work in the fields.<sup>59</sup> Grigorev received permission to settle permanently in Russia and arrived in October 1864 amidst the discontented masses of peasants, many of whom were his religious followers. He admonished his listeners on one occasion: "Now I command you, sow not, nor plow next year... And yet these devils thrash, which will begin to plow now; all that they sow... shall belong to you."<sup>60</sup>

Grigorev continued spreading his "communistic" teachings for eight years, organizing communes in at least ten villages in Novouzensk District. In 1872 he was imprisoned in Novouzensk and in November taken to Samara by Orthodox authorities and imprisoned in the capital of the province. Two Orthodox missionaries, Arseniy<sup>61</sup> and Savelev, interviewed Grigorev on the 10th and 17th of November, converting his prison companion but proving unable to dissuade Grigorev from his views. Ivan Grigorev Kanygin died in prison sometime in February or March of 1872, probably from poisoning.<sup>62</sup>

### Methodists Called Mormons

Although Grigorev and his followers often referred to themselves as Methodists, Obschie, or Molokans, the formal literature of their Orthodox opponents used a new term beginning in 1869: Mormons. Khrisanf Rozhdestvenskiy, archpriest of the Novouzensk and Nikolaevsk districts, authored the title. Rozhdestvenskiy had been appointed to his position in 1843, and from the beginning of Grigorev's religious activity in 1855 he had been tireless in his denunciation and persecution of the new sect. The cleric was personally acquainted with both Grigorev and his predecessor movement, the Obschie: he was a native of Pestravka, a town located only 1.8 miles (3 kilometers) northeast of Tyagloe Ozero, the village where Ivan Grigorev was raised.<sup>63</sup> In 1869 Rozhdestvenskiy authored an article entitled "On the Teachings and Rituals of the Molokan-Mormon Sect, With Criticisms Against Them."<sup>64</sup> It contained a short description of Grigorev's life, teachings, and the organization of the Methodist groups surrounding Novouzensk.

Rozhdestvenskiy's reason for calling Grigorev's followers Mormons probably stemmed from perceived similarities between American Mormonism and the Russian Methodists. The American Mormons, led by their prophet Joseph Smith, received international recognition in the 1840s as news of their peculiar faith and history became known. Members of Smith's following most often called themselves Latter-day Saints, although the nickname Mormons became general after the 1830 publication of the *Book of Mormon*, a scriptural record Smith claimed to have translated. The Mormons became widely known not only for the *Book of Mormon*, but for their unusual religious beliefs about the community of property, prophetic revelation, and marriage. The principles of their social structure depended on close participation and even communitarianism to varying degrees. Joseph Smith and his successor Brigham Young were considered prophets to the Mormon people, and Smith often dictated revelations that the Mormons accepted as being the words of God. In addition, Joseph Smith gradually developed an entirely new order of marriage, resulting in religiously sanctioned polygyny (men marrying more than one wife) and polyandry (women marrying more than one husband). After Smith was assassinated on June 24, 1844, many of his followers joined Brigham Young in an exodus to the Salt Lake Valley in present-day Utah. Plural marriage was openly practiced there, and word quickly spread about the sect's unusual family practices. By the 1860s, religious scholars across the world were familiar with the popular account of Mormonism's rise in the American West. V. M. Skvortsov, an ardent Orthodox anti-sectarian missionary, wrote in 1897: "This sect [Russian Mormonism], to differentiate it from the Khlyst, was called by what was then a popular word, "Mormon": in the 1840s the local newspaper press spoke much of this new American sect."<sup>65</sup>

After Grigorev's death in 1872, the Methodists continued to evolve as a religious body. Discontent about the highly stratified hierarchy and concentration of wealth within the Methodist communes led many to criticize Grigorev's legacy. In the 1890s, Grigorev's son Ivan Ivanovich Meshalkin established a new

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<sup>59</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 260.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>61</sup> A detailed biography of Arseniy is available online at [http://www.rusk.ru/Press/R1/R15/r15\\_8.htm](http://www.rusk.ru/Press/R1/R15/r15_8.htm)

<sup>62</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 231.

<sup>63</sup> Skvortsov, 116.

<sup>64</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 214. Rozhdestvenskiy's article appeared in *SEV* (1869, No. 20).

<sup>65</sup> Skvortsov, 115.

communal system called the “Fellowship of Faith”, based in the village of Malyy Uzen. Rejecting his father’s idea of complete communism, Meshalkin introduced capitalistic features to create a cooperative enterprise based on common religious ideas. The younger Ivan also introduced several doctrinal changes, including the use of religious icons—an idea abhorrent to Molokans.<sup>66</sup> By the first decade of the twentieth century, most of the Methodists identified themselves as Obschie, or more generally, as Molokans, but some were still called Mormons as late as 1891.<sup>67</sup> Historical records show that the group was active up to the era of Soviet collectivization. In fact, 860 Obschie or Mormons were still living in eight different communes in 1907.<sup>68</sup> Klibanov records that the surviving members of Grigorev’s communes “accepted the October Revolution as the Last Judgment over the existing order of formalism.”<sup>69</sup> The history of the Novouzensk Mormons after the Soviet rise to power is unknown. They were probably either destroyed or displaced by collectivization, and like many other sectarians, later assimilated into Soviet society.

## Samara Mormonism

Grigorev’s preaching never extended to the northern half of Samara Province, and his only recorded travel to Samara occurred when he was transferred to the provincial jail three months before he died. In fact, Grigorev’s preaching in his native village of Tyagloe Ozero appears not to have won many converts.<sup>70</sup> Although all manifestations of Mormonism—in the Novouzensk, Buzuluk, Samara, and Nikolaevsk districts—shared a common heritage in Molokanism and Khlystism, major differences between their beliefs and practices occurred because the sect lacked a common authority structure or even a common history. Grigorev’s Methodist-Mormons probably had no contact with Samara Mormonism, although many authors have mistakenly grouped the two movements together.<sup>71</sup> This section will detail the history of the Mormon groups that arose independently of Grigorev’s Novouzensk Mormonism. These northern Mormon groups are collectively known as Samara Mormonism.

### Roots in Samara Montan-Khlyst Communes

While Grigorev’s Mormons developed from a predominantly Molokan background, the Samara Mormons operated more from a Khlyst perspective. The Orthodox writer M. I. Grebnev wrote that Samara Mormonism was “an incredible amalgamation of the ideas of Molokan rationalism and Khlyst mysticism.” According to his article in the 1897 *Samara Eparchial Bulletin*, a wave of Khlyst religious reform swept the province from north to south, eventually meeting a similar reform movement led by Ivan Grigorev in Novouzensk District. Both Ivan Grigorev’s “Molokan-Montanism” and the northern Khlyst reformers produced a new hybrid religion by applying Molokanism’s rationalistic approaches to the mystical religiosity of the Khlysts. “From the collision of these two waves of movement, one having at its foundation purely Khlyst teachings, the other arising from the struggle of two principles—mysticism and rationalism—a fermentation took place, which in its ultimate form developed into Mormonism.”<sup>72</sup>

The Samara Mormon communities had their roots in earlier Khlyst traditions. Mystical Christianity came to the Samara region in the first decades of the 1800s from several Khlyst villages on the west side of the Volga. The earliest Khlyst leader in what later became Samara Province was Vasiliy Egorovich Beloportkov. A peasant from the village of Icheksov, Alatyr District, Simbirsk Province, Beloportkov settled in 1834 in the village of Dubovyy Umet, 11 miles (17 kilometers) south of Samara. Beloportkov brought with him the ideas of other Khlyst groups then practicing in Simbirsk Province, and was successful in converting many of his

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<sup>66</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 541.

<sup>67</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 262.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>71</sup> Several Orthodox writers in the late 1800s incorrectly assumed that Northern Mormons were simply an extension of Grigorev’s sect. This was an easy assumption to make, since both groups were known as Mormons. For an example of this mistaken matching, see Aleksey Matyushenskiy, *Sekta mormonov v Samarskoy eparkhii* [The Mormon Sect in Samara Eparchy], *SEV* (1 and 15 July 1897, No. 13-14), 585.

<sup>72</sup> M. I. Grebnev, “Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva Samarskoy eparkhii v 1896 godu [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1896]”, *SEV* (1 December 1897, No. 23), 1050.



neighbors to the new sect. The Alatyry and now Dubovyy Umet Khlysts called themselves White Doves (*belye golubi*) but were called Montanists (*montanisty* or *montany*) by the Orthodox clergy. Montan was a pagan priest who converted to Christianity in AD 156, and whose followers (Montans or Montanists) believed that humankind could sustain a direct revelatory relationship with God without church ordinances or priesthood. Some of Montan's most important converts were Pricilla and Maximilla, two women who were acclaimed as prophetesses and who, in conjunction with Montan, led the activities of the sect.<sup>73</sup> Certain similarities between Beloportkov's movement and the early Montanists led local clericals to apply the historical designation to the new sect. One particular similarity lay in the structure of the group: like Montan's early Christian organization, some of the Alatyry Khlysts were led by two prophetesses who held meetings in their village of Bazarnyy Uren.<sup>74</sup>

A new phase in the growth of the Montan-Khlyst movement began with the arrival of Vasiliy Nikiforovich Scheglov, often simply called Nikiforych. Nikiforych was a native of Prislonikh, Syzran District, Simbirsk Province, an educated peasant who loved to participate in the religious discussions of the Bazarnyy commune. He married a woman from the commune, raised two sons and two daughters, and became respected as a well-read spiritual mentor in the village. One of his favorite works was a translation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. However, Nikiforych's peaceful life ended suddenly when he claimed to have received several revelations and a call from God to become a "prophet of God, called from his mother's womb to be a herald of a new teaching about the right path to the kingdom of heaven."<sup>75</sup> Nikiforych left his home and family to wander the countryside, preaching mystical Christianity, and eventually settled in Dubovyy Umet.

Nikiforych established Montan-Khlyst communes in several nearby villages in which the Montans conducted discussions on various themes from religious books. Nikiforych's teachings centered on the necessity of repentance and spiritual rebirth, while rejecting the "rules and regulations" of the Orthodox Church.<sup>76</sup> However, attendance at church services was encouraged, and outward performances of some Orthodox practices served to lessen potential persecution. Nikiforych proclaimed that because Christ could no longer be among the people, offerings and prayers should be directed toward him (Nikiforych) rather than Christ. Other teachings included abstinence from alcohol, tea, and meat, and aversion to luxury and ornamentation. Traditional marriage was rejected in favor of a "union of spiritual fraternity," or spiritual marriage, in which the marriage partners were called brother and sister. According to one Orthodox writer, concubines were kept by some Montans.<sup>77</sup> Nikiforych's social teachings divided the Montans into four groups: God-like, Angel-like, Righteous, and Hopeful. These levels of spiritual progress were marked by the Montan's willingness to abide by the social and religious rules of the sect.<sup>78</sup> Another hallmark of his teaching was an oath of secrecy forbidding new converts to reveal the teachings or practices of the Montans to others. A complex system of indoctrination was conducted previous to entry into the sect.<sup>79</sup>

Nikiforych died on May 13, 1855, leaving 32 organized communes in Samara Province—including 35 families in the sect's central village of Dubovyy Umet.<sup>80</sup> Predictably, the Montan-Khlysts continued to evolve religiously as leadership moved to local "christs" and "apostles". Many of the Samara Province Khlysts continued to recognize the leadership of the earlier Alatyry communes. In 1868, the Montan-Khlyst prophet Petr Alekseevich Ivanov arrived from Alatyry to lead the Dubovyy Umet commune. Other Montans identified with their local leaders. One influential successor to Nikiforych's legacy was Anastasiya Kuzminichna Kerova (or Shuvina), an energetic Montan from the village of Rakovka, Samara Province. Under her leadership, many Montan communes moved toward greater mysticism and away from the original focus on religious literary discussions. Kerova was confined to the Spaso-Evfimiev Suzdalskiy Monastery in 1882 by the Orthodox

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<sup>73</sup> Butkevich, 130.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>78</sup> Konstantin Kutepov, *Sekty khlystov i skoptsov* [The Khlyst and Skoptsy Sects] (Kazan, Russia: 1882), 465.

<sup>79</sup> Butkevich, 133-137.

<sup>80</sup> Butkevich, 137. See also "Ocherki po istorii misticheskago sectantstva samarskoy eparkhii v 1860-ikh godakh [Notes on the History of Mystical Sectarianism in the Samara Eparchy in the 1860s]", *SEV* (15 May 1896, No. 10), 412.



authorities, but continued to communicate to her followers.<sup>81</sup>

Some Montans, disaffected with the introduction of Khlyst elements under Kerova's leadership, began calling themselves Besedniks (*besedniki*, "Discussionists"). The Besedniks held to the original focus of Nikiforych's teachings, conducting intense religious discussions on holy writings and spiritual themes. This Montan-Khlyst development practiced a communal lifestyle and followed strict monastic rules. *Radenie* was de-emphasized, and a more rational approach to religion was encouraged. Other branches of the Montan-Khlyst community later developed along similar lines, and the Besednik movement became a major sectarian force in Samara and other surrounding provinces through the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>82</sup>

### Early Samara Mormon History

Samara Mormonism developed as a unique subdivision within the Montan community, eventually emerging as a separate Montan-Khlyst division but never entirely becoming independent of Montanism. Kseniya Danilova Prokhorova, an early follower of Nikiforych, was among the first of the Montans to be called a Mormon. Prokhorova established a popular following by conducting Montan meetings for young men and women in her home, and many Montans considered her a saint. Like other sectarians, Prokhorova's followers called themselves "Spiritual Christians" (*dukhovnie khristyane*), believing that the spirit of God dwelt in them. This nucleus of Montans, including many of Prokhorova's relatives, became known as Mormons in the early 1870s.<sup>83</sup> Early Mormon roots can also be traced to Nikita Vasilev Potapov of Bolshaya Gluschtsa, Nikolaevsk District in the late 1860s and early 70s. Potapov—popularly known as Nikitushka—was a religious teacher and icon merchant who had made several pilgrimages to Jerusalem and other holy sites, and was later considered one of the earliest Mormons.<sup>84</sup>

Several points of contact explain how the term "Mormonism" migrated northeast from Ivan Grigorev's Novouzensk communes to the Khlyst and Molokan groups of nascent Samara Mormonism. The first medium through which the term may have been transmitted was Khrisanf Rozhdestvenskiy. As archpriest of both Novouzensk and Nikolaevsk districts, Rozhdestvenskiy worked with clergy to combat sectarianism in both Ivan Grigorev's villages and in the population centers that hosted the rise of Russian Mormonism in the 1870s. In addition, his native village was Pestravka (home to Samara Mormons) while his center of administration was Novouzensk, where Ivan Grigorev was imprisoned by Rozhdestvenskiy several times. Rozhdestvenskiy is the most likely transmitter for the term Mormonism across the province.

The nature of the Orthodox rural clergy also contributed to the dissemination of "Mormonism" as a religious term during Rozhdestvenskiy's career. Rural Orthodox priests in the latter 1800s were a well educated and distinctive societal class that occupied a high position in village and town life. Provincial seminaries founded in the late 1700s introduced formal clerical training, which had virtually not existed in Russia before Peter the Great. By the mid-nineteenth century, there were 61,798 clerical candidates enrolled in seminaries.<sup>85</sup> As Gregory L. Freeze wrote in his analysis of nineteenth-century rural parish life, "By the mid-nineteenth century a full seminary education had become the norm virtually everywhere—in striking contrast to the usual stereotype of illiterate, ignorant priests that has prevailed in most accounts." Eighty-three percent of Russia's rural priests had studied in the upper division courses of the seminaries by 1860.<sup>86</sup>

The relatively high level of education among the priestly estate meant that rural clergy were exposed to a variety of historical writings and were often themselves society's most prolific writers and publishers. Rozhdestvenskiy was undoubtedly familiar with both ancient and modern religious history, including the history of the American Mormon movement. Later accounts by rural priests show a good grasp of contemporary reports arriving from North America and Europe about Western sectarian activities. This common interest in religious writings also helped spread the term "Mormonism" through the publication of articles by rural priests working on the forefront of the struggle with sectarianism. Local publications were circulated widely through

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<sup>81</sup> Butkevich, 137.

<sup>82</sup> Butkevich, 143-145.

<sup>83</sup> "Mormonstvo", *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 709-710, footnote.

<sup>84</sup> "Khlystovschina v Samarskoy eparkhii v semidesyatkakh godakh [Khlystism in Samara Eparchy in the 1870s]", *SEV* (1 June 1897, No. 11), 472-476.

<sup>85</sup> Gregory L. Freeze, *Description of the Clergy in Rural Russia* (London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 20.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

the official journal of the Orthodox Church in Samara Province, the *Samara Eparchial Bulletin* (*Samarskie eparkhialnie vedomosti*). Samara clerical officials published 800 copies of the *Bulletin* twice monthly, which was then distributed to the rural clergy.<sup>87</sup> The *Bulletin* contained official reports, advertisements, and unofficial articles written by local clergy. Rozhdestvenskiy's report on the "Molokan-Mormon sect" would have been read by most of the priests in Samara Province. The popular clerical culture fostered by the unofficial articles of the *Bulletin* spread news and ideas quickly throughout the region's far-flung village communities.

Another point of contact facilitating the dissemination of the term "Mormonism" was the Obschie population of Nikolaevsk District. The Obschie were active during the 1830s and 40s in what later became the core area of Russian Mormonism, especially Tyagloe Ozero and Yablonovyy Ovrag. After the Obschie leader Mikhail Popov was exiled to the Caucasus and later Siberia, the Obschie declined in importance but continued limited activities within the larger Molokan community from which they originally derived. However, by the 1850s and 60s, Ivan Grigorev had assumed the Obschie name along with several fundamental doctrines established by Popov. In this way, Grigorev became the inheritor of the Obschie tradition in the eyes of the Orthodox establishment, even though Grigorev's Methodist-Mormon communes were located far to the southwest of the Obschie center.

Samara Mormonism began as one of many *korabli* ("ships", or communities) within the large and diverse Khlyst tradition. When the term was first applied to Samara-area sectarians in the early 1870s, the name was probably more an artificial designation than a truly distinguishing characteristic of any group of people. Over time, Samara Mormonism came to be defined as a unique Khlyst sect by most Orthodox observers. Historical evidence shows that while Mormonism did include a large number of adherents who identified themselves with a larger Mormon following, the sect remained a fluid expression of deeper Khlyst roots. Montans and other Khlyst groups were indiscriminately called Mormons along with the actual Mormons, and sometimes these different communities were indistinguishable. Aleksey Matyushenskiy, an Orthodox observer writing in 1897, described this fluidity: "In many places in the Eparchy . . . Khlysts are called Mormons, and Mormons are called Khlysts. . . . We should think that very soon, the term 'Khlystism' will fade into history and will everywhere be called Mormonism."<sup>88</sup> Care should be taken to understand that the term Mormonism was used both to describe a specific community of Khlysts and to describe the Khlysts as a collective whole.

The Mormons that became distinguished from their Montan roots continued to trace their origins to the Alaty Montan-Khlyst communities. One of the most important Mormon preachers in the 1890s was a native of Sobakino, a village in the heart of the Alaty Montan community.<sup>89</sup> Surviving Khlyst-Mormons in the Mormon center of Mekhzavod also have connections to Sobakino.<sup>90</sup>

The Mormon sect spread quickly through the Khlyst communities of Samara Province, aided both by the popularity of the group's name and by the proselytizing efforts of Khlysts who were now distinctly identified as Samara Mormons. By the 1880s, many Khlyst-Molokan groups in Nikolaevsk, Buzuluk, and Samara districts had adopted the name of Mormons as a distinctive sect. Mormons in all three of these districts had contact with one another and some degree of mutual cooperation. For example, a Mormon convert in the Buzuluk District village of Aleksandrovka-Grachevka was sent to the village of Yablonovyy Ovrag in Samara District to be ordained an "apostle".<sup>91</sup> The amazing success of Mormon missionary efforts astounded their Orthodox opponents. Other sectarians also lost many of their members to the growing wave, as one writer in Nikolaevsk District explained:

Mormonism... manifested its zeal for proselytizing with such success that Molokanism was threatened with the serious danger of losing its following.... Mormonism represents an immense power at the

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<sup>87</sup> Petr Alabin, *Dvatsatipyatiletie Samary, kak gubernskago goroda* [The Twentieth Anniversary of Samara as a Provincial Capital] (Samara, Russia: Provincial Press, 1877). Online at [http://www.ssu.samara.ru/campus/digitlib/ALABIN\\_1/index.HTM](http://www.ssu.samara.ru/campus/digitlib/ALABIN_1/index.HTM).

<sup>88</sup> Aleksey Matyushenskiy, "Secta mormonov v Samarskoy eparkhii [Sect of the Mormons in Samara Eparchy]", *SEV* (1 July 1897, No. 13), 591.

<sup>89</sup> "Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1895 goda [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1895]", *SEV* (15 July 1896, No. 14), 609.

<sup>90</sup> Conversation between the author and Ivan Aleksandrovich, a Mekhzavod resident born in 1921. Ivan stated that many of the Khlysts he knew were from the village of Sobakino, where they continue to visit the burial place of one of their great patriarchs.

<sup>91</sup> Grebnev, "Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1894 goda [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1894]", *SEV* (15 October 1895, No. 20), 888.

current time: it has the entire charm of Khlyst exultation [*radenie*], while at the same time protecting its adherents from persecution [because of its association with Molokanism].<sup>92</sup>

Mormons also absorbed several smaller religious sects that had previously been active in the area. One author conjectures that the Prygun movement in Pestravka, Tyagloe Ozero, and Teplovka was absorbed into Mormonism during the 1870s.<sup>93</sup> The Durmanovites, a Spiritual Christian sect established in the late 1870s by Afanasiy Grigorevich Durmanov in Buzuluk District and the northwestern part of Orenburg District, was likewise “swallowed up by Mormonism” in the early 1900s.<sup>94</sup>

Despite wide variation in beliefs and practices, Mormons held to a generally accepted core belief system that borrowed from both Molokan and Khlyst sources. The most distinguishing characteristic of the Mormon sect was the institutionalization of plural marriage. “The central tenet distinguishing [Mormons] from Khlysts is the dogma of polygamy,” wrote Grebnev. “It is commonly known that marriage is not accepted among the Khlysts: they live with each other without regard to whom or how. Among the Mormons, this so-called ‘*svalnny grekh*’ [illicit sexual intermingling] is now forbidden: the Mormon man has assumed the right to have many wives—up to twenty—depending, of course, upon his income.”<sup>95</sup> Another author wrote: “The only difference between Khlystism and Mormonism consists in the fact that Khlystism allows marital relations, or intercourse, in the form of *svalnny grekh*, while the Mormons allow marital relations in the form of polygamy.”<sup>96</sup> Evidently, the Mormons introduced regulation and a certain respectability into the plural marriage system of the Khlysts, although the specifics of their marriage regulations, and the extent of plural marriage, are unknown. S. V. Bulgakov wrote in his *Handbook for the Clergy*:

The sect of the Samara Mormons is divided into two camps: the actual ‘Mormons’ (in Nikolaevsk and Buzuluk districts), and the ‘Methodists’ (in Novouzensk District)... Mormons are distinguishable from Methodists in their relationship to marriage and their way of life: while the former, having rejected marriage, have instituted among themselves polygamy, but lead temperate, sober lives, the latter are notorious drunkards and libertines.<sup>97</sup>

Bulgakov makes an important distinction between Ivan Grigorev’s liberal teachings on marriage and the more respected Samara Mormon practices. While Grigorev taught that men and women should freely associate on the basis of attraction alone, Samara Mormons regarded the institution with greater permanence. Several documented cases of Northern Mormon polygamy have been found. The Orthodox priest Matyushenskiy reported that the leader of the Khlyst-Mormons in Yablonovyy Ovrage practiced a form of plural marriage. “The sect’s leader is a bachelor, but he lives with two maidens or, as he calls them, his sisters.”<sup>98</sup>

Ecstatic worship services (*radenie*) with dancing, singing, and late-night vigils were a central part of Mormon identity. As with other village sectarians of the day, the Mormons greatly prized religious singing. Orthodox priests not infrequently wrote of the defection of their best church singers to the Mormons.<sup>99</sup> The Mormon *radenie* were often held at night in the houses of wealthy members of the community. Guards were placed around the house to warn of any threat.<sup>100</sup> After greeting each other the men and women would sit on opposite rows of benches. The men would then “ask forgiveness” of each other, and all participants removed their outer clothing and shoes. In some villages, the Mormons treated themselves to tea previous to beginning the prayer meeting. Then, sitting on the benches, the sectarians would begin singing their religious songs while stamping their feet. The singing and stamping would grow in intensity and frequency, until one by one the

<sup>92</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 532.

<sup>93</sup> Grebnev, “Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1894 goda [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1894]”, *SEV* (15 October 1895, No. 20), 886.

<sup>94</sup> Klibanov, *Narodnaya*, 265.

<sup>95</sup> Grebnev, “Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1894 goda [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1894]”, *SEV* (15 October 1895, No. 20), 883.

<sup>96</sup> “Khlystovschina Samarskoy eparkhii v 1870-ikh godakh [Khlystism of the Samara Eparchy in the 1870s]”, *SEV* (1 June 1897, No. 11), 476.

<sup>97</sup> Bulgakov, 363.

<sup>98</sup> Grebnev, “Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1894 goda [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1894]”, *SEV* (15 October 1895, No. 20), 890.

<sup>99</sup> Nikola Stroeov, “O sekte mormonov po selam reki Irgiza Nikolaevskago uezda, Samarskoy gubernii [On the Mormon Sect in the Settlements of the Irgiz River, Nikolaevsk District, Samara Province]”, *SEV* (15 July 1907, No. 12), 622-23.

<sup>100</sup> The practice of guarding Mormon worship services is still a visible part of Mormon worship in Nineteenth Kilometer.

Mormons would jump to the middle of the room and begin dancing in two circles, the women forming the outer circle. The “Christ”, “prophet”, or “virgin mother” of the group would stand in the middle of the two circles, and those surrounding him or her would chant words such as “*day dukh, day dukh*” (“give the spirit, give the spirit”) or variations like “*ukh du, ukh du*” in the belief that the spirit of Christ will descend upon their leader.<sup>101</sup> A period of intense physical activity would then occur, with participants speaking in unknown languages, shouting, and crying. Physical exhaustion was sought in order to reach greater spiritual heights.<sup>102</sup>

The doctrinal teachings of Northern Mormonism varied somewhat from village to village. One priest wrote: “Among the Mormons there are as many leaders as there are minds, and as many prophets as there are congregations, so that even within Mormonism there can be different teachings.”<sup>103</sup> Each Mormon community was led by a spiritual leader, sometimes called the elder (*starshoy*), prophet, apostle, or Christ. Mormons contended that as there were prophets and apostles in Biblical times, so too prophets and apostles exist in modern times, and they are called to preach the truth that they themselves have found. In accordance with Khlyst thought, Mormons also believed that Jesus was a mortal man who was inhabited by the spirit of Christ. After Jesus died, this spirit inhabited other holy men, and the Christs of Mormonism claimed to be recipients of that spirit. Despite these claims to spiritual preference, however, Mormons studiously avoided creating formal hierarchies or structures within their sect. They argued that “there were apostles and prophets [in Biblical times], but they did not use the privilege of power; rather, they used the privilege of honor... Christ... did not establish a hierarchy, nor a priesthood.” Living revelation was considered more important than the Bible.<sup>104</sup> This informal power structure resulted in divergent teachings even within related Mormon congregations, leading to many doctrinal variations.

Several important doctrinal differences show that the Samara Mormons in Buzuluk, Samara, and Nikolaevsk districts were distinct from Ivan Grigorev’s Methodist-Mormons. Perhaps most importantly, the northern Mormon communities believed in strict abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. While Grigorev justified drunkenness and the use of vodka, wine, and beer, the Samara Mormons shunned these substances as an essential characteristic of their religion.<sup>105</sup> Samara Mormons were also required to confess their sins before the entire Mormon congregation at *radenie*, while the Novouzensk Methodists confined their confessions to their local leader, the presbyter. Other northern Mormon differences included a focus on asceticism, rejection of hierarchy, and a total lack of religious imagery, especially icons.<sup>106</sup>

In keeping with their Khlyst heritage, the northern Mormons guarded their religious beliefs with an oath of secrecy. “The Mormons stand for one another steadfastly, and they do not open their secrets to anyone,” wrote one observer.<sup>107</sup> This code of silence was an important part of the Montan faith, from which many of the Mormon communes developed. The Montan initiates “utter a solemn oath, under pain of death, to keep secret all that occurs in the commune, together with their doctrines, upon which they are pronounced ‘brothers’ or ‘sisters’ and are accepted into the sect.”<sup>108</sup> While details of the Mormon oath have not survived, a format similar to that of the Montans was evidently followed. The Mormon code of secrecy survives even in post-Soviet times. Virtually no living Mormons are willing to share details about their beliefs or history, and direct field work among them has therefore suffered from an inability to gather primary information.

Mormons were well respected in their communities, and perhaps in some cases even feared. Reportedly, Mormons “avoid luxury, do not hang about the streets, do not sing vulgar songs, abstain from arguments and gossip, show no public drunkenness—they don’t even smoke tobacco or chew on sunflower seeds.”<sup>109</sup> The Buzuluk and Nikolaevsk Mormons lived sober, religious lives and often participated fully in the surrounding Orthodox community. “They drink no wine, smoke no tobacco, do not sing wordly songs—they even scorn the

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<sup>101</sup> The chant of “ukh du, ukh du” was reported by an elderly Molokan in Bogdanovka, now deceased, who had visited Mormon *radenie* as a young man. See Eliason and Browning, 19.

<sup>102</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 647-646.

<sup>103</sup> Stroeve, *SEV* (15 July 1907, No. 12), 629.

<sup>104</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 672-73.

<sup>105</sup> Grebnev, “Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1894 goda [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1894]”, *SEV* (15 October 1895, No. 20), 888.

<sup>106</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 725.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 678.

<sup>108</sup> Butkevich, 138.

<sup>109</sup> “Mormonstvo”, *SEV* (15 June 1898, No. 12), 679.

age-old Russian custom of sitting along the streets and gossiping during holidays. They faithfully attend the house of God [Orthodox church].” Despite Orthodox claims that Mormons secretly despised the established church, many Russians viewed their Mormon neighbors as being fully within the legitimate circle of religious devotion.<sup>110</sup> Modern Mormons continue to be respected for this seeming aloofness from prevalent social habits.

Because each Mormon in the community was committed to helping his neighbors materially, and stemming in part from Mormon abstinence from alcohol or tobacco, the sect was widely envied for its prosperity. “The Mormons of all the villages in the Nikolaevsk District constitute a close-knit, solidary circle on the principles of brotherly love and mutual assistance,” wrote one observer.<sup>111</sup> Wealthy Mormon families wielded influence both within the sect and with Orthodox neighbors, and were described as “capitalists and influential people.”<sup>112</sup> Arkhip Pomazkov, an influential Mormon “Christ”, once remarked to an Orthodox village priest that “if all Russians, in other words Orthodox Russians, helped the poor as they [the Mormons] help their own, then there would be no poor in the village at all.”<sup>113</sup> In Bolshaya Gluschitsa, the Mormon Nabaratov family used their successful commercial enterprise to support the growth of Mormon missionary efforts. Several village men were induced to join the sect when the Nabaratovs offered to help them build houses and establish them as merchants. Thus we read that the peasant Semen Sonin, who with his 7 children fell on hard times during a famine, “sold himself to the Mormons” for material help.<sup>114</sup> Turn-of-the-century Mormons engaged in land renting, various manual trades, and commerce, often hiring their field labor out to others. One author wrote in 1898 of the Mormons: “Not being very attached to the land, they spend nearly the entire year traveling to different villages and districts with the purpose of making some transaction to benefit themselves. During these trips they also pursue the goal of propaganda [to spread Mormon teachings].”<sup>115</sup> Today, the surviving Mormon village of Nineteenth Kilometer (Mekhzavod) near Samara attests to the strong Mormon communal spirit. Locals cite many examples of Mormons pooling their resources to buy cars, build houses, and start businesses. Similarly, wealthy descendants of Mormons in the modern city of Orenburg have created a politically influential business cartel in the construction and petroleum industries.<sup>116</sup>

This focus on material prosperity eventually divided some Mormon communities. A division within the Mormon congregation led by the Nabatovs occurred during the winter of 1900, when the Mormons decided to meet in two separate houses for worship. The Nabatovs hosted the richer villagers and invited the popular young women to their *radenie*. Meanwhile, Eroshikhia Ierofeevna's *radenie* participants were poorer. A scandal ensued when Ierofeevna's followers locked the other Mormon group in the basement during a combined meeting. Word of the incident spread throughout the village and cemented the division between the two groups.<sup>117</sup>

Russian Mormons functionally accepted “Mormon” as a descriptive name for their sect, but most Mormons referred to themselves in other terms. “[The Russian Mormons] have nothing in common with the real Mormonism,” wrote Skvortsov in 1897. “In fact, they do not even know what it is. In any event, the Mormons themselves have asked us about the meaning of their name.”<sup>118</sup> The Mormons continued to refer to themselves as “Saints”, “White Doves”, and “People of God”, common designations among the larger mystical Christian community. The lack of direct records handed down by Russian Mormons themselves makes it difficult to determine whether the Mormons ever used “Mormon” in describing themselves. At any rate, Orthodox clergy did not report that Mormons objected to the term. New adherents to the sect would in some instances “announce themselves Mormon[s]” upon conversion.<sup>119</sup> The imported name took on such a popular aspect that the Mormons were functionally obliged to acknowledge it, despite its curious origins. One example of this functional usage occurred in Bogdanovka, where 15-year-old Ekaterina Pestrikova approached the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 712.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 677.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 678.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 677.

<sup>116</sup> Eliason and Browning, 22.

<sup>117</sup> Stroev, *SEV* (15 July 1907, No. 12), 442-450.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>119</sup> *SEV* (15 November 1898, No. 22), 1132.

village priest in 1896 and asked him “to register her as a member of Mormonism.”<sup>120</sup> Thus “Mormon” was accepted by members of the sect as a legitimate designation for their distinct beliefs, although other more internally religious names were often applied as well.

Interestingly, Orthodox sources report that by the 1890s, most Mormons called themselves Molokans or Spiritual Christians to avoid the more severe legal restrictions placed on sects associated with Khlystism. One prominent example of this re-naming occurred in the village of Aleksandrovka-Grachevka. On January 12, 1900 the priest F. Turutin discovered Mormons at a *radenie* at the mill of peasant Pavel Korchagin. Korchagin was forced to sign a document stating that he would not hold any more Mormon meetings. After persecution continued, representatives of 15 families comprising about 80 people told the priest that they wanted to be registered as Molokans. Turutin saw this as an obvious attempt to avoid persecution and find a way to continue holding *radenie*.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the Mormon request to be grouped with Molokans was bitterly contested by true Molokan believers.<sup>122</sup> Evidence of this problem lingers in the village of Bogdanovka, where the elderly Molokan villagers are derisively labeled “Mormons” by their Orthodox neighbors to this day, although the origin of the term Mormon has long been forgotten.<sup>123</sup> Edokiya Ivanovna Zinovyova, an Orthodox resident of Kolyvan born in 1908, was familiar with many Molokans, Khlysts, and Mormons in her village, and once attended a Molokan meeting in Samara. She recalled that the Mormons and Molokans were identical—another example of Mormons insisting they be called Molokans.<sup>124</sup>

Orthodox authorities often sought to limit and destroy Mormonism by any legal (or illegal) means possible. Reports of arrests, deportations, imprisonment, raids, and intimidation are common in the historical record. Nikola Stroeve, a young Orthodox priest who befriended Mormon leaders in the town of Bolshaya Glushitsa, wrote that on many occasions the local police would seek to disrupt the nightly Mormon worship services. On one such night in 1897, 58 Mormons from four villages were caught dancing at a *radenie* by the local chief of police.<sup>125</sup> The leaders of Buzuluk Mormonism in Aleksandrovka-Grachevka “were for a long time held on charges in the Buzuluk prison” without trial.<sup>126</sup> Justification for arrests and imprisonment was often found in the definition of Mormonism as an “anti-government” sect.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, laws were passed that defined Khlystism and its offshoots as “especially dangerous” to the public welfare. Article 197 of the Penalty Code, issued in 1866, allowed civil authorities the right to imprison Khlyst agitators.<sup>128</sup> Thus, many Mormons in the late 1800s sought refuge by defining themselves as Molokans rather than as Khlysts. Sympathizers to the Mormons were also not tolerated: in 1899 an Orthodox priest serving in the village of Ivanovka was removed from the area after he became too friendly with the local Mormons.<sup>129</sup>

## The Omsk Mormon Settlement

Persecuted sectarians often sought refuge beyond the boundaries of the state. During the early 1800s, many Molokans and Khlysts gathered to the Caucasus in far southern Russia to escape persecution and found religious communes. Another center for the sectarians and Old Believers was the Russian Far East. By the late 1800s, Mormons too were seeking new lands and freedoms away from the more settled areas of the empire. Often these emigrations were caused both by a desire to find more freedom and severe persecution from church

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<sup>120</sup> Grebnev, “Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva Samarskoy eparkhii v 1896 godu [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1896]”, *SEV* (1 December 1897, No. 23), 1051.

<sup>121</sup> *SEV* (1 November 1900, No. 21), 940-941.

<sup>122</sup> *SEV* (1 August 1901, No. 15), 786-788.

<sup>123</sup> Visits by Lyon, Browning, Eliason, and myself to Bogdanovka show that true Molokans are still called Mormons, even though the Mormon population in the village has long since disappeared. An account of the Bogdanovka Mormon-Molokan problem can be found in Lyon, 1-3, 8-9.

<sup>124</sup> James W. Scott, *Samara Research Journal*, recorded May 16, 2001, personal document, 20.

<sup>125</sup> Stroeve, *SEV* (15 July 1907, No. 12), 629.

<sup>126</sup> “Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1895 goda [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1895]”, *SEV* (1 July 1896, No. 13), 610.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 613.

<sup>128</sup> “Khlystovschina Samarskoy eparkhii v 1870-ikh godakh [Khlystism of the Samara Eparchy in the 1870s]”, *SEV* (1 June 1897, No. 11), 475.

<sup>129</sup> “Raskol i sektantstvo v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1899 goda [The Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1899]”, *SEV* (15 November 1900, No. 22), 1004.

and state authorities.

Perhaps the largest settlement of Mormons outside Samara Province was in Omsk, a prominent town in Siberia. The first leader of the Omsk Mormon settlers was Filipp E. Kirilin, a Mormon “Christ” from the village of Bolshaya Glushitsa in Samara Province who had been active as a Mormon leader at least since 1891.<sup>130</sup> Kirilin emigrated to Omsk in 1910 and kept close contact with his fellow Mormons through frequent letters.<sup>131</sup> During later periods of Soviet persecution, other Samara Mormons left for Siberia to join Kirilin’s colony. N. A. Kostenko notes in his book, *Protestant Sects in Siberia*, that 150 Mormons came to the region of Omsk in 1930.<sup>132</sup> However, persecution followed the Samara Mormons to their new settlements. Lyubov Sergeevna Korol, a Russian native of Omsk born in 1916, remembered that her father held secret Mormon meetings in the town when she was a child. Paul Rolly, a reporter for the Salt Lake Tribune and an American Mormon, interviewed Korol in 1998. She remembered that the leader of the Mormons was jailed in 1929. “My father fled because our friends said he might be jailed too,” she reported. Her parents, who had joined the Mormons in 1910, moved with their family to a region near Azerbaijan, but died soon after. Korol grew up with the memory of the Mormon meetings but little knowledge of who the Mormons were. “I loved the songs,” she told Rolly. “I was just a little girl. But the songs were beautiful.” At the age of 80, Korol heard of American Mormon missionaries and was baptized into the LDS Church.<sup>133</sup> Both Korol and Rolly assumed that Russian Mormonism originated with the American movement, but in fact Korol’s parents were more likely members of the Samara Mormon settlement in Omsk.

### “Transcaucasian Mormons”

Another area of migration for persecuted Mormons was the Caucasus, a mountainous region in the far south of the Russian Empire. Samara Mormons were living in the Caucasus at least by 1887. A letter found in the possession of a Kolyvan (Samara Province) Mormon named Dubrovin in 1896 was addressed to him by a Mormon named Korenchenko, who had been exiled to the Caucasus in 1887. Interestingly, the Caucasus Mormon settlers had contact with Western missionaries. Korenchenko wrote to his coreligionist that “Quakers from England and America often visit the exiled Khlysts, endeavoring in every way to lessen the burden of the exiles.”<sup>134</sup>

At least one group of Caucasus Mormons may have developed separately from Samara or Novouzensk Mormonism. This group appeared in the eastern Caucasus near modern-day Baku, Azerbaijan, and involved the presence of American Mormon literature. The Orthodox priest Nikolay Slobodyannikov wrote that in 1902 the “sect of the Mormons” had appeared in the Molokan settlement of Chikhir-Yurt (Chukhur-yurt), west of Baku. In two separate reports he outlined a brief history of these “Transcaucasian Mormons” as told by non-Mormon villagers and the wife of one Mormon leader. According to Slobodyannikov, in 1900 a man named Feodor Semenovich Spakhov arrived in the village, calling himself a preacher of Spiritual Christianity. However, after several religious discussions with Spakhov, the local Molokans rejected the new preacher and he left to Marevka, a small nearby village. Spakhov spent one year in Marevka, then traveled to various other surrounding districts. By 1904, Spakhov’s followers in Chikhir-Yurt numbered 30 to 40 souls, and called themselves Mormons.<sup>135</sup>

Several items of evidence indicate that Spakhov’s “Mormons” may have developed independently from Mormonism in Samara Province. Slobodyannikov wrote that Spakhov left an unnamed book with Isaiya Savchenko, the leader of the Chikhir-Yurt Mormons, which outlined Mormon teachings. In addition, Savchenko possessed printed materials that his wife claimed contained a brief description of Mormon teachings.

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<sup>130</sup> “Mormonstvo [Mormonism]”, *SEV* (15 September 1907, No. 18), 531-532.

<sup>131</sup> “Mormonstvo [Mormonism]”, *SEV* (1 September 1910, No. 17), 1156.

<sup>132</sup> N. A. Kostenko, *Protestantskie sekty v Sibiri* [Protestant Sects in Siberia] (Novosibirsk, Russia: 1967), 4.

<sup>133</sup> Paul Rolly, “Russian Mormons Cling to Faith Amid Hard Times”, *Salt Lake Tribune* (December 19, 1998), B1. While Rolly’s article states that Korol’s childhood occurred in Minsk, Russia, Tania Rands Lyon established that the correct city was Omsk. Lyon, 15-16.

<sup>134</sup> “Sostoyanie raskola i sektantstva v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1895 goda [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism of the Samara Eparchy in 1895]”, *SEV* (1 July 1896, No. 13), 601.

<sup>135</sup> Nikolay Slobodyannikov, “Zakavkazskie Mormony [Transcaucasian Mormons]”, *Missionerskoe Obozrenie* [Missionary Review] (Kiev: Berezhlivost’, 1904, No. 15), 690-695.



Slobodyannikov's interviews led him to believe that American Mormon missionaries were visiting the village posed as merchants, and that the printed materials had come from them. Unfortunately, during Slobodyannikov's visit to the village, Savchenko was in Baku preaching with the aid of these materials, and the priest could not confirm the report.<sup>136</sup> Printed materials outlining the beliefs of Mormonism would be highly uncharacteristic for Samara Mormonism, which was predominantly a local village sect. Printed materials from American Mormon missionaries could very well have penetrated to sectarian communities near Baku by 1902.

The beliefs of Spakhov's Mormons as reported by Slobodyannikov also show that the group probably originated with American Mormon beliefs rather than those of Samara Mormonism. Among the sect's central beliefs were several doctrines that could be seen as uniquely American Mormon. Slobodyannikov wrote that Spakhov believed "God has the same kind of body that a normal man has", and that "God differs from man only in the glory of His moral perfection; therefore, every man can become a god."<sup>137</sup> These beliefs further imply that Spakhov did, in fact, derive his doctrines directly from American Mormonism.

Other areas in the Russian Empire were settled by Samara Mormons after the turn of the century. A Russian convert to American Mormonism and resident of Surgut (northern Siberia), Nadezhda Galiaeva, related to Tania Rands Lyon that her great uncle's first wife was a Mormon who led prayer meetings in the Ural region during WWII. Other reports indicate a possible Mormon presence in villages near Barnaul, capital of the Altay Region east of Omsk in Siberia, and in Birobidzhan, capital of the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Russian Far East.<sup>138</sup>

Not all groups that came to be known as Mormons descended from Samara Mormon settlers. In the Crimean village of Astrakhanka, a community of Molokans began to be known as Mormons after a doctrinal dispute. V.A. Danilov writes that in 1910 this group of Spiritual Christians split in half: some of the sectarians, "primarily among the rich", began practicing polygamy; the others in the community rejected the new doctrine, calling the polygamists "Mormons".<sup>139</sup> The new name probably originated from the villagers' knowledge of American Mormonism.

## Mormonism Today

### Persecution, Dissention, and Dispersion

The emergence of Soviet power and the subsequent collectivization of most Mormon villages nearly succeeded in destroying Samara Mormonism in the Buzuluk, Samara, and Nikolaevsk districts. While the Mormons had resisted exile, persecution, and long prison sentences under the tsarist empire, the disruptions caused by massive collectivized agriculture and state-sponsored atheism proved too strong to combat. Many Mormons were deported, executed, or stripped of their property during the 1920s and 30s. One elderly man who was identified by neighbors as a Mormon told me of these early persecutions. His family was forced from a village in the Orenburg Region when Soviet troops attacked and killed the wealthy Mormons living there. Similar occurrences forced many Mormons to abandon their faith, hide their beliefs, or flee to other areas of the country. Rodion Ivanovich Gorokhov, a "presbyter of the Mormon sect", was one such case. Born in 1887 in Yablonovyy Ovrage, Gorokhov was arrested on February 1, 1931 for "counter-revolutionary propaganda" and sentenced to three years in a concentration camp.<sup>140</sup> Gorokhov was later remembered by descendants of Mormons as the last Mormon leader in the village.<sup>141</sup> John Noble, an American confined to the Vorkuta Soviet labor camp after WWII, described in his memoirs that people of many faiths lived in the camp, including "two or three ... Mormons."<sup>142</sup> He wrote: "There were only a handful of Mormons in our compound, but on their

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 690-695. See also Slobodyannikov, *Missionerskoe Obozrenie* (1903, No. 16), 805.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 692.

<sup>138</sup> Lyon, 15. Browning, manuscript article in the possession of the author, 14. Reference to Birobidzhan from Igor Moiseev, "Orenburg: The Free City", 2001. Online at [http://www.aferizm.ru/criminal/ops\\_orenburg.htm](http://www.aferizm.ru/criminal/ops_orenburg.htm)

<sup>139</sup> V. A. Danilov, "O khlystakh [On the Khlysts]", *Dukhovnyi Khristianin* [The Spiritual Christian] (1910, No. 2), 43. Quoted in Etkind, 77.

<sup>140</sup> Online at [http://www.memo.ru/memory/samara/sam\\_4\\_4.htm](http://www.memo.ru/memory/samara/sam_4_4.htm)

<sup>141</sup> James W. Scott, *Samara Research Journal*, recorded May 16, 2001, personal document, 25.

<sup>142</sup> John Noble and Glenn D. Everett, *I Found God in the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1959), 126. Noble assumed these Mormons were connected with American Mormonism, a very unlikely possibility given the absence of any LDS proselytizing efforts in Russia before the 1990s. See Eliason and Browning, 8.



days off they would always meet for meditation and prayer.”<sup>143</sup> By the 1930s, most Mormons living near Samara had either emigrated, been imprisoned, or ceased openly practicing their beliefs.<sup>144</sup> Mass urbanization following World War II also changed the demographic distribution of surviving Mormon populations. Today, the largest Mormon concentrations are located in the suburbs of Samara, rather than in the outlying villages.<sup>145</sup>

Groups of surviving Mormons, Montans, and other Khlysty continued to meet for religious worship throughout the Soviet period, but gradually most groups either emigrated or assimilated into secular Soviet society. Those communities that did survive metamorphosed and evolved with the changing times. The revelatory nature of Khlyst worship made it inevitable that Mormonism, like its related Khlyst sects, would fragment and divide. By the decade preceding the Bolshevik Revolution, Samara Mormonism had already begun to fracture due to doctrinal and practical considerations.<sup>146</sup> This diffusion and evolution makes a study of Russian Mormonism during Soviet times problematic, since many groups developed their own strains of belief and Samara Mormonism no longer constituted a unified movement. However, the use of the term Mormonism to describe Khlysts—including those who were previously part of the Samara Mormon movement—continues today. The following section will describe several of the known surviving Khlyst communities in Samara Region. While not all of these groups necessarily descend from Samara Mormons, they are often known popularly as Mormons by local villagers and urban residents.

### Suburban Samara Mormonism

The largest, most cohesive group descending from the old Samara Mormons is currently located in several villages and towns on the northern and eastern outskirts of Samara. This area of Mormon communes includes the towns of Krasnaya Glinka, Mekhzavod, Zubchaninovka, and Kinel'skiy, where Mormons have lived since at least the early 1900s. These groups had a definite historical connection to Samara Mormonism and are still known popularly as Mormons today.

Mormons had lived within the city of Samara as early as the 1890s, but urbanization during the Soviet period accelerated this trend. One of the earliest sectarian groups in Kinel'skiy, a small village on the outskirts of the greater Samara metropolitan area, was Semen Ivanovich Suslin. Originally from Dubovyy Umet, Suslin led a large following among the Montan, Khlyst, and Mormon sectarians between 1916 and 1947, when he was brutally killed by police in Samara. Suslin's sect was distinguished by a movement toward urban areas that included Samara, Buzuluk, Ufa, and other large provincial cities. In the immediate vicinity of Samara, Suslin established a following in the village of Kinel'skiy, where Mormons continued to live during the late Soviet period.<sup>147</sup>

After World War II, surviving Mormons from the villages began gathering to a small village called Krutye Klyuchi, several miles north of Samara. Krutye Klyuchi was founded in the mid-1800s by a small lake north of Samara and was originally known as khutor Kalakhontsev. The small settlement included 6 families and 61 people.<sup>148</sup> By 1930, about 17 families lived in the area. However, the pressures of war production led to the construction of a nearby factory beginning in 1937. In 1938 the area was renamed Mekhzavod (Mechanical Factory) and construction began on Soviet-style apartment blocks to the north of the old homesteads. The area of the old settlement eventually lost its original name and became known as Nineteenth Kilometer. Today,

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>144</sup> An elderly Molokan leader in Bogdanovka, Vasiliy Stepanovich Safronov, reported to Tania Rands Lyon that he attended Mormon meetings as a youth. In the 1930s, most Mormons in the village fled to escape persecution. See Lyon, 9.

<sup>145</sup> The current concentration of Mormons around Samara includes the suburbs and outlying villages of Krasnaya Glinka, Mekhzavod, Zubchanninovka, and Kinel'skiy.

<sup>146</sup> “Otchët o sostoyanii sektantstva i deistviyakh protivosektantskoy missii v Samarskoy eparkhii za 1911 god [Report on the Condition of Sectarianism and the Activities of the Anti-Sect Mission in Samara Eparchy During 1911]”, *SEV* (15 June 1912, No. 12), 17-30.

<sup>147</sup> Kirill Serebrenitskiy, “Dubovo-umëtskoe tsarstvo: Potaynoe uchenie khlystovskogo napravleniya v Samarskoy oblasti [The Dubovyy Umet Kingdom: The Secret Teaching of the Khlyst Sect in the Samara Oblast]”, *Etnos i kultura* [Ethnicity and Culture] (1997, No. 1). Online at <http://www.civnet.samara.ru/infcent/etnos/1-1997/etnologij/ist-religii-mifologij/dubumetza/>. A report on the Kinel'skiy Mormons is given in Lyon, unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author, 5.

<sup>148</sup> A. Artemev, *Samarskaya Guberniya. Spisok naselyonnikh mest po svedeniyam 1859* [Samara Province: List of Settlements According to Data from 1859] (St. Petersburg, 1864). Electronic version (1999). Online at <http://www.ssu.samara.ru/campus/digitlib/SamGub/index.htm>

Nineteenth Kilometer preserves its village atmosphere with several hundred well-built wood and stone homes. Post-war construction later led to the area being incorporated as part of the city of Samara. The total current population of Mekhzavod, including Nineteenth Kilometer, is about 30,000.

The Mormons in Nineteenth Kilometer maintain a sense of unique community life and connection with the past, but the sect's numbers are dwindling. Local observers have estimated between 200 and 300 Mormons living in the area, but many of these are Mormons in a cultural sense rather than strict religious adherents. The younger generation does not observe Mormon teachings in the same way its predecessors did, and the sect apparently makes no effort to religiously educate its youth. The spiritual leader of the Nineteenth Kilometer Mormons died in 1993, and the activities of the group are reportedly decreasing.<sup>149</sup> Like other Russians, the Mormons are forced to reconcile their traditional spiritual values with the daily necessity of earning a living and raising children in an increasingly secular environment. Some Mekhzavod Mormons continue to practice their beliefs, meet together for religious services, and are noted for their exceptional unity and abstention from alcohol, tobacco, and swearing. They engage in joint business ventures and are generally envied for their material prosperity.

Research to discover more about the Mekhzavod Mormons has been slow due to the group's insistence on keeping religious matters private. While this tendency owes its existence to the oath of secrecy taken by Mormons in the nineteenth century, Soviet persecution created an even more unwilling attitude to divulge information. Those identified by their neighbors as Mormons uniformly deny any association with the sect.

A second area of Mormon concentration within the city of Samara is the Ninth Microregion, where Tania Rands Lyon made several important contacts with living Russian Mormons in the summer of 1998. Lyon spoke with an elderly woman named Nadia, a practicing Mormon who shared a limited amount of information about her faith. Lyon's conversation with Nadia is significant as being the only one yet recorded in which a Mormon acknowledged his or her affiliation with the sect. Lyon reported that Nadia was born in 1931 in the Orenburg Region in a village of about 120 residents, 30 to 40 of whom were Mormon. While ignorant of the origins of her faith, Nadia continued to practice the basic tenets of abstention from alcohol, tobacco, and swearing. Her son lives in Mekhzavod, and Nadia maintains contact with the Mormons living there. Lyon's conversation with Nadia and other interviews confirm that Russian Mormons continue to hold private religious meetings, off-limits to outsiders.<sup>150</sup>

In the region between Samara and Buzuluk, Khlystism continues to linger among the Mordva, a native steppe people who lived along the Volga before the settlement of Russians began. The Mordva adhered in large numbers to Molokanism, Old Belief, and Khlystism. One modern ethnographer also writes that Mormons also found converts among the Mordva.<sup>151</sup> In the early 1900s, a group of Mordva Khlysts was led by a man named Grigoriy, whose activities were centered in the village of Krasnye Klyuchi, east of Samara. After Grigoriy disappeared in the 1920s, a new prophet named Serafim directed the sect in several surrounding villages. In 1928 the sect, now popularly known as *Tilebukhi*, underwent severe persecution, including the imprisonment and exile of many of its leaders. Serafim moved east to the city of Ufa, spreading the sect throughout the countryside despite Soviet persecution. By the 1980s, many of the sect's younger adherents were moving to cities, and in the late 1990s the *Tilebukhi* had all but disappeared in the villages.<sup>152</sup> The early *Tilebukhi* may have been remnants of the earlier Samara Mormon communities among the Mordva.

### **The Orenburg Mormon Mafia**

One of the most interesting remnants of Samara Mormonism today can be found in Orenburg, the city that first sparked rumors about the existence of Russian Mormons in 1991. The Orenburg Mormons "descend from the old original Mormons", and probably originated in Buzuluk District, now comprising the northwest part of the

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<sup>149</sup> Serebrenitskiy, "Dubovo-umëtskoe." Online at <http://www.civnet.samara.ru/infcent/etnos/1-1997/etnologij/ist-religii-mifologij/dubumetza/>.

<sup>150</sup> Lyon, 20-23.

<sup>151</sup> Online at [http://www.uic.ssu.samara.ru/~povolzje/mordva\\_religiaSam.htm](http://www.uic.ssu.samara.ru/~povolzje/mordva_religiaSam.htm)

<sup>152</sup> Serebrenitskiy, "Tilebukhi: Sovremennoe khlystovskoe uchenie, rasprostranënnoe sredi pravoslavnoy mordvy-erzi na vostoke Samarskoy oblasti [Tilebukhi: Modern Khlyst Teaching Among the Orthodox Mordva in Eastern Samara Oblast]", *Etnos i kultura* [Ethnicity and Culture] (Samara, Russia, 1997, No. 2-3). Online at <http://www.civnet.samara.ru/infcent/etnos/2-3-1997/etnologij/ister-relig-mifologij/tilebyhi/index.html>.

Orenburg Region but historically an area of strong Mormon activity.<sup>153</sup> The Orenburg Mormons are led by two enterprising brothers, Ivan Ivanovich and Aleksandr Ivanovich Zhabin. Gary Browning and Eric Eliason met with Aleksandr in May 2000 for a brief visit. Ivan and Aleksandr were born in the late 1950s into a family that eventually numbered eight children. Their father was a decorated WWII veteran who taught his children to work hard and avoid alcohol and tobacco. Raised in the village of Sofievka (about 200 km north of Orenburg and east of Buzuluk), Ivan and Aleksandr came to Orenburg in the late 1970s and began a series of business ventures with the help of their father. Through hard work and loyalty to the family, the Zhabin brothers built an extensive network of business interests in the area.<sup>154</sup> However, by the 1980s the Zhabins and their relations had turned their business consortium into a violent mafia organization. One police inspector described the Orenburg Mormons as “the city’s largest criminal organization today.” Rumors in Orenburg indicate that members of the Mormon mafia continue to adhere to their religious beliefs, and the Zhabins and their relatives are well known for their abstention from alcohol and tobacco—a very non-Russian practice. The Zhabins and other Mormons occupy a distinct neighborhood of upper-class homes commonly called Mormonovka, and are both feared and admired by many Orenburg residents.<sup>155</sup>

While ruthless in business, Orenburg Mormons are fiercely loyal to each other and to their communities. They are active in the region’s politics and have invested enormous resources into their home villages. The Zhabins promote their native village of Sofievka as a model Cossack community free of alcohol and active in industry. Regulations instituted since the Zhabins’ return from Orenburg in the 1990s include speed limits, strict ordinances against alcoholism, and regulations aimed to reduce divorce. Ivan Zhabin has become a sort of folk hero, creating more than 500 jobs in a village of less than 2,000 and bringing Sofievka to the forefront of modern agricultural progress.<sup>156</sup>

One of the most common remnants of Mormonism’s past is the lingering confusion between Molokans and Mormons, due to the Mormons’ late nineteenth-century insistence on being called Molokans. Molokans in Bodganovka, Gluschitsa, Dubovyy Umyot, and Kolyvan are still occasionally referred to as Mormons even though the Mormons have long been extinct in these villages. Nataliya Yurevna, Kolyvan’s middle-aged head of village administration, recalled that in her school days every boy had a nickname. One boy was nicknamed “Mormon”, but she never learned why.<sup>157</sup>

A final visible trace of former Mormon village populations is located in the village of Yablonovyy Ovrage, 23 miles (37 kilometers) south of Samara. In 1897, Gavriil Zemtsev spent seven months in jail because he organized a Khlyst commune in the village. After being released from prison, Zemtsev again set to work and converted the Korabelnikov family. Villagers claimed that Zemtsev and the Korabelnikovs exhibited characteristics of both the Khlyst and the Molokans, and eventually the Korabelnikovs became known as Mormons.<sup>158</sup> I discovered three gravesites belonging to the Korabelnikov family in Yablonovyy Ovrage, evidently cared for by other Mormons living in Samara. Descendants of the family told me that they were known as Mormons, but that the last practicing Mormon in the family died some years ago. The graves are situated on the far edge of the village, well separated from the distinct Molokan and Orthodox graveyards, and the grave crosses were identical to those used by Mormons at Mekhzavod.

## Conclusion

The story of Russian Mormonism emphasizes the unique fluidity and creativity of Russian religious dissent previous to the Soviet Union. While many are interested in the movement because of its philological relationship to American Mormonism, the epic history of the people involved in Russian Mormonism justifies continued study and attention. Continued research on the local manifestations of religious zeal in rural Russia

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<sup>153</sup> Moiseev, “Orenburg.”

<sup>154</sup> Eliason and Browning, 19-24.

<sup>155</sup> Moiseev, “Orenburg.”

<sup>156</sup> Liliya Mukhamedyarova, “Porotaya Derevnnya: Kak ataman Zhabin nauchil krestyan zemlyu lyubit [The Undone Village: How Ataman Zhabin Taught the Peasants to Love the Land]”, *Obschaya Gazeta* (23 August 2001, No. 34). Online at <http://www.og.ru/archieve/2001/34/mat/di1.shtml>.

<sup>157</sup> Scott, *Samara Research Journal*, recorded May 16, 2001, personal document, 22.

<sup>158</sup> “Sostoyanie Raskola i sektantstva v 1900 godu [Condition of the Schism and Sectarianism in 1900]”, *SEV* (15 August 1902, No. 16), 766.

benefits our understanding of the Russian consciousness and furthers our knowledge of Russian culture and psychology.