The Community of Lipovean Russians from Romania

The author focuses on the topic of "Lipovean-Russian" from Romania, a denomination that he proposes as an alternative to the mainstream one, "Russian-Lipovean". The author of the paper documents on the history of this ethnic minority, which is also a religious one. In his analysis, the role of the Church is carefully examined, as it shaped the political context in which the Lipovean-Russians lived and their respective cultural life. The author also analyses the differences among different religious branches of this community.

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The official literature employs the denomination Russian-Lipoveans. In my opinion, this is not a happy choice, as there are few non-Lipovean Russians in Romania. Moreover, the Lipoveans living in Romania are dispersed over a rather vast area and do not form compact demography. I propose as more opportune the Lipovean-Russians denomination because there are many Lipovean Romanians. The residents of the town of Lipova are called Lipoveans, and so are those living in the district of town Alba-Iulia. There are several vil-

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lages in the regions of Moldova and Oltenia by the name of Lipova or Lipoveni. Hence, I feel the name Lipovean-Russians to be more opportune. Over the last decades, the eponym Lipovean was a frequent occurrence in Romanian linguistics. An exhaustive history of the term Lipovean can be found in the Ph.D. thesis of Alla Vinteler[1], who considers that the origin of this term can be traced back to the patronymic of Filipp – the name of a monk. More recent authors[2] also endorse the idea.

Over the centuries, the Lipoveans and their ancestors went by the name of *staroobreadtsi*, and their religious cult was called *staroobreadcestvo*, in French: *Vieille Foi*, in English: the *Old Faith*, in Romanian: *believers in the old rite*. All that time, the term "believers in the old rite" was associated varied epithets such as *rascolnik, schismatic, sectants*. The Orthodox (Pravoslavnic) population in Ardeal was labeled schismatic[3] by the Catholics and the Calvinists. In the same vein, several recordings of the believers in the old rite can be found in church and laic Russian official correspondence and documents. Documents recording them were published in Russian (the majority), in German[4], in Romanian[5], in English[6], in French[7], and other.

To better comprehend the situation of the believers in the old rite we must review briefly the history of the Russian religion. First, let us note that the Eastern Slavs hadn't experienced slavery and the existence of a slave state in the 9th century when the Byzantine Empire, the most important state in Eastern Europe, was a feudal state, would surely be anachronistic. It is considered that Russia was officially Christianized in the year 988, by Vladimir, prince of Kiev. Before and even after, the Eastern Slavs, organized in tribes, worshiped deities such as: Perun, Svarog, Dajbag, Veles, Hors, Makas and others. The number and hierarchy of their deities bear no comparison to those of the Greeks, Romans, or Indians. The pagan religion of the Eastern Slavs was conveyed in an oral poetry heavily influencing the subsequent high literature.

The conversion to Christianity of the Slavs in general, and of the Eastern Slavs in particular, had early beginnings. There is evidence that the early conversions of the Eastern Slavs took place in the south of present day Russia and the Ukraine, at the turn of the 4th century. Considering that the Byzantine Empire with its vast territory and influence was in the proximity, this thesis is quite valid. In fact, in that exact period Christianity was spreading to other neighboring populations. However, the definite official date for the diffusion of Christianity to the Eastern Slavs is the year 867 when Kievean Russia congregated for the evangelic sermon of Princes Askold and Dir, themselves baptized by Patriarch Fotii following their unsuccessful attack on the Byzantine Empire. Unfortunately, in 882 Askold and Dir were assassinated by Oleg, the infidel. Following their death, Christianity lost some of its holding and the process of diffusion slowed down in Kiev. Even so, the eastern Slav territory was registered as the 6oth Eparchy of the Constantinople Patriarchy[8]. Under the reign of Igor a church under the patron saint Elijah is consecrated in the year 946. Next, princess Olga,

Vladimir's grandmother, is baptized in Constantinople, together with her kin and suite, marking yet another important step in the history of the Russian Church. Hence, when Vladimir, the nephew of Olga, was baptized at Constantinople, the Russian church had already a long tradition. The merit of Vladimir was that on his return from Constantinople he baptized all of his 12 sons, destroyed the idols and ordered that the population be baptized in the Nippers in the year 988. In conclusion, the process of Christening had begun long prior to 988 to be continued after.

The church played an important role in the foundation and the development of the Russian culture, in the spreading of writings, books, literature and artistic values. Writing was introduced to the Eastern Slavs before the spreading of Christianity.

Between the 9th and 10th centuries the Bogomilus movement, named after the doctrine of priest Bogomilus[9], emerged in Bulgaria. This ideology spread quickly to Serbia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, the Byzantine Empire, and later to Northern Italy, Southern France, and Germany. Over the following centuries the Bogomiles influenced the Eastern Slavs too.

In early 13th century the Mongol State was flourishing. At the same time, Eastern Europe, the Middle Orient and even China were undergoing a period of turmoil and discord. Genghis-Khan took advantage of the situation in the intent of conquering the world. After conquering the peoples of Siberia, Northern China and Central Asia he headed for Eastern Europe, and in 1223 he defeated the Russians at Kala. The year 1236 marked the beginning of the process of subordination and occupation of the Russian territories. 1380 was the year of the renowned battle at Kulikovo with heavy losses on both sides. The Mongol occupation continued for two and a half centuries, throughout which Russia was cut off from Europe, with many cities in the occupied territory destroyed and burned down along with their cultural treasures, the churches in particular. The economy, commerce, culture, all suffered under the occupation. The cities in the North were spared and consequently prospered moderately. During the latter half of the occupation period, the subject population enjoyed moderate freedom. The Churches, particularly the convents, granted freedom by the Khans, developed and accumulated wealth even while continuing to Christen the infidel peasants. It was a time when the church and state official ties strengthened. The metropolitan bishop Cyril tried to unify the doctrines in the religious publications and to impose a uniform standard.

Throughout these two centuries, religion and church in such orthodox countries as Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, the Romanian Principalities, underwent some changes. These countries were under the religious influence and patronage of the Byzantine Empire. After Cyril's death, the Russian metropolitan church was divided into two: the Muscovite church and the Lithuanian church. After the conquest of the town of Kazan, an orthodox department was set up, a church was consecrated and a diocese was established. The

spreading of the orthodoxy in Astrakhan and in Siberia followed a similar pattern.

The intensification of Catholic propaganda in Southwest Russia was an urge for the orthodox to build schools and typographies to fight the papists. The brotherhoods also ran schools that prepared the orthodox to fight the Unitarians. Just as in Ardeal, the leaders of the Russian Church were persecuted by the Unitarians. In the North, confessional education was hindered by specific factors.

In order to speed up the spreading of orthodox influence, in 1625 Patriarch Filaret founded in Russia four metropolitan churches, six archbishoprics and eight bishoprics. Boris Godunov intended to found a university, but his initiative was strongly opposed by the church, so he was content with founding just a few schools. I have mentioned all these in support of the idea that the reforms of Nikon were the continuation and culmination of orthodoxy in Russia.

The issue, then, is not whether there was a reform of the church, but rather how the reform was implemented. Religious reform in Russia was preceded by civil wars, by feudal anarchy, other reforms and the passage of various laws, all taking place in other European countries. Thus, "in the context created in the second half of the 14th century by the centralization propensities, there emerged even larger and more powerful states, which in turn accelerated the process of territorial unification within, as was the case in Poland, the Great Principality of Lithuania, the Russian Principalities of the north-east, or the Serbian kingdom. This process was accompanied by monetary and legislative unification, the latter also determining the consolidation of the central power, the strengthening of the laic and ecclesiastic territory and the conversion of the peasants into serfs. The social and economic context is reflected in the laws of Vaclav II in Bohemia, in the Zakonik of 1349 of Stefan Dusan in Serbia, and in the code of Leo I in 1341 in Hungary."[10]

In Russia the centralization of power intensified in the 15th century and was continued under Tsar Ivan the Terrible (1533-1584), Boris Godunov (1598-1606), Vasili Suiski (1606- 1610). The founder of the Romanov dynasty, Mikhail Feodorovici (1613- 1645) prohibited the peasant's movement during the field seasons. His son, Alexey Mikhailovich (1645-1676) ultimately tied the peasants to the land. The above laws in conjunction with the religious laws caused turmoil among the Russians.

We have already mentioned that the Metropolitan Cyril was contemplating a reconsideration of the translation of the Scriptures. The setting of unified rules for all Russian orthodox provinces came, too, under scrutiny during the rule of Ivan the Terrible. In this sense, see "The Council of the 100 Articles" summoned in 1551. From the proposal of Cyril to the Synod of 1654 at Moscow, there was a lapse of two and half centuries, during which the differences between books and rituals came under analysis and debate.

The Nikon reform raises many questions. We have no wish to enumerate or pause at every one of them. Some, however, are worth mentioning. Why was it nec-

essary that the reform be implemented precisely then? After the downfall of the Byzantine Empire and the fall of Constantinople under Turkish dominion, Russia remained the only independent orthodox country. Russia concentrated the elite orthodox intelligentsia from Constantinople, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and the Romanian Principalities. To Moscow they brought along many religious books but also customs novel to the land. Let us quote in this line an expert in the history of religions: "When the star of New Rome set, the star of old imperial Byzantium, in the north rose yet another Orthodox Empire claiming for itself the heritage of the fortress lost by the Christians and the splendor of the crown of the orthodox Emperor, the representative and defender of all righteous Christian believers. The Tsar was led to believe this not only by his subjects and the Russian clergy, but mainly by the Greeks and the Serbians too, who came flocking to Moscow with every opportunity to extol him… "[11]

Bishop Filotei of Pskov, remarking on the progress and growing power of Russia, and on the beauty and grandeur of Kremlin, wrote in a letter of 1512 to prince Vasilie III (1533): "Moscow is the heir of the great capitals of world, of ancient Rome and of the second Rome after Constantinople, the former owing its fall to papal heresy, the latter to the union at Florence. Moscow is the third Rome, the believer in good faith, and there will never be a fourth Rome."[12] Due to its power and extension, the Russian Orthodox Church became the patron of all orthodox believers around the world. Everyone looked to Russia for help, both spiritual and material, from the Russian patriarchy.

During the 250-year period some differences between the Russian and the Balkan churches emerged, which then called for standardization. Even though formally the Russian Church was subordinated to the Constantinople Patriarchy, it couldn't operate changes in the rite as readily as the Balkan countries could. Russia's intention was to increase its influence over Southeastern Europe, but it could not coerce the Balkan countries to resume the old rite, and so ended up by accepting the doctrines of the orthodox believers in the Balkans. This explains why Tsar Alexey Mikhailovici involved himself personally in the implementation of the religious reform in Russia. Political and ideological interests played a leading role in the religious reform, while religious interests came only second. Nikon was merely an upstart implementer, uneducated and lacking the necessary training for the position of metropolitan bishop and patriarch. The sudden death of his competitor, Stefan Vonifatiev, shortly after abandoning the race, can only set one thinking. Other advocates of the Nikonian reforms were patriarchs Macarie of Antioch and Paisie of Alexandria, who participated in the Synod of 1667.

If I'm not mistaken, I think that rather than Tsar Alexei adhering and backing the ideas of Nikon's reform, it was really a matter of Nikon tacitly accepting and implementing them. The combined action by the patriarch and the tsar to change the rite and church books aimed at imposing the same standard not only in

Russia and the Balkan countries, but also in the Ukraine and Belorussia. The goal was, on the one hand, to elaborate a uniform orthodox rite across the entire territory of Great Russia, and on the other, to create a rite for all orthodoxy. The situation of the holy books had been rather awkward since the introduction of Christianity. Numerous churches had been built but hardly enough books printed to propagate and to educate the people in the rite. The early translations were poor and superficial. Greek translators were not familiar with the Slavonic language, and the Russians didn't have a good command of Greek, creating a situation that engendered differences from the start. Even though the differences pertained to form only, they ignited hot debates and opposition. Also, as I have mentioned, the development of Christianity generated further differences leading to schism and turmoil. Let us see what differences were triggered by such debate:

Believers in the old rite

'Alleluia' is chanted twice, followed by 'Glory to You, God'.

The sign of the Cross is made with two fingers.

The eight-corner cross is accepted.

Liturgy is served with seven communion breads.

Processions around the church follow the direction of the sun.

Priests are chosen from among parishioners and do not take long training to serve in churches. Priests depend on the congregation for their livelihood.

Priests shave their beards and wear their hair short.

Entrance into the church regulates conduct and dress.

Smoking and drinking are prohibited.

Believers in the new rite

'Alleluia' is chanted three times, in translations there is also a fourth.

The sign of the Cross is made with three fingers.

The six-corner cross is accepted.

Liturgy is served with five communion breads.

Processions around church are counter sun movement.

To solve the differences above, a synod was summoned at Moscow in 1654 where the reform ideas proposed by Nikon were met with hostility. Nikon, however, thirsting for power suggested the use of force against his opponents. They counted among them bishops, priests, monks, as well as nobility. Let's just mention countess Morozova and her sister Urusova. The opponents sided with tradition. Nikon did not even wait for the synod to end to start the attack upon his opponents. The atrocities committed against the believers in the old rite are unbelievable. The adepts were put in chains, burned at the stake, had their tongues, hands, nose, and ears cut off. Whole families and entire villages were sent on permanent exile to Siberia. The atrocities of the official church and of the authorities knew no bounds. After the meeting of 1667, the fight against the opponents was taken over by the state authorities. Why? Simultaneously to the forceful introduction of reforms by Nikon, the Russian Orthodox Church experienced a breach that hasn't healed to this

day. This led to the emergence of two orthodox churches: the Nikonian Church, to become the official church of Russia, and the Orthodox Church in the old rite or the schism church. The latter serviced by the old books and traditional rite, and its believers were called schismatic and Rascolnic.

Amos Porfiriu[13] offered a rather unreasonable analysis of the term Rascolnic, based on some Romanian and bilingual dictionaries. Every dictionary or encyclopedia that discusses realities of other countries derives its sources from documents in the respective languages. I think that it would have been more reasonable for Mr. A. Porfiriu to read A.N.Vostokov (1781-1864) *Slovary cerkovno -slavjanskogo jazyka*, Vol.1-2, Saint Petersburg, 1858-1861 or *Natolnij enciklopediceskij slovari*, Moscova, 1895, Vol. 8, PP. 582-592. It doesn't mean that I totally disagree with the ideas espoused by A. Porfiriu. After all, who initiated the study of the Orthodox Church in Russia? The representatives of the traditional church? Certainly not!

We consider that the believers in the old rite were unreasonably labeled schismatic. Schism means "the formal separation of a group of believers from the religious community to which they appertain", or "scission" for schism in French. Query: who was separated from whom, more exactly? Is it possible for an entire population to separate from a leading group, or is the reverse true? Similar explanations can be provided for such terms as sect, sectarian, and others. Sectarian, which means "intolerant with the beliefs of others, exclusive", can very well be applied to the Nikonians. The schism (*rascol*) represented in the existence of the Russian people a paramount event of great magnitude. The movement, involving the private family life of a vast population, bred many purely religious ideas and tendencies, which intertwined with vital social problems, caused some anxiety within the Russian society at the time. New regulations in human relations were introduced, changes in attitudes and beliefs, but mostly in religious belief.

In those hard times, believers in the old rite were forced to choose between maltreatment and persecution and abandoning their homes for peripheral and isolated locations exempt from the direct surveillance of the authorities and the official church. The Rascolnics were not permitted to live in towns and marriages were validated only if performed by the official church. In the places they moved, the believers in the old rite built new villages, towns, churches, monasteries, cleared and cultivated the land. But persecution units followed them all the way here. Villages and towns fell once again victims to the tsarist authorities. Due to continued persecution, the Rascolnics fled to the South then under Turkish dominion, to the Baltic countries, to Poland, to Bucovina then occupied by the Austrians, and to Dobrogea. When the Russian army attacked the Ottoman Empire the villages of the believers in the old rite were destroyed. The old rite Russian population was banned access to religious and cultural centers, to official institutions. Consequently, the believers in the old rite duly developed several currents called sects. In Romania they came to be known as the

Lipoveni/ Filipoveti. The founder of the sect was Fotii, an army officer who had defected from Novgorod to the monastery of Vagodsk, where he lived for a time under the name of monk Filipp. At the demise of Daniil Vikulov, the abbot, Filipp intended to take his place, but Semen Denisov was preferred over him. Not taking defeat easily, Fillipp started writing several letters denouncing the poor administration of the monastery under Semen. To solve the problem a council was summoned, which ruled in favor of Semen Denisov. Filipp together with 50 others then left the monastery and built another not far from Vigovsk.

Fillip introduced the 8 corner cross, ruled that believers must pray only to their own private icons. They must not pray for the tsar. Husband and wife if married before must be divorced and chastised. They should consider one another brothers and sisters.

In 1742 a commission led by Samarin visiting all the northern monasteries arrived at the one administered by Filipp. The Filippovens shut themselves in and wouldn't meet the members of the commission. The commission ordered the gates broken down, but the Filippovens set the monastery on fire with them inside. Some must have survived because the name of sect has been preserved. The first collective suicide was recorded at Pomorie, in Palostrove, in 1687, when 2,700 people set themselves on fire.

Not having a guiding center, a hierarchical authority to organize the activity of the believers in the old rite, many currents - called sects by the official church – emerged. In Romania another sect was that of the Bespopovtii (without a priest) which had no ordained priest. The official church wouldn't acknowledge the priests of the sect, consequently no baptism, marriage, or burial could be performed. The doctrine of the Bespopovtii forbade marriage, demanded sexual abstinence, but the precepts were not obeyed and the convents often had to close an eye to philandering. Confronted with an increase in clandestine affairs in mid 18th century Ivan Alexeev proposed that the stricter precepts should be observed only by those capable of it, indicating that it was best for the rest to marry.

Another sect, whose members live in the village 2 May, Romania, was that of the Skopits (*skopit* means to physically remove the testicles, to castrate). This sect derived from still another called Plastovscina, whose members sought Salvation through torture unto death. For the same reason they practiced castration persuaded of its honorable and glorious power to heal. Unable to procreate, they disappeared.

The Church and tsarist administration launched fierce attacks upon the believers in the old rite. They even edited special magazines against them such as "Russkij palomnik", "Bratskoe slovo", "Missionerskoe obozrenie", and more. The problem they were confronted with was the extraordinary speed and the vast area of diffusion of the *rascol* and Rascolnics in Russia. In my opinion, however, the problem is misinterpreted. It is a known fact that the service in all the Russian churches was performed in the old rite, so it wasn't really a matter of spreading – they *had been* there all this time. Instead, it was rather the official church that

needed to propagate its new regulations and have them accepted. In other words, rather than the believers in the old rite struggling against the official church, we have the reverse case. They were merely trying to defend a tradition.

All of the tsarist administrative and official church propaganda directed against the believers in the old rite denote deep hate combined with fear. They propagated their image under the slogan: they are the ultimate evil. However, there were indeed 'good' contributions by the believers in the old rite. They settled isolated territories, cleared and cultivated the land, engaged in different trades, built mills, fished and traded. Soon, they were prospering. The convents were ranked as monasteries but were organized on laic principles. There were schools for children of both sexes, with their own qualified teachers, and endowed libraries. They copied books, old rite documents, wrote poetry, painted allegorical pictures. In the localities with old rite residents everyone could read (in sharp contrast, by the 20th century the majority of the Russian population was still illiterate).

A statistics of the year 1863 compiled by Fon Bucheni registers 8,220,000 believers in the old rite representing 1/6 of the entire Russian population. Romania, due to persecutions, was the choice of the old rite believers called Lipoveni. They first settled in Dobrogea, Bucovina, and Moldova. They have a special place in their houses reserved for the cross, icons, and candles where every member of the family prays. Every family has a private bath where they wash every Saturday for one is not allowed to enter the church not groomed.

Notes

1. Alla Vinteler, Lexicul folclorului lipovenesc, Cluj, 1974, p.12-15

2. Idem, p.16-21; Sevastian Fenoghev, Sarichioi (pagini de istorie), Bucuresti, 1998, p.150-156; Peter Osip, Rusii de rit vechi (lipveni) in Tarile Romane, in Cultura rusilor lipoveni (ortodoxi de rit vechi din Romania) in context national si international, Bucuresti, 1998, p.152-153.

3. Cf. Siviu Dragomir, Relatiile bisericii romanesti cu Rusia in veacul XVII, Bucuresti, 1912; Idem, Istoria dezxrobirii religioase a romanilor din Ardeal: secolul XVIII, vol.I, Sibiu, 1920, vol.II, 1930.

4. Johann Polek, Die Lippowaner in der Bukowina, Czernowitz, 1896, Karl Konrad Crass, Die russichen Sekten, Dorpab-Leipzig, 1907, 1914.

5. St. Melchisedec, Lipovenismula, dica schismaticii si ereticii rusi, Bcuresti, 1871; I. Nistor, Cercetari asupra cultului lipovenesc din Romania, cf. si vol. F. Chirila, A. Ivanov, Th.Olteanu, Probleme de dialectologie. Graiurile lipvenesti din Romania, Bucuresti, 1993

6. Cf. Victor Vascenco, Omisiune istorica regretabila, in Cultura rusilor lipoveni, p.96

7. Idem

8. Nastol'yj enciklopediceskij slovar', Moscova, 1895, tom.VIII - yj., p.5082

9. V.K.Zajcev, Bogomil'skoe dvizenie i obscestvenaja zizn severnoj Italii epohi Ducento, Minsk, 1967

10. Istoria Romanilor, Bucuresti, 2002, p.475

11. Silviu Dragomir, Relatiile bisericii romanesti, p.2

12. Apud, Milan Sesan, Biserica ortodoxa in veacurile XV-XVII, in Mitropolia Ardealuluui, 1963, nr. 11-12, p.860

13. Amos Porfiriu, Cine sunt "rascolnicii"?, Œn "Kitej-grad", 1998, nr.2, p.10.