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*Cover:* António Simões Ribeiro and Vicente Nunes, *Allegories of Honour and Virtue* (detail), University of Coimbra, Biblioteca Joanina, ceiling of the central room. Photo © José Maria Pimentel



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# The Historiography of the Khlyst Movement in Russia in the Second Half of the 19th and the 20th Centuries

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*Статья посвящена изучению историографии хлыстовского движения в России во второй половине XIX – начале XX вв. Хлыстовство, известное также как “христовщина” или “хлыстовщина”, представляло религиозную мистическую секту, признанную крайне вредной в Российской империи. Сектанты хранили свой культ в тайне и тщательно скрывались среди православных. Незнание всей правды о хлыстах рождало множество догадок и домыслов, при этом уровень интереса к сектантам был достаточно высок. Секта привлекала внимание различных исследователей, особенно представителей духовенства и чиновников. Однако, если о старообрядцах написано достаточно много серьезных работ, то о хлыстах их единицы. Многочисленные чиновники и сельские священники не часто заботились о качестве и достоверности информации и подчас просто переписывали друг у друга ложные сведения. Многочисленные публицисты в погоне за сенсацией тоже нередко сочиняли разные небывлицы. При этом квалифицированных работ о хлыстах публиковалось крайне мало.*

*В связи с этим проблема историографии хлыстовского движения является актуальной и представляет большой интерес для исследования. Необходимость ее изучения заключается в том, что сектанты практически не оставили источников о самих себе. В таких условиях совокупность работ о хлыстах является незаменимым и практически единственным источником информации, с которым может работать исследователь.*

*Более или менее профессиональные исследования о хлыстах появляются лишь в начале XX века, когда проблема вероисповедной политики стояла в Российской империи наиболее остро. Понятно, что по идеологическим причинам тема хлыстовства крайне мало изучалась в СССР. Только конец 80-х – 90-е годы XX века можно отметить как время, когда все, что связано с мистикой, стало очень популярным. Тогда же многие исследователи возвращаются к теме русского сектантства, и в частности, к изучению хлыстовства. При этом подробное изучение историографии хлыстовского движения позволяет составить наиболее полное представление об этом явлении в русской религиозной жизни.*

This chapter is devoted to the historiography of the Khlyst movement in Russia during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The Khlysts, who were known as *Khlystovshina* or *Bozhii ludi* [God's People], were a mass religious movement. The sect, which was formed in the 17th century, existed until the 20th century, and their great development did not go unnoticed. Over the course of several centuries, the Khlysts attracted the attention of a great number of researchers, mostly clerics and various officials whose work brought them into contact with the Sectarrians.

During the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the problem of Sectarrianism grew. It was a matter of concern not only for researchers, but also for ordinary people. There were a lot of rationalist and mystic sects in the territory of the Russian empire, and Old Believers and Sectarrianism were becoming a serious danger to the Russian Orthodox Church, which commanded a position of strength, not susceptible to weakness. The overdue formation of a religious policy, coupled with repressive measures taken to solve the Sectarrian problem, made people hostile to the state and Orthodoxy. Harsh conditions, discontent with their spiritual life, and semi-illiteracy were responsible for people joining the sect. For over three centuries, Russian Sectarrians had attracted great attention from other people. Many mysterious rituals and strange beliefs were attributed to the Khlysts, and they were regarded as followers of either an alien religious movement or an original rural Russian belief system. They were also thought to be the most dangerous sect, and were attacked in all possible ways, being accused of debauchery, the ritual murder of children and other bloodthirstiness. The greatest strength of the Khlyst sect was drawn from its mystery, and that was the reason why its original leaders had insisted that its members should strictly obey the rules of the Orthodox Church, often encouraging them to be over-zealous in their obedience in order not to give the sect away.

The researchers of the 19th century knew more about the Khlysts than we do now. Although they never managed to make a full and objective analysis of the movement, a variety of opinions about the sect tells us how important the issue was for the people during our period of study. For this reason, the historiography of the Khlyst movement is very topical, representing an extensive sphere of research.

During the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century, the attitude of researchers towards the Sectarrians was quite biased; they simply copied the attributes of the Khlysts mechanically from each other, without any proper investigation. Research of a more professional nature only appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, when the problem of a religious policy became more marked. For clear ideological reasons, the Khlysts were insufficiently studied in the USSR, although the period at the end of the 1980s going into the 1990s can be noted as the time when everything connected with mysticism became very popular.

Scientists have paid greater attention to the history of the movement in the 17th and 18th centuries, and as a result, the study of the history of the movement during the

second half of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century has suffered. The historiography of the Khlyst movement represents a very interesting field for research because, while there were a lot of volumes devoted to the Old Believers, because many historians were interested in researching this movement, only very few studied the Khlyst sect. The history of its study is in itself interesting and special. On the one hand, there are many volumes devoted to how it came into existence, but on the other hand, the main aspects of most of this research concern rituals, beliefs and folklore. These works are devoted to the history of the sect in the 17th century, the time when it first appeared. There are, however, exceptions to this type of research, as reports by missionaries and priests, published in theological magazines, usually contain quite useful information about the sect.

Most materials traditionally used by researchers concerning the Russian mystic sects were collected and published during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

One of the first works devoted to this sect was a note by the Kaluga priest Ivan Sergeev. Entitled *Iz "yasneniye raskola, imenuemogo khrystovshina ili khlystovshina* [The Explanation of the Schism Called Khrystovshina or Khlystovshina], it was submitted to the Synod in 1809. Sergeev had been admitted to the community and participated in *radenya* [divine service assembly]. He was also one of the first to write about the sect and supply the authorities with necessary information<sup>1</sup>.

The works devoted to the Khlysts started to appear in the early 1860s. The first researchers of the sect were officials of the Home Office, among them the professor of law N.V. Varadinov, who had written the history of the Home Office. This eighth, additional book was devoted to a history of decrees on the schism<sup>2</sup>. Using the facts, Varadinov showed the attitudes between the Church and power structures on the one hand, and the Church and the Khlysts on the other. Being an expert on the history of law, he managed to collect and analyse a significant number of documentary sources – decrees and decisions connected with the schism. He also showed and characterised the stages of the government's activity regarding the Old Believers.

Theological researches contributed greatly to investigating *khlystovshina*. They were the first to draw public attention to the sect and the fact that it was so widely spread. They began to write about it actively. One of the first was a professor of the Kazan Spiritual Academy I.M. Dobrotvorskiy, whose monograph *Lyudi Bozh'i. Russkaya sekta tak nazываемыkh dukhovnykh khristian* [People Divine. Russian Sect of So-called Spiritual Christians] was published in Kazan in 1869.

The work of Dobrotvorskiy received some criticism. In his book, he designated "the doctrine about mysterious death and mysterious revival" as ostensibly typical for the Khlyst sect. But this was based only on the letters and notes of Vasilii Radaev, who, as Dobrotovskiy stated in his book, was the Khlyst's prophet. He also wrote about the depravity of the Khlysts. However, the great merit of Dobrotvorskiy's work was the publication of 85 Sectarian church motets which had been collected by him<sup>3</sup>.

Dobrotovkiy's work was preceded by some other publications by church authors. However, they involved a minimal quantity of additional material. For example, G. Protopopov's *Opyt istoricheskogo obozreniya misticheskikh sekt v Rossii* [Experience of a Historical Review of Mystic Sects in Russia] (1867)<sup>4</sup>, suggested that the Russian sects should be divided into the following groups: "mystic" ('Khlysts', 'Castratos', 'Napoleonits', 'Racers' and 'Montans') and "rationalist" ('Molokans', 'Dukhobors')<sup>5</sup>. According to the book, the Khlysts was a dangerous sect, and the author declared that it was crucial for the church and the government to fight it.

N.I. Barsov's report, *Russkiy prostonarodnyi mistitsizm* [The Russian Demotic Mysticism], published in 1860-1870, is of some interest, along with his collection of Sectarian motets (103 texts)<sup>6</sup>. The advantage of his works lies in the critical approach to P.I. Melnikov's works *Tainnye sekty* [Secret Sects] and *Belye golubi* [White Pigeons], and Dobrotovkiy's *Lyudi Bozhii. Russkaya sekta tak nazyvaemykh dukhovnykh khristian* [Divine People. Russian Sect of So-called Spiritual Christians]<sup>7</sup>. In his works, Barsov detailed the contents of all the communications concerning the Khlysts that he was aware of, although he repeated an old mistake of his predecessors. He also wrote that Vasiliy Radaev was a Khlyst, and he made some reasonably practical remarks about the genesis of the Khlysts as well as writing about the prospects for research on the sect's folklore. Moreover, following the priest Sergeev, he tried to see a certain theological doctrine behind the tradition of the sect.

F.V. Livanov devoted a whole series of writings to the Khlysts and the Eunuchs. He described a history of the Tatarinova sect with its divine service cult<sup>8</sup>. However, he did not check the information. He expressed confidence that the Khlysts was a political organization which posed danger to the state and society, and basically focused on the sect's history and ceremonial practice. However, the style of the book *Dissenters and Jailers* can hardly be called scientific, as it was written in a non-academic, popular style. When reading Livanov's works, one might think that he must have written them for ordinary illiterate people with the purpose of making them afraid of the Khlysts. As a result, his book is of little scientific value and the information in his works should be carefully checked.

One of the best-known researchers of the schism was the writer P.I. Melnikov. He showed his writing talent in the third part of the novel *Na gorakh* [On Mountains]. He was also famous for his non-academic, popular works such as the articles *Tainnye sekty* [Secret Sects] and *Belye golubi* [White Pigeons], published in *Russkiy byulleten'* [The Russian Bulletin] in 1868 and 1869, as well as his scientific research about the Castratos, which was published along with documentary materials in the archive of the Home Office. Later, it was included in the collected works of Melnikov<sup>9</sup>.

As a writer, Melnikov based his research about the Khlysts on oral communications without checking their reliability. One can forgive a writer for using of unchecked information, but as long as Melnikov was a researcher and an official of special orders, he should have chosen his sources of information more carefully. Unfortunately, he made

the same error when writing *Otchet o sostoyanii raskola v Nizhegorodskoy gubernii* [The Report on the Condition of the Schism in the Nizhny Novgorod Province], for the Home Office. This certainly reduces the quality of his work considerably<sup>10</sup>.

His articles *Tainye sekty* [Secret Sects] and *Belye golubi* [White Pigeons] did not show a methodical approach to the stated facts, but as these products are literary, rather than scientific, their usage for research of the Khlysts is considerably limited in any case. However, the author probably did not aim to write a scientific work and so frequently altered the facts. The facts given in the novel *Na gorakh* [On Mountains] are even less reliable

A.P. Shchapov's volumes are of great interest. In 1858, his thesis *Russkiy raskol starobryadchestva* [Russian Schism of the Old Believers] was published<sup>11</sup>. He considered the schism to be not only religious, but also a historical, domestic and social phenomenon. Later he developed the ideas in his book *Zemstvo i raskol* [Zemstvo and Schism]<sup>12</sup>.

Shchapov's approach to the problem of Sectarianism was the best thought out and compared very favourably with all his contemporaries. His ideas on the genesis of the Russian Khlysts are still of scientific interest. In trying to present the Russian schism of the 17th century as a reaction of regional and federal tendencies to growing state centralization, he assumed that the collision resulted in mass and local religious creativity becoming more intense. He noticed, quite reasonably, that there was some kind of new belief which was distinct from official Orthodoxy in the rural environment, and, in his opinion, the reason for it was the lack of knowledge about Christianity, and semi-iliteracy among the people. The suppression of the Russian peasants generated religious imposture; that is, the occurrence of imaginary 'Christs' and 'prophets'.

Nevertheless, the quality of Shchapov's research was much better than that of those who followed. Unfortunately, he never continued his work on the Khlyst movement.

One of the researchers of the 1860s was V.I. Kelsiev. His research was followed by the publication of the four-volume *Sbornik pravitelstvennykh svedeniy o raskolnikakh* [Collection of Government Data on Dissenters] (London, 1860-1862) and the two-volume *Sobraniye postanovleniy po chasti raskola* [Assembly of Decisions in Connection with the Schism] (London, 1863). It was one of the largest publications of sources on the history of the schism.

The second edition of *The Collection of Decisions in Connection with Schism* contained materials about the Khlysts. It included a communication from the participants of the 1852 expedition who took part in research on the schism in the Nizhny Novgorod, Kostroma and Yaroslavl provinces. It also included a classification of the dissenting movements which fell into three categories: Orthodox, Molokanstvo and the belief of the 'Divine People'. He referred to the Khlysts as Divine People, saying that there was not much known about them<sup>13</sup>.

In 1867, a series of articles entitled *Sviatorusskie dvoeveri* [Double-faith Believers of Holy Russia] was published in the magazines of Saint Petersburg<sup>14</sup>. Kelsiev's work has

advantages such as the publication of some important documents as well as quite a few stories about the Khlysts' bloodthirstiness, albeit without any proper facts that could prove these statements.

In 1872, another government work about the Khlysts was published<sup>15</sup>, written by the Moscow official of the Ministry of Justice, N.V. Reutsky. He actively used documents from the Moscow archives: "authentic sources and original papers", which were practically unknown to previous researchers. However, neglect of reference to the documents considerably reduces the quality of his work, although he pointed out in his research that the attitude towards the legend about the Khlyst's "Sabaof" Danila Philippovich should be changed to a critical one.

Ten years later, in 1882, Reutskiy published an original addition to the monograph – the article that contained a history of the Khlyst movement in Moscow in the first half of the 19th century<sup>16</sup>.

B.V. Andreev was one of the followers of Schapov's ideas. Andreev tried to find a new approach to the question of Sectarianism and his attempt does deserve approval, although he worked with unreasonably narrow frameworks of research, which was certainly a drawback. Andreev followed the basic idea of many researchers who tried to find the roots of the Khlyst movement anywhere but in the Russian environment, presenting these religious movements as an alien phenomenon. Moreover, he stated in his work that the Khlysts were predecessors of the Castratos, which gives rise to a number of objections.

In the eighties and nineties of the 19th century, interest in the Khlyst sect increased considerably. Hundreds of research works and articles devoted to the Khlysts were published. They were the works of seminary students such as K.V. Kutepov, I.G. Ayvazov, N.G. Vysotsky, T.I. Butkevich, N.I. Ivanovsky etc.

The thesis of the teacher of the Kazan spiritual academy, the archpriest K.V. Kutepov, is of great interest. For example, in the monograph *Sekty khlystov i skoptzov* [Sects of the Khlysts and Castratos]<sup>17</sup>, the author was not too anxious to criticize any sources, and tried to unify all the data known to him about the Khlysts, but he aimed to show the harmful affect which the Khlysts had had. In 1900, Kutepov's 'research' was re-published without any changes, which emphasized the unwillingness of the author to change his approach to the problem of the sect.

In 1908, D.G. Konovalov published the monograph *Religiozniy ekstaz v russkom misticheskom sektantstve* [Religious Ecstasy in the Russian Mystic Sectarianism]<sup>18</sup>. The views in the book were different to those of other research. In his work, he did not rank Radaev as a Khlyst, whereas he had previously been considered to be almost the ideologist of debauchery, though he was not a Sectarian at all. That has been proved and confirmed by experts from the Moscow Spiritual academy. Another advantage of Konovalov's work was that he proved that the *12 Commandments* of Danila Philippovich were of a later origin than previously thought<sup>19</sup>.

However, the works of Konovalov contain a number of drawbacks. In spite of the fact that he found a new approach to the problem of Sectarianism, he did not manage to fully develop his ideas. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Konovalov's ideas were more progressive than those of many of his colleagues.

I.G. Aivazov and N.G. Vysotsky were of a theological orientation. In 1910, Aivazov published some archival materials about the Khlysts and the Castratos<sup>20</sup>. Unfortunately, he did not bother to order the documents he used, or make comments about them. This, as well as the irreconcilability of Aivazov to Sectarianism, means we cannot trust the information in his work completely. Therefore, his research should be subject to strict criticism.

In 1915, a book by Professor and Archpriest T.I. Butkevich entitled *Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov* [The Review of Russian Sects and Their Significance] was published<sup>21</sup>. The author gave a detailed description of the Khlysts as a fanatical and extremely harmful sect. This publication served as a reference book for missionary work for a long time. Nearly all sects which were known about at that time were described in it. The author offered a detailed analysis of Khlyst doctrines, representing them as unequivocal. The ideas of Butkevich were typical of the majority of historians and theologians. He could not be reconciled to Sectarianism and wrote about the real need to fight it. Therefore, it is necessary to treat such research carefully.

In 1912, N.I. Ivanovskiy, Professor of the Kazan Spiritual Academy and official Councillor of State, had his book entitled *Rukovodstvo po istorii i oblicheniyu staroobryadcheskogo naskola* [The Manual of the History and Censure of the Old Believers' Schism] published<sup>22</sup>. It was a textbook for missionaries and priests. Ivanovskiy was more constrained in his ideas on the sect. In the articles published in the Ministry of Justice's magazine, he weighed all the 'pros' and 'cons' of the Khlysts, fairly assessing and criticizing the new legislation<sup>23</sup>.

A.S. Prugavin was one of the best known historians of the schism. From 1877, he was known as an ethnographer and a publicist. He worked on the history of the Old Believers and Sectarianism as well as the problems of a religious policy in the Russian Empire. Prugavin's works on the Khlyst movement are of great interest to us<sup>24</sup>. In his opinion the Khlysts were a very advanced group of people

Prugavin's *Bunt protiv prirody* [The Revolt Against Nature] is completely devoted to the Khlysts of the Samara province, a place where he had lived for some years owing to his work. According to him, the Khlysts were innocent victims of prosecutions by the authorities, and especially by the clergy.

Prugavin compared the Khlysts to the Mormons, in the way that they were thought of in society at that time. In his opinion, the Khlysts were the sanest of people, and he denies all rumours concerning general debauchery, while admitting that if there had been any instances, they would have been exceptions.

V.D. Bonch-Bruevich also contributed to the scientific development of the problem of Sectarianism. He saw huge revolutionary potential in Sectarians who resisted oppres-

sion and repression by the state. In his opinion, the Khlyst sect was the most united against the state. He wrote that the Khlysts supported revolutionary movement in the Russian villages<sup>25</sup>.

In the multi-volume edition *Materialy po istorii sektantstva i staroobryadchestva* [Materials on the History of Sectarianism and Old Believers], Bonch-Bruevich expressed the same point of view on the schism. However, his research did not result in anything new.

Among the researchers of the Soviet period, it is necessary to pay attention to A.I. Klibanov, whose teacher was V.D. Bonch-Bruevich (1960-1970). Klibanov published the whole series of monographs, articles and literary sketches devoted to the history and public role of Russian heretical movements and sects, including the Khlysts<sup>26</sup>. However, his works on the history of *khristoveriye*, as he called them, were mostly based on the research of previous authors.

In 1950-1960 Klibanov organized and led sociological and historical expeditions for studying “modern religious beliefs” (and, in particular, sectarianism) in central areas of Russia. However they did not discover much. In 1959 in Tambov regional center Rasscazovo managed to get acquainted with several *postniki* – followers of one of the khlyst’s branches, formed in 1820th by peasant Abakum Kopylov<sup>27</sup>. But, anyhow, Klibanov’s works were, as a matter of fact, unique within the framework of the Soviet religious studies of a post-war period. Unfortunately, they actually did not bring anything new in studying of the sect in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of 20th century.

When speaking about research of the history and culture of Russian Sectarrians in latter years, it is necessary to note A.M. Etkind and A.A. Panchenko.

A. Etkind’s book entitled *Khlyst: sekty, literatura i revolyutsiya* [Khlyst: Sects, Literature and Revolution]<sup>28</sup> (his thesis for his doctoral degree at the University of Helsinki), is devoted to Russian religious communities during the 19th and 20th centuries, and the influence of their ideas and collective forms of life on intellectuals and literature. Communal sects in Russia paved the way for the victory of Bolshevism. The author traced the destiny of Russian communal Sectarianism during the Soviet period. The archival materials he collected, together with the facts testifying to the interaction of communistic Sectarianism and Bolsheviks in construction of a new society, are valuable. He also considered the display of *Khlystovstvo* in the creation of figures in literature during the period known as the “silver age” as an innovation in native science.

A. A. Panchenko’s monograph called *Khrystovshina i scopchestvo: folklor i traditsionnaya kultura russkikh misticheskikh sekt* [Khrystovshina and Scopchestvo: The Folklore and Traditional Culture of Russian Mystic Sects] represented the first regular research of cultural tradition of the two mass religious movements from the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Panchenko considered the folklore

and rituals of *Khrystovshina* and *Scopchestvo* (Castratos) in the wider context of the religious culture of the common people from the 17th to the 20th centuries. However, he hardly studied *Khrystovshina* in the 19th century at all, limiting it to a brief summary. As a whole though, Panchenko's work is worthy, and has great scientific interest<sup>29</sup>.

In conclusion, it is necessary to note that the historiographic review allows us to create a representation of the development of Khlyst research in Russia. Lack of sources left by the Sectarrians makes the research more complicated, and for this reason, we have to turn to numerous articles, brief literary sketches, and textbooks by missionaries on the subject of the schism, in our search for information. There has been quite a lot of research in this area, although we need to bear in mind that most of it is of poor quality. The historiography is a very important aspect of studying this religious movement, and its study is a priority.

## NOTES

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- <sup>3</sup> И.М. Добротворский, *Люди Божьи. Русская секта так называемых духовных христиан* [Divine People. Russian Sect of So-called Spiritual Christians], Kazan 1869.
- <sup>4</sup> Г. Протопопов, *Опыт исторического обозрения мистических сект в России* [Experience of a Historical Review of Mystical Sects in Russia], "Труды Киевской духовной академии" [Works of the Kiev Spiritual Academy], 10, 11, 1867.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Н.И. Барсов, *Русский протонародный мистицизм* [Russian Mysticism of Common People], "Христианское чтение" [Christian Reading], 9, 1869.
- <sup>7</sup> Н.И. Барсов, *Исторические, критические и полемические опыты* [Historical, Critical and Polemic Experiences], Saint Petersburg 1879.
- <sup>8</sup> See: Ф.В. Ливанов, *Раскольники и острожники* [Dissenters and Extremely scarce], vol. I-IV, Saint Petersburg 1868-1873.
- <sup>9</sup> П.И. Мельников (Андрей Печерский), *Собрание сочинений* [The Collected Works], vol. 1-6, Moscow 1863.
- <sup>10</sup> И.М. Добротворский, *К вопросу о людях Божьих* [To a Question on Divine People] "Православный собеседник" [The Orthodox Interlocutor], 1, 1870, pp. 19- 20, pp. 25-29.
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