

THE USE OF SCRIPT BY SIBERIAN OLD BELIEVERS AS A CULTURAL MARKER FOR TEXTS*

by

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In recent years, the codicology of literary texts has attracted significant academic interest¹. Investigations have shown that a detailed examination of the codicological features of literary texts enables several hitherto unobserved social practices to be reconstructed². Of special note are publications where particular emphasis is given to the role of handwritten texts in the formation of a group identity: “Selective pressures to learn and maintain widely shared writing systems expands the community of writing-system users and provides the potential for these previously distinct groups to create a common group identity through a shared writing system”³. The shared system would become more complicated when combining several types of handwriting. The graphic diversity we intend to consider in this article is an important field of recent research and is clearly observed in manuscripts written by and for Siberian Old Believers – so-called *stranniki* (wanderers, pilgrims) – from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries.

Old Believers form a particular group of the Russian faithful (called schismatics or *raskol'niki*), who opposed patriarch Nikon's Church reforms (1652-1658) to the point that they broke with the Russian Church and caused a major schism between themselves and the followers of Nikon³. From the Old Believers' point of view, the “Nikonian” Church supported by the State was in the process of destroying the faith. The Old Believers did not constitute a single united movement: many different groups were referred to in Russian as *tolki* and *soglasii* (“branches” and “subgroups”). All of them shared the same concern for a strict maintenance of Tradition, which governed their everyday life⁴. Among Old Believers, *stranniki* are regarded

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1. *Histoire de la lecture dans le monde occidental*, ed. by Guglielmo CAVALLO and Roger CHARTIER, Paris, 1997 (L'univers historique); R. CHARTIER, *Culture écrite et société: L'ordre des livres (XIV^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, Paris, 1996 (Bibliothèque Albin Michel. Histoire). Jeffrey T. KNIGHT, “Renaissance Book as Furniture”, *Book History*, t. 12, 2009, pp. 37-73.

2. See P. STIRNEMANN and Marc H. SMITH, “Forme et fonction des écritures d'apparat dans les manuscrits latins (VIII^e-XV^e siècle)”, *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, t. 165, no. 1, 2007, pp. 67-100.

3. Georg B. MICHELS, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia*, Stanford, 1999.

4. Nikolai N. POKROVSKII, “Gusli, patefony i televizory”, *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, t. 48, 1993, pp. 446-450.

as the most radical subgroup, since they accepted neither the Orthodox Church nor the State as institutions. Particular emphasis is usually placed on the social isolation of the Old Believer *stranniki* ⁵. From the religious perspective, they rejected the reforms imposed on texts and church practices. Their accusations of distortion of the faith primarily concerned the correction of books, and more specifically liturgical books. This radically critical attitude gave rise to a confrontation that has continued to the present day. Direct confrontation with the official Church and the need to maintain the faith led to the creation of Old Believer book centers in the Vygo-Leksinskii community (near Lake Onega, in the northern European part of Russia), Starodub'e (in south-west Russia, near the border of the Polish-Lithuanian State), and other places. In addition, many Old Believers were engaged in copying texts published before the schism with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Taken together, these factors determined the special features of the Old Believers' reading preferences. According to Russian and foreign specialists in the field ⁶, a basic feature of the behavior of Old Believers as readers is their reliance on Holy Tradition and the careful study of Christian scriptures and legends, as well as works by Byzantine and Old Russian authors. The notion of the Old Believers' culture as a "literacy culture" ⁷ is also a common characterization. By and large it is assumed that Old Believers did not accept modern literature, as it fell outside the purview of their interests. But the Old Believers of the Vyg community were closely acquainted with the rhetorical tradition of the Ukrainian Kyiv Mohyla Academy ⁸ and used it extensively ⁹. However, such publications are within the province of ecclesiastical or church-related writing. More relevant to this discussion might be the surprising use of Marxist socio-economic theory to interpret the Day of Judgment by Isaia Nazarovich, an Enisei Old Believer bibliophile of the 1970s ¹⁰. Other authors, such as the nineteenth-century writers who defended or studied the Old Believers (Pavel I. Mel'nikov-Pecherskii, Afanasiy P. Shchapov and other writers) are often quoted in Old Believer collected works. Thus, despite the apparent isolationism of Old Believers and adherence to Tradition, some of them kept abreast with the literary and historic trends of their time (to say the least) as early as the nineteenth

5. Aleksandr I. MAL'TSEV, *Starovery-stranniki v XVIII-pervoi polovine XIX veka*, Novosibirsk, 1996.

6. N. N. POKROVSKII, *Puteshestvie za redkimi knigami*, Novosibirsk, 2005; Id. and Natal'ia D. ZOL'NIKOVA, *Starovery-chasovennye na vostoke Rossii v XVIII-XX vekakh: Problema tvorchestva i obshchestvennogo soznaniia*, Moskva, 2002; Natal'ia S. GUR'ANOVA, *Starobriadtsy i tvorcheskoe nasledie Kievskoi mitropolii*, Novosibirsk, 2007, and others. See also Robert O. CRUMMEY, *The Old Believers and the World of Antichrist: The Vyg Community and the Russian State (1694-1855)*, Madison, 1970; Id., *Old Believers in a Changing World*, DeKalb (Ill.), 2011.

7. Id., "Old Belief as a Popular Religion: New Approaches", *Slavic Review*, t. 52, no. 4, 1993, pp. 700-712.

8. The first institution of higher education in the Ukraine founded by Peter Mohyla in 1632. The Academy focused on the European system of education. The main language used was Latin, but students were educated in the spirit of Orthodoxy.

9. R. O. CRUMMEY, "Old Belief as a Popular Religion", quot. art., pp. 703-704

10. N. D. ZOL'NIKOVA, "Eskhatologiya eniseiskogo starovera-knizhnika chasovennogo soglasiia Isaia Nazarovicha (1970)", *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, t. 5, 1998, pp. 118-122.

century. Contemporary texts, including secular literature, were occasionally used in the Old Believer writing tradition.

Let us consider now the diversity of reading preferences in connection with the variety of types of handwriting used for copying the texts in Old Believer manuscripts. We will do it first by looking closely to one of the manuscripts found in the collection housed in Tomsk State University.

A library within a single binding: manuscript B-17.986 in Tomsk State University

National Research Tomsk State University in Tomsk, founded in 1878, is the oldest university of West Siberia. Its Research Library contains more than one thousand manuscripts written between the twelfth and twentieth centuries, among which are numerous manuscripts written by and for Old Believers. Some of them were confiscated by the Orthodox Church, while others were purchased during scientific (“archaeographic”) expeditions in Tomsk oblast. We will focus here on manuscript B-17.986¹¹ which contains an early twentieth-century collection of works copied by Old Believers datable on the basis of papermaker stamps and watermarks¹². The texts were copied by six scribes in semi-uncial and cursive scripts, and the pages were modestly decorated. The manuscript was acquired from representatives of an Old Believer community living in a taiga settlement in Tomsk oblast. The history of the community was studied by researchers from Tomsk State University¹³. Unfortunately, neither the compiler’s name nor the location where he worked has been determined. What is intriguing about manuscript B-17.986 is its unconventional use of two kinds of handwriting, semi-uncial and cursive, by one of the scribes¹⁴.

By and large the structure of the collection is typical of the Old Believer booklore, since it includes many texts related to religion, mainly spiritual verses and extracts from authoritative texts such as *Kirillova kniga* (“Kirill’s book”¹⁵; folios 7-8), *Syn tserkovnyi* (“Son of church”¹⁶, folios 8-9v),

11. Otdel rukopisei i knizhnykh pamiatnikov Nauchnoi biblioteki Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta (hereafter, ORKP NB TGU), B-17.986. 175 × 106 mm, 19 quires (folios 2-22). 145 folios: 1 (the folio is blank), 1-141, and 1-III (the folios are blank). The binding is cardboard covered with black paper, and the spine reinforced with blue textile. The decoration: headlines in red ink, panels of floral ornament at the beginning and end of chapters (folios 18, 20, 22, 29 and 82). Cul-de-lampe (folios 5, 28v, 69 and 69v).

12. Impressed marks of three types: (1) similar to: Sokrat A. KLEPIKOV, *Filigrani i shtempeli na bumage russkogo i inostrannogo proizvodstva XVII-XX vekov*, Moskva, 1959 (hereafter S. A. KLEPIKOV), No. 202 (1896, 1909; folios 7-12, 22-27, 29-72 and 126-141); (2) similar to S. A. KLEPIKOV, No. 145 (the 1900s; folios 111-125); (3) similar to S. A. KLEPIKOV, No. 47 (1901-1904, folios 28 and 73-88).

13. Elena E. DUTCHAK, *Iz Vavilona v Belovod’e: adaptatsionnye vozmozhnosti taezhnykh obshchin staroverov-strannikov (vtoraiia polovina XIX-nachalo XX veka)*, Tomsk, 2007.

14. A table of texts, scribes and scripts is provided at the end of the article, see Appendix 1.

15. The collection was written by Stefan Zizaniy, the first edition: Vilno, 1596. The main subject of the book is a discussion with Lutherans. It also includes an index of permitted and prohibited books. The handwriting is cursive.

16. This is probably the first Russian Catechism written in the seventeenth century. The author is unknown. The handwriting is cursive.

Torzhestvennik (“Panegyrikon”¹⁷, folios 29-48), *Nomokanon*¹⁸ (folios 49-49v and 60-61v), etc.

The collection begins with two spiritual poems (folios 1-5), followed by a comprehensive collection of short extracts dealing with topics of importance for Old Believers, like home worship (folio 8), the obligation of wearing a pectoral cross next to one’s skin (folios 8-9v), the use of candles (folios 18v-20), confessors, confession, monastic life (folios 49-53v, 56-58v), and the like. The extracts served as instructions for everyday life. There are a number of texts traditionally found in Old Believer collections, such as:

- folios 13-14v: *Skazanie o tsene Gospodni* (“A story about the Lord’s price”¹⁹);
- folios 14v-18: *Svidetelstvo sviatago i prepodobnago ottsa nashego Ioanna Damaskina, cheso radi na voskresenie Khristovo rekshe na Velikii Den’, byvaet chervlenoe iaitso ustanovleno na tselovanie* (“Testimony of our Holy and Sainted Father John Damascene explaining the reason for exchanging dark red eggs and kisses on Christ’s Resurrection, that is on the Great Day”²⁰);
- folios 95-109: *Zhitie Kirika i Ulity* (“The Vita of Quiricus and Julietta”²¹);
- folio 110: the famous spiritual poem *Adskii gazet* (“Hellish newspaper”²²);
- folios 111-125v: *O blazhennoi zhizni budushchago veka i o vozdaianii sviatym* (“On a blessed life in the next world and on the divine retribution for saint men”) by Kirill Trankvillion-Stavrovetskiĭ²³;
- folios 134-141v, at the end of the collection, there are two chapters transcribed from an unidentified work dealing with the Antichristian nature of passports and money²⁴.

17. One of the old-Russian “calendar collections”, which are essentially ordinals, giving ritual instructions and lections for the liturgical year. They included Russian and translated texts and were very popular between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. The handwriting is cursive.

18. Byzantine collections of church rules. The earliest text was created in the sixth to seventh centuries. This is one of the sources of the canon law in the medieval Russia. The handwriting is cursive.

19. An Old-believer text whose time of creation is unknown. The handwriting is semi-uncial.

20. This is an Old-believer text attributed to John Damascene. The text is often found in manuscript collections in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The handwriting is semi-uncial.

21. Quiricus and Julietta are Cilician martyrs of the third century: see BHL 1801-1814. Their vita has not been studied in Russian scientific tradition, the date of composition is unknown. The handwriting is semi-uncial.

22. A popular satirical poem probably written in the eighteenth century. Researchers pointed to the connection between this text and other Russian *Adskaya pochta* (“Hell-mail”, journal of Fedor A. EMN) and translated texts (“Crédit est mort”, “Le Diable d’argent”, etc.). See Sergei V. ALPATOV, *Vedomost iz Ada’: Sud’by evropeiskoi satiry v otechestvennykh religioznykh subkul’turakh XVIII-XX vekov*, Sedmitza.RU. <http://www.sedmitza.ru/lib/text/4682862/> [accessed 18 June 2015]. The handwriting is semi-uncial.

23. From the edition Kirill TRANKVILLION-STAVROVETSKIY, *Zertsalo bogosloviia* (“Mirror of Theology”, Pochaev, K. Trankvillion-Stavrovetskiy, 1618). K. Trankvillion-Stavrovetskiy was an East Slavonic scholar, supporter of the union of Catholic and Orthodox churches. The handwriting is semi-uncial.

24. “Glava 2. O dengakh i pasportakh” (“Chapter 2. On passports and money”, folios 134-137); “Glava 3. O tom, iako ashe pasporty pravovernym ne imeti, to kolmi pache ne podobael

Discussions about the Antichristian nature of different practices are often found in Old Believer manuscripts²⁵, and the compiler's interest in this subject is evident in B-17.986, not only on folios 134-141v, but also folios 64-69, 70-72, 78-88v, and 126-133v.

The first text entitled *Kniga Granograf* ("The Chronograph Book", folios 64-69) is a large extract from the work *Sobranie ot sviatago pisaniiia ob antikhriste* ("A Collection from Holy Writ about Antichrist") excerpted from another book. The complete collection of *Sobranie*, classified according to Aleksandr I. Mal'tsev as a work written by *stranniki*²⁶, was published as early as the nineteenth century²⁷. Two copies of the work were found by Natal'ia S. Gur'ianova²⁸. The fragments in manuscript B-17.986 were extracted from the middle of the text of *Sobranie ot sviatago pisaniiia*: the first comes from a commentary on Psalm 82 (folios 64-65, extract from *Tolkovanie Kassiodorovo*, that is "Cassiodorus commentary", folios 64-64v)²⁹ and the second, from pseudo-Methodius of Olympus³⁰ (folio 64v). There follows a text in which characteristic signs announcing the Day of Judgment and mark of the Beast are described. The foregoing signs offer an explanation for the resistance of Old Believers to the census ordered by Tsar Peter I (1718-1722). The Antichrist nature of Peter I, accused of usurping both temporal and ecclesiastical power, is substantiated in the text.

Another extract (folios 70-72) is a fragment of an Old Believer work published in 1988 by N.S. Gur'ianova³¹. In the manuscript, the fragment is entitled *Poslanie khristianskoe* ("Christian Epistles"), where as in the publication, it is called *Poslanie protiv pokloneniia dvuglavomu tsarskomu*

dengi imeti. O dengakh" ("Chapter 3. On the fact that as the faithful do not have passports, even more so they must not have money. On money", folios 137-141v). The handwriting is semi-uncial.

25. Their insistence on distancing themselves from the world of Antichrist is reflected even in minor details, such as the excising of watermarks from the folios of Old Believer manuscripts. See Appendix 2, fig. 5, for one example from ms. B-5621, Tomsk State University; Valeriya A. ESIPOVA, "A Watermark as 'a Mark of Antikhrist': A Viewpoint of Siberian Old Believers", *International Association of Paper Historians Congress Book*, t. 16, 2009, pp. 173-176.

26. A. I. MAL'TSEV, *Starovery-stranniki. op. cit.*, p. 263, No. 170. Mal'tsev studied the manuscripts in the collections of the Research Library, but our manuscript was not included in the sources he examined.

27. Vasilii I. KEI'SIEV, *Sbornik pravitel'stvennykh svedeniia o raskol'nikakh*, 4 vols, London, 1861, vol. II, p. 247-252; *Chtenia v imperatorskom obshchestve istorii i drevnosti rossiiskikh*, t. 1, 1863, pp. 52-71. See also Vasilii G. DRUZHININ, *Pisaniia russkikh starobriadtsev*, Sankt-Petersburg, 1912, p. 230. Online publication by Sergei I. NIKOLAEV: <http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=6017> [accessed 29 January, 2014].

28. N. S. GUR'IANOVA, *Krest'ianskii antimonarkhicheskii protest v starobriadcheskoi literature perioda pozdnego feodalizma*, Novosibirsk, 1988, p. 179, No. 111. One copy is stored in Tobolsk State Archives (A collection of manuscripts, No. 2, the first quarter of the 19th century); another copy is in Scientific Library of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (A collection of Metropolitan Makarius, No. II.66, from the second half of the 19th century).

29. This is a translation of Cassiodorus's *Expositio Psalmorum* by Maxim the Greek (Michail Trivolis, mid-sixteenth century) known in the Russian tradition as part of the "sensible Psalter", in other words a glossed Psalter.

30. The quotation is from the apocryphal *Slovo svyatago otsa Metodii Patarskago o poslednich vremenach* ("A Word of the Holy Father Methodius of Olympus about the last times"). The author and date of composition of the text are not known.

31. N. S. GUR'IANOVA, *Krest'ianskii antimonarkhicheskii protest. op. cit.*, pp. 118-122.

orlu i chetyrekhkonechnomu krestu (“The Epistle against the worship of the imperial double-headed eagle and four-ended cross”). The scribe copies the beginning of the work, but he rewrites it to such an extent that only two sentences in the collection coincide with the publication. The original work *Poslanie* created in 1789 states that tsar Alexis Mikhailovich (1629-1676) is the Antichrist. After the schism of Old Believers with the Russian Orthodox Church in 1666, all Russian tsars were Antichrists according to the theory developed in *Poslanie* and in many other Old Believer texts³². However, the conviction pervading most of the collection suggests that Peter I was the first Antichrist. It is probably for this reason that the transcription and rewriting of the text was not finished. However, a few blank sheets (folios 72-77v) were reserved, presumably for there writing to be completed at a later time.

Then, on folios 78-88v, there is an extract from the famous novel by Dmitrii S. Merezhkovskii, *Antikhrisť. Petr i Aleksei* (“Antikhrisť. Peter and Alexis”) published in 1905. The scribe selected parts VI and VII of book 10 *Syn i otets* (“Father and son”) that described the way tsarevich Alexis was tortured, by order of his father, and how he passed away³³. D. Merezhkovskii gave particular attention to the fact that Orthodox clergymen failed to administer communion to the dying tsarevich; finally an old man appeared to Alexis in a vision and gave him the Eucharist. Moreover, this is the very fragment of the text that describes the way Tsar Peter tortured his son³⁴.

The special features of the manuscript make it possible to determine the edition used to copy the extract. Folio 78 is a page with half title *Pervaia kniga Peterburgskaia Venera. Khristos i Antikhrisť, Petr i Aleksei. List stranitsa 542* (“The first book Petersburg Venus. Christ and Antichrist. Peter and Alexis. Leaf page 542”). A comparison of the manuscript with the edition of the novel published by the Mikhail V. Pirozhkov Publishing House in Saint Petersburg in 1905 shows that in that edition, the extract reproduced in the manuscript begins on page 542 and continues up to page 549. Furthermore, the title-page in the edition is followed by a page with the title of the first book: *Peterburgskaia Venera*. Thus it is mostly likely that the scribe of B-17.986 used the Pirozhkov’s edition of 1905.

The creative work of D. Merezhkovskii has long attracted the attention of both Russian and foreign researchers³⁵. There have been than thirty dissertations on Merezhkovskii’s works in Russia alone since the year 2000. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union it has become possible to study Merezhkovskii’s biography in detail. It is known, among other things, that when working on the third book of trilogy *Khristos i Antikhrisť* (“Christ and Antichrist”) in 1902, Merezhkovskii was in the neighborhood of Lake

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-57.

33. Dmitrii S. MEREZHKOVSKII, *Khristos i Antikhrisť. III. Antikhrisť. Petr i Aleksei*, Sankt-Petersburg, 1905, pp. 542-549.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 547.

35. Aleksei A. KHOLIKOV, “Osnovnye nauchnye raboty o D. S. Merezhkovskom: materialy k bibliografii”, *Vestnik Pravoslavnogo Sviato-Tikhonovskogo gumanitarnogo universiteta. III. Filologia*, t. 2 (24), 2011, pp. 107-167. As early as 1975, Sergei A. ZEN’KOVSKII, “Merezhkovskii”, in *Russkaia religiozno-filosofskaia mysl’ XX veka*, ed. by Nikolai P. POLTORATSKII, Pittsburg, 1975, p. 278, wrote that interest in the writer had been lost, but he was mistaken.

Svetloiar in Nizhny Novgorod province³⁶. According to a legend, the fabulous city of Kitezh was “hidden” under the lake and left untouched since the time of the Mongolian invasion. The writer also travelled to the Kerzhenets forests (Semenovo uyezd of Nizhny Novgorod province), a place made famous for its Old Believer communities in Melnikov-Pecherskii’s novels³⁷. Vasilii V. Rozanov mentioned this and emphasized the strong mutual understanding between Merezhkovskii and the Old Believers³⁸; Merezhkovskii composed the poem *Protopop Avvakum* (“Archpriest Avvakum”), which is a versification of the Vita of a founder of the Russian Old Faith³⁹.

The representative value of this collection is further enhanced by a copy of another text devoted to Peter I (folios 126-133v): *O istreblenii patriarkha Petrom pervym i voskhishchenii vlasti patriarsheskoï* (“On the annihilation of the patriarch by Peter the First and his usurpation of the patriarchal power”). This extract from the work of Jacob von Staehlin *Podlinnye anekdoty Petra velikogo*, 1787 (“Authentic anecdotes of Peter the Great”, 1787)⁴⁰ associated by the scribe with fragments of other works devoted to Peter I⁴¹ illustrates the great attention paid by Old Believers to the figure of Peter I as “tsar-Antichrist”⁴².

In her thorough study on Old Believer works devoted to “Peter I – Antichrist” and the sources used by their authors, N. S. Gur’ianova noted, among other things, that Old Believers occasionally used very unusual texts, including secular ones⁴³. For instance, a complete text of *Poslanie k slugam moim Shumilovu, Van’ke i Petrushke* (“A message to my servants Van’ka and Petrushka Shumilov”) by Denis I. Fonvizin was copied in one of the Old Believer works. Old Believers also read the odes of Mikhaïl V. Lomonosov and the work of Staehlin mentioned above⁴⁴. Not all Old Believers approved of the use of such secular texts, as shown by polemical letters published by Gur’ianova. Eventually, she concluded that quotations from the Holy Writ and Tradition were by and large not perceived by the authors as guiding their minds and forming an eschatological system; rather the quotations were

36. Zinaida N. GIPPIUS, “Svetloe ozero. Dnevnik”, *Novyi put*, 1904, pp. 1-2.

37. Pavel I. MELNIKOV-PECHERSKII (1818–1883) was a famous Russian writer known for his novels, essays, and historical writings devoted to Old Believers.

38. Vasilii V. ROZANOV, “Sredi inoiazychnykh (D. S. Merezhkovskii)”, *Mir iskusstva*, t. 10, 1903, pp. 7-8.

39. D. S. MEREZHKOVSKII, “Protopop Avvakum”, *Stikhotvorenia* (1883-1887), Sankt-Petersburg, 1888, pp. 157-176.

40. Iakov FON SHTELIN, *Podlinnye anekdoty Petra Velikogo, slyshannnye iz ust znatnykh osob v Moskve i Sankt-Peterburge, izdannnye v svet Iakovom fon Shtelinym, na rossiiskom iazyke perevedennnye K. Karlom Rembovskim*, Moskva, Matvei Petrovich Ponomarev, 1787, pp. 352-354.

41. The scribe mentions, for instance, *Vseobshchaia istoriya* (“General history”), Sankt-Petersburg, 1801 (pp. 308 and 336) and *Deianiia Petrovy* (“Peter’s acts”), Sankt-Petersburg, 1774, chap. 1.

42. N. S. GUR’IANOVA, “Staroobriadcheskie sochineniia XIX veka o Petre-antikhriste”, in *Sibirskoe istochnikovedenie i arkhodrafiia*, ed. by N. Pokrovskii, Novosibirsk, 1980, pp. 136-153.

43. N. S. GUR’IANOVA, *Krest’ianskii antimonarkhicheskii protest*, op. cit., pp. 38-60.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-45.

used along with other sources as evidence for the main ideas of the work. Hence Old Believer texts devoted to Peter I as Antichrist were more akin to propaganda than to theological writings⁴⁵. The structure of the collected manuscript is thus fairly traditional. It contains neither unknown works nor texts contradictory to the general philosophy of the movement. However, the way the texts were physically copied is of interest, namely the types of handwriting used.

A paleographic analysis of manuscript B-17.986

Old Believers traditionally copied texts using the semi-uncial writing. This script has been known in Russia since the fourteenth century. With the advent of printing, semi-uncial served as a model for the early founts (Old Cyrillic alphabet) in the mid-sixteenth century. A new Russian fount was introduced by Peter I in 1708, the so-called Civilian fount, which was used up to 1917 in non-religious publications. The main difference between the Civilian and the Old-Cyrillic founts was a simplified lettering of the Civilian fount. Some letters were also removed from the alphabet as a result of the Peter I reforms. The final Civilian fount was graphically close to contemporary European founts. Most important documents, like the newspaper *Vedomosti*, were then printed in both Civilian and Old-Cyrillic type-scripts. Apparently, the turning-point for the use of the semi-uncial fount occurred when the "tsar-Antichrist" introduced the Civilian fount, where upon semi-uncial came to be considered as more suitable for sacred texts.

Cursive was introduced by scribes of the Moscow State in the fourteenth century. It was employed mainly for record keeping. Simplified forms of cursive became increasingly more common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the desire and ability to read and write spread throughout the population. However, Old Believers used Old Cyrillic semi-uncial writing almost exclusively up to the early twentieth century. Old Believer books were also printed in the Old Cyrillic alphabet based on semi-uncial. Thus, the semi-uncial and Old Cyrillic founts were markers of the Old Believer group identity.

Six scribes copied manuscript B-17.986 in two kinds of script, semi-uncial and cursive⁴⁶. Handwriting Number 1 was used by the scribe who copied more than half of the texts. He employed both graphic systems, semi-uncial and cursive: cursive on folios 1-3v, 7-10, 22-64v (except the titles), 70-72 (except the title) and 78-78v; semi-uncial on folios 22-64v (for the titles), 65-69v, 70-72 (for the title), and text of 79-88v. Cursive and semi-uncial are used by this scribe with in the same set of two fragments on folios 64v-69v (cursive for the first extract, semi-uncial for the second one), and one after the other on folios 78-88v (cursive for the title and the beginning of the text, semi-uncial for the rest of the text). One person wrote both scripts, as can be demonstrated by a comparison of the semi-uncial titles for the cursive fragments with the texts written in semi-uncial by the same scribe (fig. 1). Furthermore, this scribe used the same diacritical marks and superscript letters in both of the hand writings. Note the way letter "c" is written above lines 1, 2, 13, and 15 on folio 70 (fig. 2).

45. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

46. See the table at the end of the article, Appendix 1.

An examination of the distribution of the two scripts with regard to the content of the manuscript shows that scribe Number 1 employed cursive to copy the texts of spiritual poems and numerous extracts from canonical and didactic works found at the beginning of the collection. Cursive was also used on folios 70-72 for copying a fragment of the tract *Poslanie protiv pokloneniia...*, about Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich as an Antichrist. The title-page preceding the extract from Merezhkovskii's novel (folio 78), and the text that follows on folio 78v, up to the words "ia k takovym delam neobychen, delo sie strashnoe..." ("I am not used to such things, this is a terrible thing..."), were again copied in cursive, but the extract from the novel itself was reproduced in semi-uncial (fig. 3, folios 78v-79, and fig. 4, folios 81v-82). The change of handwriting occurs in the middle of the sentence at the end of the folio.

Scribe Number 1 also used both semi-uncial and cursive for writing an extract from the *Sobranie ot sviatogo pisaniiia*. The beginning of the text, where the author quotes Cassiodorus and Methodius of Olympus (folios 64-64v), was copied in cursive. The subsequent part of the text, devoted to the characteristic features of Antichrist and antichristian nature of Peter I, was copied in semi-uncial (folios 65-69).

Scribe Number 1 only used semi-uncial to copy part of the texts that are on folios 64-69 and 79-88. Other scribes, however, employed semi-uncial for transcribing extracts and the complete text of *Zhitie Kirika i Iulity* ("Vita of Quiricus and Julietta", folios 89-109), the poem *Adskii gazet* ("The Hellish newspaper", folio 110), the text *O blazhennoi zhizni budushchago veka* ("On the blessed life in the next world", folios 111-125), the extract from the work of Jacob von Staehlin (folios 126-133v), and two chapters from an unidentified work describing the Antichristian nature of passports and money (folios 134-141v). It is evident that the last three fragments on folios 111-125 and folios 126-133 deal with the personality and deeds of Peter I as a figure of Antichrist.

Thus, scribe Number 1 transcribed different texts in semi-uncial and cursive. He began copying two of the texts in cursive, then switched to semi-uncial and used it up to the end of the extract. Those were two quite different texts: part of Merezhkovskii's novel published only a short time before and a fragment of the work of an Old Believer (*strannik*) that appeared about 100 years earlier (the earliest copies of the text have been dated to the first quarter of the nineteenth century). In this case, the choice of script used for the text appears to reflect a perception of texts in terms of their trustworthiness. The scribe started writing the text in ordinary script, and then he "suddenly remembered" that it was necessary to use the more solemn semi-uncial. That the scribe began with the cursive script is probably due to the fact that Old Believers employed this kind of handwriting extensively in their everyday life, which gradually affected their austere graphic culture. It should also be noted that in *Poslanie protiv pokloneniia...*, scribe Number 1 probably used cursive because the theory known as "Aleksei Mikhailovich – Antichrist" was less appealing to him than that of "Peter I – Antichrist". In our opinion, it might also be the reason why the copying and rewriting of the text was not completed. In any case, the most striking feature

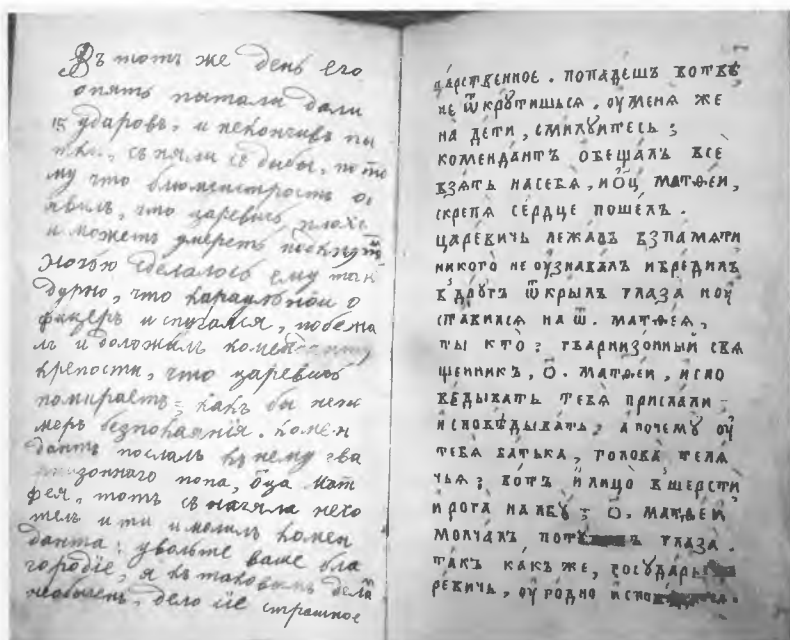


Fig. 3. – Tomsk, Tomsk State University, ms. B-17986, folios 78v-79, cursive and semi-uncial, handwriting of scribe 1. © Tomsk State University.

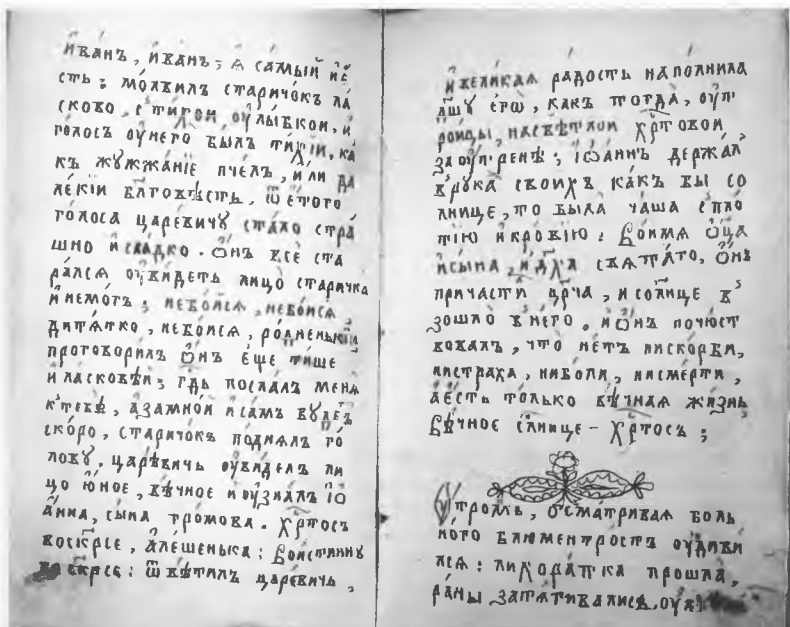


Fig. 4. – Tomsk, Tomsk State University, ms. B-17986, folios 81v-82, semi-uncial, handwriting of scribe 1. © Tomsk State University.

of manuscript B-17.986 is its combination of a set of texts typical of Old Believer text collections and an unusual way of using different types of handwriting either within a single text or for copying different texts.

An analysis of other Slavonic manuscripts available in Tomsk State University

The question arises as to whether the phenomenon outlined above is typical of Old Believers' culture. It is from this standpoint that we examined the collection of the Slavonic manuscripts available in the Research Library of Tomsk State University. At present the collection numbers about 900 written documents, with 115 manuscripts dated to the eighteenth century, 171 manuscripts dated to the first half of the nineteenth century, 305 manuscripts dated to the second half of the nineteenth century, and 167 manuscripts dated to the twentieth century. Old Believer manuscripts with cursive handwriting can be found among them. For example, there are six Old Believer manuscripts of the eighteenth century with collected works where sacred texts were copied in cursive⁴⁷. One of them – manuscript B-5503, written entirely in cursive – includes texts of prayers and quotations from *Kormchaya*⁴⁸, extracts from *Keleinoe pravilo* (“Monastic rule for prayer in the cell”), texts of prayers and fragments from *Ustav* (“Statutes”) of Sabbas the Sanctified⁴⁹. As far as we can judge from the materials available in the Research Library, the use of cursive handwriting in manuscripts increased during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it was the most common way to transmit sacred writings, as I have verified while cataloguing the collection. Of 57 manuscripts from the first half of the nineteenth century written in the cursive, four are Old Believer texts. One of them, dated to the first third of the nineteenth century, for example, includes eschatological texts and an extract from the Gospels⁵⁰. Other manuscripts include Old Believer polemical texts such as, *Kniga nazyvaemaya Otvetoslov protivno narushayushikh drevnyaya svyataya otsev predaniya* (“The book named Response against persons who break ancient traditions of sainted fathers”)⁵¹.

Among the 49 manuscripts from the second half of the nineteenth century written in the cursive, 8 are Old Believer manuscripts of collected works; of

47. ОРКР NB TGU, B-5675. B-20.102. B-5609. B-5663. B-10.187. B-5503.

48. This is a collection of canon law, as well as Nomokanon (see n. 18). The earliest versions of the text appeared in Russia in the eleventh century.

49. The text was first introduced in the monastery of ven. St. Sava in 542 and referred to as Jerusalem Ustav. The text has been known in the Russian tradition since the fourteenth century.

50. ОРКР NB TGU, B-530. *Ibid.*, B-3927, *Skazanie o iavlenii Bogomateri Abalatskoi* (“A legend of the appearance of the icon of the Blessed Virgin of Abalak”); see details in: Elena K. ROMODANOVSKAYA, *Sibir' i literatura (XVII vek)*, Novosibirsk, 2002, pp. 155-180. *Ibid.*, B-1126, *Sbornik statei pouchitel'nogo kharaktera iz Prologa vtoroi redaktsii. Mart-avgust* (“A collection of didactic articles from Prolog of second redaction. March-August”), Tomsk, 1789-1790, and details in: *Slaviano-russkie rukopisi Nauchnoi biblioteki Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta: Katalog*, vol. II, ed. by V. A. ESIPOVA, Tomsk, 2009, pp. 27-61.

51. ОРКР NB TGU, B-1245. The text is an Old Believer critique of the book of metropolitan Philaret (Drozdov), *Beseda k glagolemomu starooriadtsu o Stoglavom sobore i o istinnom soglasii s Pravoslavnoi Tserkov'iu* (“Conversation with so-called Old Believers”), Moscow, 1835. Therefore the manuscript was written no earlier than 1835.

17 Slavonic manuscripts dated to the twentieth century written in cursive, 8 are Old Believer manuscripts of collected works; nearly all of the manuscripts are of sacred writings and Old Believer polemical texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries⁵². Another manuscript includes a collection of works by Maxim the Greek⁵³, all written in cursive. Mention should be made of another manuscript with the text of *Pomorskie otvety* (“Pomorsky answers”)⁵⁴. The manuscript was written by three scribes. One of them used cursive (folios 9-47v), while the others employed the semi-uncial (folios 1-8v).

On the whole, we can say that cursive was used to copy texts used in everyday life (prayers, church rules, edifying texts, etc.) and for polemical works. The use of cursive in the texts intended for preaching and polemics is quite understandable: cursive was very common at that time, and semi-uncial might not have been familiar to neophytes. There are some manuscripts copied entirely in cursive (B-24.927 and others); occasionally, only one or two scribes used cursive and the rest employed semi-uncial (for example, B-23.606). In the cases under discussion the scribes used cursive from the beginning to the end of the text. Thus, manuscript B-17.986 is quite original in its use of scripts⁵⁵. The results of these observations cannot be considered final; they must be checked using materials available in other libraries.

There are also manuscripts where secular texts were copied in semi-uncial. For example, on the fly-leaf of the Old Believer collected extracts from *Paterik* (“Lives of Holy Fathers”⁵⁶) of the mid-nineteenth century⁵⁷, there is the following inscription:

O doblesti, o podvigakh, o slave
uzh ne mechtat' mne gorestno

Of prowess, heroic deeds and fame
I am to dream no more miserable dreams.

These lines recombine phrases (underlined) from a famous poem by the modernist lyric poet Alexander A. Blok (1880-1921):

O doblestiakh, o podvigakh, o slave
Ia zabyval na gorestnoi zemle,
Kogda tvoe litso v prostoi oprave
Peredo mnoi stoialo na stole.

Prowess, heroic deeds and fame
I could forget in this world's misery,
While still your image in this simple frame
Glowed on the table-top in front of me.

52. ORKP NB TGU. B-24.927. B-23.364, B-8481, B-9432, B-9768, B-9771. B-9772. B-23.606. *Slaviano-russkie rukopisi Nauchnoi biblioteki Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta: Katalog*, vol. iv and vol. v, ed. by V. A. ESIPOVA, Tomsk. 2016.

53. ORKP NB TGU. B-24.927. Maxim the Greek (Michail Trivolis), a Russian religious scholar, translator, essayist of the sixteenth century, see also n. 29.

54. ORKP NB TGU. B-23.606. “Pomorsky answers” was first published in 1723. The text includes collective answers of Vyg monks to 106 questions posed by the Orthodox monk Neofit; the main authors of “Answers” were the brothers Andrei and Semen Denisovs. The “Answers” is an outstanding polemical work, including, *inter alia*, the first professional paleographical analysis of a historical document in the Russian history.

55. The results of these observations cannot be considered final; they must be checked using materials available in other libraries.

56. The text was composed in Greece in the fourth to fifth centuries, it appeared in the Russian tradition around the eleventh century.

57. ORKP NB TGU, B-5714.

<p>Uzh ne mechtat' o nezhnosti, o slave, Vse minovalos', molodost' proshla! Tvoe litso v ego prostoi oprave Svoei rukoi ubral ia so stola</p>	<p>No more the dreams of love and deathless fame, They are all flown, and youth has had its day! And so your image in its simple frame With my own hand I took and hid away.⁵⁸</p>
--	--

The first line on the fly-leaf quotes the first line of the first quatrain of Blok's poem, then it quotes the first line of the second quatrain and ends with a play on words borrowing *gorestno* ("miserably") from the second line of the first stanza. The structure of these lines reflects the methods used to construct the texts of Old Believer polemical writings, including a large number of quotations. What is more, the poem was composed by Blok in 1908, allowing us to date the fly-leaf after that year.

By and large the traditional classification of handwritings was retained: secular texts were copied in cursive, whereas sacred texts were copied in semi-uncial. However, our research shows that the rule is not strictly observed, and that the number of secular works (especially fiction) copied in semi-uncial is much smaller than that of sacred texts reproduced in cursive. This fact appears to indicate the deterioration of the Old Cyrillic writing tradition. This type of writing was gradually excluded from everyday use and became the prerogative of the church; it was no longer perceived as a natural way of writing secular works and was used only (but not systematically) by marginal communities such as those of Old Believers⁵⁹.

Cursive has been used in Old Believer manuscripts since the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church; it suffices to mention the famous Pustozerskii collected manuscripts of the seventeenth century written by Avvakum and Epifanii, the Fathers of the Old Faith⁶⁰. In this way, Old Believer scribes brought cursive into general use for writing different texts, including sacred manuscripts, as early as the eighteenth century, as was demonstrated above using materials available in Tomsk. On the other hand, the use of semi-uncial by Old Believers for reproducing non-sacred texts is a more recent and rare phenomenon: it was found only in two manuscripts of collected works in the Research Library in Tomsk State University, one of them being the extract from Blok's poem on the fly-leaf. Both records are dated to the early twentieth century.

While observations such as these are by no means complete, they do suggest that everyday writing (cursive) was increasingly used for reproducing sacred texts because of its wider use within the community. On the other hand, copying secular, non-sacred texts in semi-uncial, which is a less common phenomenon, shows that this kind of handwriting, occasionally used to impart solemnity through archaism⁶¹, could be a way of referring to

58. Alexander A. BLOK. *Selected poems*, transl. by Alex MILLER, Moscow, 1981, pp. 183-184 (original text: A. A. BLOK, *Izbrannoe*. Moskva, 1981). My thanks to Larisa Walsh (The University of Chicago Library), who informed me about the edition.

59. See details in: *Slaviano-russkie rukopisi*, vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

60. *Pustozerskii sbornik: avtografy sochinenii Avvakuma i Epifania*, ed. by Vladimir I. MALYSHEV, Leningrad, 1975. See n. 39 for the poetical reconstruction of Avvakum's vita by Merezkovskii.

61. See P. STIRNEMANN and M. H. SMITH, "Forme et fonction des écritures d'apparat dans les manuscrits latins", *quot. art.*, pp. 97-100

Tradition⁶², and in this sense, it could appear as a “cultural marker” of an Old Believer community⁶³. If we were simply witnessing a change in Tradition and an increased mixing of cursive and semi-uncial, we would expect sacred and secular texts to be copied in both of the scripts with equal currency. However, such was not the case. At the same time, the importance of semi-uncial as a marker can be observed only in situations where the overall graphic system exhibited severe deterioration in response to environmental factors, namely, where an increasing number of Old Believer scribes used cursive elements and cursive script for transcribing traditional texts for Old Believers. This borderline situation provides evidence for the importance of the type of handwriting for each specific social group.

It is probable that the anonymous scribes wished to provide the cultural marking of texts by using semi-uncial because the scribe regarded the texts they reproduced to be “their own”, canonical, “correct” work and believed that their script played a crucial role. In the manuscripts of collected works studied here, the texts needed for everyday life (instructions for the order of saying prayers and taking food, behavior of monks and confessors, etc.) were copied in cursive, which can serve as evidence for their everyday use and currency.

Concluding remarks

We have analyzed the use of different types of handwriting in Old Believer manuscripts of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The results obtained led us to suggest an alternative view on the problem of the interrelation between secular and religious texts described by N. S. Gur’ianova, who used eighteenth-century manuscripts of collected works. At that time, fragments of secular works were not merely collected and read by Old Believers along with the Holy Writ, but certain secular works were considered to be as authoritative as traditional texts. Further work is needed, however, using other materials.

It should be remembered that as early as the nineteenth century, it was not only the Old Believer community who acknowledged the difference between the ability to read Old Cyrillic (graphically semi-uncial) texts and printed secular texts, but peasants did so as well. For instance, reading ecclesiastical writings and edifying Old Cyrillic texts was perceived as an occupation pleasing to God, whereas reading newspapers and secular texts was considered to be an occupation for idle men, a sinful deed of a sort. It is for this reason that some researchers point to the inadequate substantiation

62. Jean VEZIN, “Écritures imitées dans les livres et les documents du haut Moyen Âge (vii^e-xi^e siècle)”. *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes*, t. 165, no. 1. 2007. pp. 47-66 (p. 47) pointed out the fact that “certains copistes ont imité des calligraphies qu’ils admiraient pour leur élégance et leur lisibilité, mais aussi parce qu’elles appartenaient à une tradition qu’ils voulaient maintenir”.

63. A similar practice has been observed in Anglo-Saxon England, where Anglo-Caroline minuscule was used for Latin texts and Vernacular minuscule for Old English texts. See Peter A. STOKES, *English vernacular Minuscule from Aethelred to Cnut, Circa 990-Circa 1035*, Cambridge, 2014 (Publication of the Center for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 14).

of statistics concerning domestic literacy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When respondents were asked whether they could read, their answers were often *negative*. It was due to the fact that they did not mention their ability to read Old Cyrillic texts rather than secular works⁶⁴. Even in the late twentieth century, during archaeographic expeditions to Tomsk oblast, the investigators could hear people say: “We are illiterate and can only read old books”.

Special attention should be drawn to the following issue. The problem of the elucidation of the Old Belief in the literature of the nineteenth century has been studied thoroughly in Russia and abroad⁶⁵. However, the reverse process – the question of how Russian writers and historians were perceived by Old Believers – has not been adequately studied. Researchers usually restrict themselves simply to mentioning copies of one work or another, or its fragments in the Old Believer writing tradition. In the absence of written evidence concerning this question, an examination of collections such as the one described above and of the subtleties associated with the use of different types of handwriting is likely to help in investigations concerning the perception of the classic texts of the Russian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by different social groups, including Old Believers.

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64. See details in: Aleksandr V. BUGANOV, “Dukhovnaia knizhnost’ i pis’mennost’ russkikh krest’ian XIX veka”, in *Pravoslavnaia zhizn’ russkikh krest’ian XIX-XX vekov: itogi etnograficheskikh issledovaniĭ*, ed. by Tat’iana A. LISTOVA, Moskva, 2001, pp. 316-333 (pp. 320 and 326); Nina A. MINENKO, *Zhivaia starina: budni i prazdniki sibirskoi derevni*, Novosibirsk, 1989, p. 100; Tamara S. MAMSIK, “Iz istorii razvitiia gramotnosti v zapadnosibirskoi derevne (po materialam sudebnykh del vtoroi poloviny XIX veka)”, *Kul’turno-bytovye protsessy u russkikh Sibiri XVII–nachala XX veka*, Novosibirsk, 1985, pp. 105-120 (p. 106).

65. See Faith WIGZEL, “Leskov’s Soboryane: A Tale of Good and Evil in the Russian Provinces”, *Modern Language Review*, t. 83, no. 4, 1988, pp. 901-910; William J. COMER, “Rogozhin and the ‘Castrates’: Russian Religious Traditions in Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*”, *Slavic and East European Journal*, t. 40, no. 1, 1996, pp. 85-99.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE OF TEXTS, SCRIBES AND SCRIPTS IN
TOMSK STATE UNIVERSITY MS. B-17.986

(In bold letters: texts on Antichrist.)

FOLIOS	TEXTS	SCRIBES AND HANDWRITINGS CURSIVE / SEMI-UNCIAL
1-5 1-3v 3v-5	Two spiritual poems. Poem about a ship. Poem about the Passion.	Scribe 1. Scribe 2.
5v-6v	[blank]	
7-8	Quotation about Tradition from Kirill's book.	Scribe 1.
8-9v	Quotations from "Son of Church" (home worship, pectoral cross).	Scribe 1.
10v-12v	[blank]	
13-14	"A story about the Lord's price".	Scribe 3.
14-18	John Damascene, on the exchange of eggs and kisses at Easter.	Scribe 3.
18v-20	Quotation about the use of candles.	Scribe 3.
20v-21v	[blank]	
22-28	John Damascene, word on the Annunciation.	Scribe 1: title. Scribe 1: text.
29-48	Quotation from Panegyrikon.	Scribe 1: titles. Scribe 1: text.
48v	[blank]	
49-49v	Quotation from Nomokanon.	Scribe 1: titles. Scribe 1: text.
49v-53	Quotation from Nomokanon and Kormchaya about confessors and confession.	Scribe 1: titles. Scribe 1: text.
53v-54v	Quotations from Kormchaya.	Scribe 1: titles. Scribe 1: text.
55-55v	[blank]	
56-58v	Quotation from Kormchaya about monastic life.	Scribe 1: titles. Scribe 1: text.

FOLIOS	TEXTS	SCRIBES AND HANDWRITINGS CURSIVE / SEMI-UNCIAL
59–60	Quotations from Kormchaya.	Scribe 1: titles. Scribe 1: text.
60–61v	Nomokanon.	Scribe 1: titles. Scribe 1: text.
62–62v	Quotations from Paterik.	Scribe 1: titles. Scribe 1: text.
62v–63v	Nomokanon.	Scribe 1: title. Scribe 1: text.
64–69 64–64v 65–69	<i>Sobranie ot sviatago pisaniia ob antikhriste</i> (“A Collection from Holy Writ about Antichrist”), two fragments. - Cassiodorus/Methodius. - Peter I as Antichrist	Scribe 1. Scribe 1.
70–72	Christian Epistles (Antichrist text) = Poslanie.	Scribe 1: title. Scribe 1 (text).
72–77	[blank]	
78–88 78–78v 79–88	Antichrist. Peter and Alexis (= extract from a Merezhkovskii’s novel).	Scribe 1: title. Scribe 1: beginning of the text. Scribe 1: rest of the text.
89–94r	Quotation from the Vita of Quiricus and Julietta.	Scribe 4.
94v	[blank]	
95–109	<i>Vita</i> of Quiricus and Julietta (full text).	Scribe 4.
109v	[blank]	
110	Hellish newspaper (spiritual poem).	Scribe 4.
110v	[blank]	
111–125	On a blessed life in the next world and on the divine retribution.	Scribe 5.
126–133	On the annihilation of the patriarch by Peter the First and his usurpation of the patriarchal power (Antichrist text).	Scribe 5.
134–141	Antichristian nature of passports and money (extracts: two chapters).	Scribe 6.

APPENDIX 2



Fig. 5. – Tomsk, Tomsk State University, ms. B-5621, folio 10, hole instead of stamp.
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