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Article abstract

Throughout Russian Orthodox history the icon has been an important part of the visual and emotional experience of the faithful. Icons that exhibited wondrous powers inspired pilgrimages to their shrines and requests for temporary visitations to local communities hoping that this mobile sacred aura would protect against epidemics or crop failure. As Russia's autocracy began the long process of modernization in the 1860s and 1870s, loans of wondrous icons became increasingly commonplace as newly literate peasants read about these sacred images in the emerging religious and secular press. Faced with the untested medical and agricultural practices that were being brought to the countryside by educated outsiders, peasant believers supplemented these new techniques with processions honoring wondrous icons. In this way wondrous icons served as important bridges between traditional and modern life as they provided spiritual, physical, and psychological comfort to believers in an uncertain and changing world. For communities whose visitation requests were denied and for believers who wanted their own personal reminder of sacred aura, mass icon reproduction filled this need as millions of copies were manufactured and distributed for free or at negligible cost. The rise in requests for icon visitations and the proliferation of cheaply produced sacred images troubled Church authorities who, facing growing criticism from secular and revolutionary activists and the new religious toleration law of 1905, struggled to bring these popular forms of folk piety within the institutional and bureaucratic structure of Orthodoxy without dampening religious fervor. As spiritual essence emanated from shrines to local communities of believers through visitations and reproductions believers were reminded of the fundamental cultural fragments that bound them together as members of the same faith and as inheritors and creators of modern Orthodox experience as Russia became increasingly modern, secular, and revolutionary.

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Icons in Motion: Sacred Aura and Religious Identity in Late Tsarist Russia

CHRIS J. CHULOS

Abstract

Throughout Russian Orthodox history the icon has been an important part of the visual and emotional experience of the faithful. Icons that exhibited wondrous powers inspired pilgrimages to their shrines and requests for temporary visitations to local communities hoping that this mobile sacred aura would protect against epidemics or crop failure. As Russia's autocracy began the long process of modernization in the 1860s and 1870s, loans of wondrous icons became increasingly commonplace as newly literate peasants read about these sacred images in the emerging religious and secular press. Faced with the untested medical and agricultural practices that were being brought to the countryside by educated outsiders, peasant believers supplemented these new techniques with processions honoring wondrous icons. In this way wondrous icons served as important bridges between traditional and modern life as they provided spiritual, physical, and psychological comfort to believers in an uncertain and changing world. For communities whose visitation requests were denied and for believers who wanted their own personal reminder of sacred aura, mass icon reproduction filled this need as millions of copies were manufactured and distributed for free or at negligible cost. The rise in requests for icon visitations and the proliferation of cheaply produced sacred images troubled Church authorities who, facing growing criticism from secular and revolutionary activists and the new religious toleration law of 1905, struggled to bring these popular forms of folk piety within the institutional and bureaucratic structure of Orthodoxy without dampening religious fervor. As spiritual essence emanated from shrines to local communities of believers through visitations and reproductions believers were reminded of the fundamental cultural fragments that bound them together as members of the same faith and as inheritors and creators of modern Orthodox experience as Russia became increasingly modern, secular, and revolutionary.

Résumé

Les icônes ont constitué une partie importante de l'expérience visuelle et émotive de la foi orthodoxe russe. Les icônes réputées avoir des pouvoirs extraordinaires inspiraient des pèlerinages aux sanctuaires les possédant. Parallèlement, des communautés locales tentaient de les faire venir temporairement dans leur village dans l'espoir que l'aura sacré dégagé par ces icônes les protégerait des épidémies et des mauvaises récoltes. Alors que la Russie autocratique commençait à se moderniser dans les années 1860 et 1870, le prêt de ces icônes est devenu de plus en plus commun. Les demandes affluaient de plus en plus au fur et à mesure que les paysans alphabétisés lisaient à propos de ces images sacrées dans la presse religieuse et séculière. Les paysans croyants juxtaposaient les processions honorant les icônes merveilleuses aux nouvelles pratiques médicales et agricoles, encore non testées, apportées dans les campagnes par des spécialistes de l'extérieur. À leur façon, ces images saintes ont servi de pont entre la vie traditionnelle et la vie moderne en donnant un réconfort psychologique, physique et spirituel aux croyants dans un monde en constante mutation. La reproduction et la distribution de millions de copies de ces icônes à peu de frais répondaient au désir des croyants de posséder un objet rappelant l'aura sacré des icônes. L'augmentation des requêtes pour la visite des icônes et la prolifération d'images sacrées bon marché ont troublé les autorités ecclésiastiques. Ces dernières ont tenté d'intégrer ces formes de piété populaire dans le cadre des structures bureaucratiques et institutionnelles de l'Église orthodoxe, sans amenuiser la ferveur populaire. Cette intégration s'est faite alors que les activistes révolutionnaires et laïques critiquaient de plus en plus l'Église dans le cadre de la tolérance religieuse acquise en 1905. Comme l'essence spirituelle émanant des sanctuaires se trouvaient transportée dans les communautés locales visitées par les icônes ou par leurs reproductions, les croyants se voyaient rappeler l'importance de ces fragments culturels qui unissaient les membres d'une même foi, les fondateurs et les héritiers de l'expérience orthodoxe russe moderne alors que la Russie devenait de plus en plus moderne, laïque et révolutionnaire.

Sacred Aura, Icons, and Peasant Piety

Throughout the late nineteenth century, the icon stood at the centre of questions about religious authority and the peasant faithful's ability to adapt to a modernizing and secularizing Russia. As peasant requests for icon visitations increased, church authorities faced a familiar problem — how to bring folk piety within the institutional and bureaucratic structure of Orthodoxy while not dampening popular religious fervor. Questions of ecclesial authority were never completely divorced from confessional loyalty, especially as church leaders perceived real threats from an increasingly secular primary school system, secular literature, and new forms of popular entertainment that together challenged its status as premier moral authority. When church leaders denied requests for icon visitations they inadvertently sent ambiguous messages to believers who remained steadfast in their conviction that they were indisputable members of the Orthodox faith and that this faith was an essential part of their communal identity.[1]

Icon visitations in the last decades of tsarist Russia represent a particular form of Orthodox *expression* among the peasant faithful and the complexity of believers' response to the social and cultural transformations resulting from modernization, urbanization, and revolutionary activities. By reversing the direction of motion in the ancient practice of pilgrimage, icon visitations brought sacred aura to local communities of believers without requiring prolonged absences that interfered with the normal routine of agricultural work. This variation on traditional pilgrimage exemplifies how peasants used the benefits of expanding highways and rail lines and their newly acquired literacy skills to learn about wondrous images and bring them inexpensively to their communities. The movement of these images resulted in an unprecedented dissemination of sacred aura and affirmed the centrality of Orthodox Christianity in the lives of the peasantry. Although the movement of special icons had deep roots in Russian Orthodox tradition, enough to prompt special regulations in Peter the Great's church reforms of 1722, the unexpected increase in requests beginning in the 1860s and 1870s left the understaffed church apparatus overwhelmed and slow to respond.

Unwilling to wait for official approval or disappointed with rejection, many communities made their own arrangements, thus aggravating already strained relations between local faithful and diocesan authorities in the provincial capitals and the church headquarters faraway in St. Petersburg. At stake were the very nature of believers' identity and the social role of the church as secularizing educated Russians and revolutionaries of many stripes deemed the political and moral position of Orthodoxy to be out of touch with contemporary realities.

The practice of borrowing wondrous icons occurred within the context of popular conceptions of the natural world and the innumerable uncontrollable factors that could bring harm or benefit to the peasant household as well as the village. Starting in the middle of the nineteenth century, as Russian folklorists and ethnographers penetrated the countryside in search of the essence of the national character, they described the peasant worldview as muddled, dark, and simple in its Manichean principles of good/evil, light/dark, sacred/profane, insider/outsider. When it came to faith, ethnographers catalogued an immense collection of practices and beliefs that gave the appearance of paganism with a thin overlay of Christianity that came to be known as the dual faith (*dvoeverie*).[2] Described in this way, the peasant religious economy confirmed educated Russians' stereotypes about the backwardness of rural folk and, after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and gradual introduction of primary schooling, provided educators and publishers of popular literature a metaphorical target against which to aim their enlightenment projects.[3] While peasants divided the world into natural and supernatural realms that overlapped and whose residents — ordinary mortals on the one side and a multiplicity of spirits on the other — constantly interacted in a complex web of relationships, the combination of Christian and older folk belief and practice helped to ameliorate the physical hardships and psychological uncertainties of life given the shortage of modern medicine, agricultural techniques, and education.[4] Common remedies for bodily aches and pains included special prayers during the liturgy or petitions to specific saints, as well as visits to the local herbalist (*znakhar*), sorcerer (*koldun*), or witch (*ved'ma*).[5] Good harvests required ritual blessings

of the fields and nearby water source by the priest in addition to the burial of a fertility effigy or a sacred object (often an icon). Finding a suitable life partner and ensuring a successful marriage (including fertility and wealth) had little to do with the church sacrament and priest's blessing and instead depended on the customary visit of the local matchmaker and sorcerer who were treated as special guests and compensated generously. Icons were present in all of these moments.

In the Orthodox tradition, the icon is an important part of the visual and emotional liturgical experience, as well as personal piety.[6] Formulaic iconography throughout the church provides both a metaphor of commonality between the universal and local church and their believers. Within the context of formal worship, icons occupied a central place in the liturgy and individual devotion. The famed floor-to-ceiling iconostasis — a layered screen of religious images that divides the sanctuary from the view of believers and represents the distinction between the divine and profane worlds — offers the most vivid and lustrous visual display of the fundamental teachings of the faith in every Orthodox Church (see Figure 1). In late tsarist Russia, the home of peasant believers paralleled the house of God on a personal level and typically one corner (the *krasnyi ugol* or "beautiful/sacred corner") was devoted to a shrine consisting of an icon shelf (*bozhnitsa*) with sacred images of importance to the family's history and present and future well-being, a *lampada* (a votive lamp that was constantly lit), holy water brought from church for special needs throughout the year, and relics from a revered shrine. Framing the icon shelf was a sacred towel (*polotentse*) or belt (*poias*) that might also hang over the entire shrine and was used to mark the most important milestones of birth, marriage, and death. In this "beautiful corner" morning and evening prayers were recited, meals were eaten, newly baptized babies were welcomed into the family after baptism, matrimonial agreements were made during elaborate betrothal ceremonies, household members received parental blessings before departure, and deceased household members were bid farewell before their final journey to the afterlife. More broadly and individually, icons functioned as instruments of religious education, vehicles for communal unity, and protectors of household well-being.[7]

Figure 1. Iconostasis in the summer cathedral, Leushinskii Monastery, Novgorod Province.

The spiritual practice of venerating wondrous icons began in a physical space, the permanent residence of the image, and encompassed movement during ordinary or special worship services, as well during its "pilgrimage" journey to a temporary host community that shared a belief in the object's exceptional properties and potential benefits.[8] Icon visitations have a long history in the Christian tradition and were akin to what Peter Brown has described in his study of the cult of saints in Western Christianity as the "translation of relics" — when a physical object or objects, which resided in a specific community, were transported permanently or temporarily to local communities of the faithful. This practice, which became dominant in the late medieval Catholic world, transformed sedentary holy objects into portable commodities that facilitated the establishment of networks of relationships based on the principles of "generosity,

dependence, and solidarity" between local communities of believers and the church's administrative structure while confirming the authenticity of the object in question.[9] Many centuries later, as the Catholic Church faced intellectual assaults on Christian belief beginning with the publication of Marx and Engels' social theories and Darwin's theory of evolution, Rome responded with its support for popular Marian devotion. Facing similar intellectual challenges in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Russian Orthodox Church leaders characteristically responded with caution and placed "icon visitations" within the framework of Peter the Great's church reforms that established rules about the movement of sacred images, requiring the central governing council of Russian Orthodox bishops, the Holy Synod, to ascertain an icon's wonder-working or miraculous status.[10] Although this institutional process was the only official means of sanctioning a wondrous icon's authenticity, in practice local communities of believers regularly sidestepped Synodal authority and made their own pronouncements of a locally revered image's special status.[11] As with most other developments in Orthodox devotional life in the late tsarist period, the lines between officially approved practices and lived Orthodoxy were in constant flux as church authorities at the national, diocesan, and parish levels struggled to maintain their relevance in an increasingly secular world of scientific discoveries; proliferating secular popular education; revolutionary movements (from the mid-1890s onward); and, after the religious toleration decree of 1905 that ended the virtual monopoly of Orthodox Christianity, competition from other faith groups.[12]

Although cautious in their pronouncements on the proliferation of loans and reproductions of wondrous icons, by the 1890s icon borrowing and the production of icon "proxies" — especially cheaply printed and widely distributed copies — had become widespread enough for the Holy Synod to issue guidelines about how to negotiate visitations, the length of visits, fees that were paid to the owners of the object, procedure for transfers (including how to greet and bid farewell to the borrowed item), protocol for unclaimed icons left at local train stations, inspection of newly discovered wonder-working icons, sale of icons, and use of religious images for non-religious purposes (e.g., in advertising).[13] The detail of these

regulations attests to the commonplace practice of icon visitations and the difficulties presented when the communities making loans did not treat these sacred images respectfully. As train transport became less expensive, the Holy Synod joined with the Ministry of Transportation to establish process and procedure stipulating what should be done when icons, crosses, holographic portraits of saint other religious items of special reverence were not met by the requesting community. After a designated period of time the object in question was to be taken to the church nearest to the train station for storage and notation in the parish registry. The object was then to be moved to the offices of the diocesan administration where again it was entered into a record book. Once completed, an announcement was to be placed in the local government newspaper with the hope of reaching the owners of the icon. If the holy image remained unclaimed for a year after the published announcement, it was to be given to a local parish designated by diocesan authorities.[14] The authenticity of an icon's status, then, occurred at and connected multiple levels of authority and identity — everything between official/national and local/communal.[15]

The movement of icons paralleled the unprecedented growth of another type of religiously motivated motion: pilgrimage, which benefited from the lifting of legal restrictions in the decade following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861.[16] While icon visitations connected believers to the larger community of faithful through modern expressions of Orthodox piety they also shined a light on growing tensions between the laity and church hierarchs as they both responded to rapidly changing social and political circumstances. As spiritual essence emanated from shrines to local communities of believers the phenomenon raised questions about sacred objects' authenticity, church authority, and believers' growing awareness of their membership in a larger community of Russian Orthodox Christians living in an in increasingly modern, secular, and revolutionary Russian.[17]

Icon Visitations as Expressions of Modern Orthodox Piety

In the decades following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the machinery of the tsar's autocracy introduced what became known as the Great Reforms, which set into motion fundamental changes in the judicial system, military service, primary education, and local government that aimed at modernizing the imperial structure without eliminating the autocracy.[18] Although each of these initiatives eventually challenged many aspects of traditional village life, primary schooling had the greatest impact on peasants' social and cultural identities. The extraordinary life of Ivan Stoliarov suggests the complex and unexpected outcomes of the interaction between traditional and modern worlds. Stoliarov was born a peasant in 1882, only two decades after the emancipation of the serfs and the introduction of educational reforms. Like many other village residents, he faced a cycle of poverty that seemed as much a force of nature as the passage of time. Being the youngest son in the family, his prospects were even worse since according to custom the family's scant resources would succeed to his eldest brother. His parents did not lack for initiative. His father, who attained a rudimentary literacy while serving in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 and 1878, tried unsuccessfully to augment the family's meager agricultural income selling buns and pretzels during the pre-Lenten carnival festivities and religious holidays, times of merriment and large gatherings of potential customers. Discouraged, he considered moving the family to Siberia where land and opportunities appeared to abound. Stoliarov's mother refused to move and instead tried her hand at changing fate and sent young Ivan to the newly opened parish school. Ivan quickly developed a taste for reading and raised money to continue his education at the district agricultural school by assisting the church choirmaster. Describing his experience at the agricultural school as "the best time of my life [because it] introduced me to culture and connected me to the rest of Russia," Ivan hoped to introduce modern farming techniques in his village, but his plans were altered when he caught the eye of a wealthy patroness who was active in a political party advocating constitutional democracy. Unable to stay in Russia because of his political activities during the 1905 revolution,

Ivan's patroness funded his studies at the Sorbonne. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Ivan used his knowledge of French and training in agriculture to represent the young Soviet Union in Paris and, eventually, helped procure equipment for Stalin's collectivization campaign before defecting to France. Although Stoliarov is mostly silent about his faith later in life, two things are clear in his memoir: his respect for religious customs and his conviction that his religious primary school education saved him from perpetuating the misery of his forebears.[19]

While Stoliarov's rise from impoverished villager to representative of the Soviet collectivization program in Paris was exceptional, the transformative power of rural education was increasingly on display in the burgeoning factory labor force, as well as in the countryside. Newly literate peasants remaining in the village took positions of authority in the institutions created by the Great Reforms and served as community leaders, schoolteachers, agricultural specialists, and scribes for their illiterate neighbors. Rather than abandon their faith these new peasants modified it by integrating the knowledge they acquired through reading with their traditional belief systems, much as earlier generations had intermixed pagan and Christian faith systems. This combination of literacy and faith was a stated goal of the Education Statutes issued by the Ministry of Enlightenment between 1864 and 1866, which encouraged the peaceful coexistence between oral and literate mental worlds by using primary education to instill "religious and moral notions among the population and to spread useful basic knowledge."[20] By the beginning of the twentieth century, the growth in publishers of popular literature fueled the peasant reading public's taste for stories about adventure, success, exotic lands, and mysteries while offering a regular catalog of religious and moral tales. To satisfy literate believers' proclivity for religious themes, in 1879, one of the most important centres of religious publishing, the Trinity-Sergius Monastery outside of Moscow, introduced its four-page *Troitskie listki* (Trinity Leaflets), which eventually included more than 1,500 titles with a circulation of more than 200 million copies.[21] Trinity-Sergius along with other monastery and church presses published saints' lives, explanations of the faith, and pilgrimage stories that appealed to the religious curiosity of millions of

Orthodox faithful in the countryside and cities.[22] Together, this new literary genre established unprecedented real and imagined connections between communities of believers and to important spiritual centers, shrines, and their sacred objects.[23]

Raising the literacy of peasants was easier to accomplish than introducing modern medicine and scientific solutions to perennial vulnerabilities as a result of cholera, poor crop yields, and epizootics that forced peasants to resort to familiar remedies that often included wondrous icons. When cholera threatened the village of Alekseev in the central province of Kaluga in 1848, the wonder-working Bogoliubskaia (Beloved) Mother of God icon, which was housed in the Church of the Resurrection in the neighboring district, offered its protection during an exceptional visit. During the cholera epidemic of 1870-1871, the peasants of Alekseev secured another loan from the icon's owner and, subsequently, requested an annual visitation as a safeguard against the dreaded disease. When the Church of the Resurrection refused to lend its wondrous icon, 2,000 Alekseev faithful set off on a mini-pilgrimage to the sacred image and received permission to perform a special procession with the icon to commemorate both interventions.[24]

The presence of medical assistance did not discourage peasants from appealing to the healing powers of wondrous icons.[25] When faced with the ravages of the cholera outbreak during the summer of 1910, Staro-Pokrovskoe village in the southern province of Voronezh first appealed to the local medical inspector. When his modern medical treatments failed and the daily infection rate climbed from two to six, the faithful sent a delegation to the Divnogorsk monastery in nearby Korotoiak city to make a personal appeal for a temporary loan of the Sicilian Wonder-working Mother of God icon which had protected Staro-Pokrovskoe against cholera ten years earlier. The icon was so well known throughout south-central Russia that the feast day of the monastery church attracted thousands of pilgrims eager to worship in its midst.[26] Aware of the importance of the icon and its busy visitation schedule the Staro-Pokrovskoe community accepted a very brief loan of less than 24 hours. Despite the scorching 95-degree temperatures, nearly 2,000 parishioners met the "Dear Guest" in time for evening vespers. Because of the large crowd, the service was

performed outdoors and was followed by a procession through the village with prayers recited at every intersection (which, according to local belief, was an especially dangerous place where evil spirits were known to wreak havoc on mortals). By one o'clock in the morning the icon entered the church and two hours later the bells rang to announce morning liturgy, which lasted several hours. Throughout the service the faithful beseeched the Mother of God to save their village from further calamity. Following the liturgy the icon was placed on a carriage and returned to the monastery. Six days later the epidemic ended.[27]

Although cholera outbreaks were devastating and frequent, a more regular concern was the harvest. A typical example is a parish in Meshchovsk district in centrally located Kaluga province which borrowed a wonder-working icon of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker that was transported from a neighboring parish annually and used in an icon procession to the fields. The icon itself was large and reportedly had a busy visitation schedule traveling a circuit of villages. When it arrived, the community gathered in the field where its priest recited prayers and sprinkled the soil with holy water to encourage rain.[28] In other communities lesser-known icons were also used in protective ceremonies and, as in everyday routines, regular sacred images belonging to the faithful were also considered to be powerful. To improve the possibilities of a good crop villagers like those in Likhvinsk district (Kaluga province) gathered at the communal fields for special prayer services. With peasants forming a semi-circle and all holding their own icons and candles, their priest blessed the fields with water and scattered a sack of grain that combined small contributions from every household in the community. After this the priest walked through the fields and sprinkled the soil with holy water before leading his parishioners back to the church.[29]

Sometimes a special icon caused an interruption in natural processes in order to communicate displeasure with local parish life. In the northern province of Olonetsk, two holidays marking the wondrous *Troeruchitsa* (Three-Handed) Mother of God drew more than 1,000 people from regional parishes (see Figure 2). After a celebratory liturgy, the icon was usually carried by two men to a nearby lake as the clergy, choir, and congregants sang hymns and recited

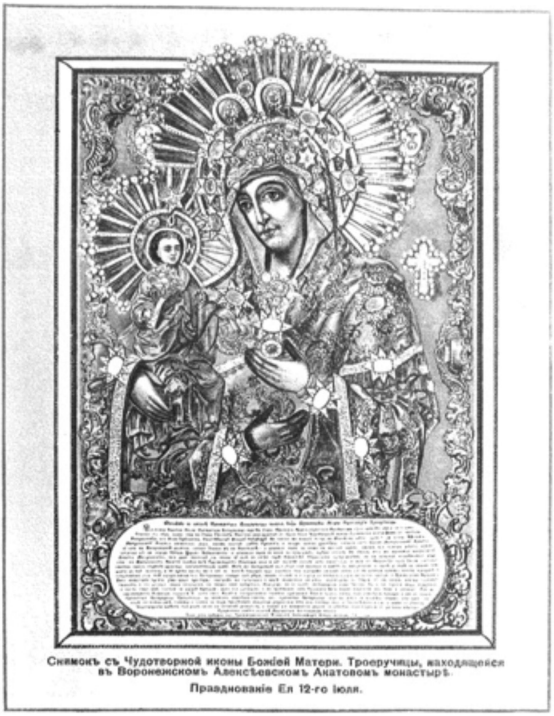

Figure 2. Wonder-working Icon of the Three-Handed (*Troeruchitsa*) Mother of God Icon, Voronezh, Alekseevskii Akatov Monastery.

prayers. During the procession pilgrims to the parish attempted to receive the aura of the icon by crawling beneath it three times. Upon its return to the church, the faithful decorated the icon with ritual towels and ribbons and left small donations as an expression of gratitude for blessings received. On one such occasion, a sunny autumn day in the mid 1890s, the icon "expressed its anger" against the local priest who often served the liturgy drunk and was inebriated on that occasion. Standing at the shore with the icon, the priest placed his cross in the water for a blessing when suddenly the wind picked up, the sky turned dark, and snow began to fall. Just as quickly the weather cleared and the warm sun reappeared. To all present this unexpected turn of events was a sign that the priest needed to change his ways. Unfortunately, the priest did not heed this warning and several years later arrived at the celebration inebriated and singing silly songs at the altar before arguing with the sober deacon. Before

long the priest fell asleep at the altar. This scandalous behavior incensed pilgrims who quarreled with parishioners who inexplicably defended their priest and implicitly defended their use of the wondrous icon.[30]

The sacred aura of traveling icons affected individuals and communities along the routes of processions to their temporary residences and these believers also became part of phenomenon. As an anthropomorphized guest of honor, the icon was treated with care by the local clergy and secular authorities, and greeted with the same respect, pomp, and ceremony accorded any visiting notable.[31] Such was the case when a wonder-working icon of the Mother of God visited Krasnoe village in Voronezh province in 1909. Annual visitations were a recent development and dated to around 1901. On this occasion, the afternoon of 18 August, an official from a neighboring village came to announce the icon's arrival and soon a crowd gathered under the measured ringing of the church bells. A welcoming procession formed and the faithful began to sing an akathist hymn in expectation of the icon's arrival. Unfortunately, news of the sacred image's arrival was premature and the faithful waited more than three hours before the icon carriers were seen walking down a nearby hill. After a ceremonial greeting that was accompanied by short prayers, the icon was taken to the parish church as people fell to their knees, praying and crying. Following an all-night vigil the icon made the rounds of village homes before making its return journey.[32] In other communities, similar prayer services and expressions of reverence were repeated during loan periods as icons were carried to public buildings (such as the village school and the newly created people's house of enlightenment and entertainment, or *narodnyi dom*), agricultural spaces of importance to the community (including local fields and granaries), and individual homes for special blessings.[33] Throughout this brief period of time, the mundane reality of everyday village life was transcended and the community itself became objectified both as a receiver of the special powers of the visiting icon and as the personification of Orthodox unity replete with its harmonious and contentious tendencies.

Tensions over Sacred Aura

Not surprisingly, the crop failure and cholera epidemics in 1891 and 1892, which were the last severe outbreaks before World War I, encouraged demand for established and newly discovered wonder-working icons that could not be met by the overwhelmed staffs of the Holy Synod and diocesan consistories. Peasants impatient with the slow progress of their petitions for visitation approval regularly skirted the process and negotiated their own terms with host communities. Aware of this development and ever concerned about spontaneous piety, the Holy Synod reminded bishops to adhere to the 1722 laws and issued updated regulations about ascertaining an icon's wondrous nature.[34] An alleged wonder-working icon was to be brought to the local district cathedral or nearby monastery for inspection. Once an icon was officially declared wondrous, a description of its heritage and miracles attributed to it were to be reported to the Synod and often reprinted in diocesan newspapers, and finally it was to be returned to its home parish. While this process improved the status of icons that received official sanctioning, it naturally disappointed communities whose sacred images were deemed to be ordinary and, combined with denials of visitation requests, was viewed by local communities as an unwelcome exertion of episcopal power. Faced with increasing political and social divisions in Russia, the newly enacted religious toleration decree of 1905, and a lack of staff and will to enforce the regulations, the Synod became less concerned about its authority over icon visitations and authenticating special powers in the decade prior to World War I.[35]

These were the circumstances in which merchant Mikhail Petrov Boichevskii found himself in 1891 when he petitioned the Voronezh diocesan board on behalf of peasant believers in the large village of Urazova. According to Boichevskii, annual cross processions with the Icon of St. Nicholas from the Valuisk Uspenskii Monastery had protected Urazova from epidemics and crop failures since the 1830s. Although the diocesan consistory had previously approved the annual processions, in 1891 it denied the loan explaining that Urazova would now have to receive permission from the Holy Synod in faraway St. Petersburg. In the eyes of Boichevskii, the

village council, and several hundred Urazova peasants who signed the petition (an indication of at least functional literacy), this delay had made the people vulnerable to the cholera epidemic and required a favorable resolution to forestall further destruction. In its response to the petition, the Holy Synod dismissed any connection between the visitation denial and the epidemic and reminded Urazova believers that a Synodal decree from 1871 had ordered the procession to be stopped because the village was not far from the monastery. Seventeen years later, in 1888, Urazova believers again had petitioned diocesan authorities for the visitation to be reinstated and again it was rejected for the additional reasons of a dispute between the Urazova clergy and Uspenskii monks about the division of income from the procession and concern about the safety of the icon (no additional information was given). In 1891, believers apparently tried to kidnap the icon and civil authorities had to be called in to guarantee its safety and restore order. In the end, the diocesan consistory agreed to a one-time reprieve and allowed a procession because Urazova children had suffered greatly from the epidemic. The consistory also permitted the procession every three or four years because the faithful demonstrated its piety, an agreement on revenue sharing had been made, the civil authorities agreed to provide security, and diocesan authorities' feared that denying the visitation would perpetuate ill will among village residents. Despite this, the Holy Synod inexplicably overruled the diocesan decision and upheld the 1871 ban.[36]

Denial of a visitation often resulted in a community's dogged persistence over many decades. This was the predicament of the Rossoshansk village during the crop failure and cholera epidemics of 1891 and 1892, when their request for a spring visitation of the Divnogorsk Monastery's Sicilian Mother of God icon was refused. Monastery officials cited the overly committed visitation schedule of the icon, yet they also sought to lessen ill sentiment among the faithful by offering alternate dates that were later confirmed by the Holy Synod. The peasant petitioners objected, arguing that these dates fell during the annual spring flooding.[37] Fifteen years later with revolutionary fervor raging in the cities and villages and the war with Japan failing miserably, this same community decided to supersede dioce-

san and Synodal authorities and appealed directly to Tsar Nicholas II. In their telegram they requested that the Sicilian Mother of God icon be allowed to leave the Divnogorsk monastery and visit their community for a special prayer service to end the war against Japan. The telegram depicted local and diocesan authorities as obstructionist in their citation of a 1901 Synodal decree requiring the icon to remain in the monastery one-third of the year (in response to its absence the entire year in 1899) and the 1902 Synodal refusal of Rossoshansk's request for a visitation. The telegram also alluded to discord between parishioners who supported the visitation and the local clergy who may have opposed it (this is implied in the telegram). Over the next four years a representative of the community repeatedly appealed to diocesan and Synodal authorities and apparently conceded defeat in 1909 when the records end.[38]

Discord within communities about the authenticity of an icon's special powers could invite the unwanted attention of church authorities. In 1907, peasants from Loseva village (Voronezh province) disagreed about the alleged powers of the Punishment of the Perished Mother of God icon that belonged to Feodor Makogonov, a local peasant man, but which was kept in the parish church. Despite the fact that only Makogonov claimed to have been cured by the icon, local people streamed to the church to light candles and recite prayers before it, and to make donations to curry its favor. Diocesan authorities ordered an investigation which revealed that although the district church superintendent suspected the icon to be a fraud, he feared that a public denunciation would only create chaos and disorder among those who believed in its powers. Rather than correct the peasants' errant ways, he visited the community and donated money in honor of the icon. In an attempt to put an end to the case, the diocesan board asked the district police to announce that scientific tests had shown the icon to be ordinary, and not wondrous.[39]

As church authorities, parish clergymen, believers, and secular critics engaged in public and private debates about popular piety and the role of religion in a modernizing Russia, peasants demonstrated another aspect of their ability to combine traditional devotional expression and modern innovation when they accepted the transference of sacred aura through the reproduction of wonder-working

icons. Since the beginning of Christian iconography, carefully painted copies were essential to the spread of fundamental teachings of the faith and the establishment of a sense of a universal church. In Russia, a combination of apprenticeship and official supervision of icon painting began to break down with the appearance of the *lubok* (pl. *lubki*) or paper prints in the eighteenth century. Well into the nineteenth century, folk tales, princely warriors, and religious heroes were among the most popular themes of these simple one-page prints that peasants hung on the walls of their humble homes. Locally styled images of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, St. George the Dragon-Slayer, and the Mother of God, along with more formalized depictions of church teachings (e.g., the Last Judgment), and the well-known words of the Lord's Prayer, suggest the comfortable mingling of popular and official Orthodoxy. A revolution in print and visual culture in the late nineteenth century built upon the *lubok* tradition and made use of the latest innovations, techniques, and materials to provide a spiritually thirsty population with cheap *narodnye kartinki* (paper prints) of their favorite icons. Religious imagery even made its way into advertising and, after 1908, seeped into the rapidly emerging domestic film industry although church authorities and cultural élites condemned the vulgarization of the sacred in advertising and on consumer products. Despite these condemnations, monasteries and shrines that attracted large numbers of visitors also took advantage of low-cost printing to distribute hundreds of thousands of paper icons to pilgrims.[40]

At the level of praxis, the rapid expansion of icon reproductions, many of them produced cheaply for sale or distribution to pilgrims at monasteries and shrines or at local markets and fairs, suggests that these spiritual clones shared at least some of the hierophantic powers of the originals.[41] Indeed, the influence of the original item increased as larger numbers of believers came into contact with mechanically reproduced facsimiles they received at a shrine or purchased on their own.[42] Contrary to Walter Benjamin's assertion that the uniqueness of a work of art is "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be," and that authenticity is not reproducible and is instead diluted through reproduction, in Russia mechanically mass-produced wonder-working icons allowed for the

essential uniqueness to be shared with large groups of faithful who might never see the original icon. What mattered to the faithful was a symbolic transference of sacred aura through a copy's filial relationship to the original, which could never be owned individually.[43]

The transference of the sacred aura of an original wondrous object, as well as a reproduction itself becoming wondrous, provides a clear example of the comfortable mixing of traditional belief with a modern mechanical process that appealed to believers and the standards of the Holy Synod. Icon reproductions reinforced the importance of the original image and increased popular knowledge of its "biography" while creating and expanding relationships between communities and the national church.[44] While the original icon retained a certain individuality the image's location and uniqueness became less important as its surrogate copies circulated the countryside and took up residence locally in one of the many radiating geographic circles that aligned communities of believers with the idea of a national church. Accordingly, many Orthodox communities assembled their own pantheons of saints, icons, or other religious items (such as holy oil from a faraway shrine), which provided spiritual insurance against the many uncertainties of life that persisted even as believers increasingly benefited from modern medicine, improved diets, education, and economic opportunities as a result of industrialization and modernization. This menagerie of spiritual transmitters made the relationship between believer and thaumaturgic object both local and personal. Farther along the geographic radius of what William Christian has called the "territory of grace," more and more Orthodox faithful shared increasingly larger senses of identity that included provincial and, eventually, national symbols (e.g., relics of all-Russian saints) and practices (e.g., pilgrimage and behavior at shrines). Increasingly, the territories of grace coincided to bring together all Russian Orthodox Christians under a common umbrella of identity. [45]

When distance prohibited the visitation of wonder-working icons, villages ordered reproductions to be made and local enterprises were eager to fill the orders. When the founder of the prosperous Rakochyi metachromotype (*metakhromotipiia*) factory died in the mid 1870s, he left behind a robust business that produced icons for

church and individual use. The factory's workers — perhaps fearing for their livelihoods as much as their declared hope to satisfy the spiritual needs of their customers — appealed to Metropolitan Isidor of Novgorod to allow them to keep the factory open to complete current standing orders and to receive new ones.[46] The Rakochyi factory was part of a proliferating industry of icon publishing that two decades later prompted an exchange of sorts in a prominent theological publication in the capital, *Tserkovnyi vestnik,* the journal of the élite St. Petersburg Theological Academy that was read by bishops and better educated clergy and laypeople. In a question and answer column entitled, "In the Realm of Church-Parish Praxis," which addressed matters of widespread concern to clergy and laity, a question from a column in 1896 asked if permission was required if a diocesan publishing house wished to photograph and then mass-produce copies of locally revered icons. In a terse response, the editor explained that both the photograph and copies required permission from ecclesiastical authorities because the resulting products were intended for sale, thus implying that the line between acceptable and unacceptable use of reproductions was situational rather than rooted in theological teachings. But the question of authenticity was carefully avoided and readers likely assumed that attributes belonging to the original icons transferred to the photographic offspring.[47] More problematic was the growing production of cheap and derivative icon reproduction that replaced divine inspiration with commercial aspirations. The millions of icons officially sanctioned at the centres of commercial folk art in the villages of Palekh, Kholui, and Mstera in the central province of Vladimir were widely known within Russia and provided a more sophisticated "people's" variation of folk icon depictions in *lubki.* The influential Imperial Committee for the Guardianship of Icon Painting (which functioned from 1901 to 1909) drew the line at new metallic icons and launched a vigorous and ultimately unsuccessful attack against this new vulgarization of spiritual aesthetics. The fact that these companies also produced tins for ordinary consumer products does not seem to have troubled the Synodal episcopate, which expressed its desire to satisfy the spiritual needs of the faithful while providing them with canonically correct icons.[48]

For personal devotion, most peasant believers could purchase a cheaply reproduced icon at a shrine or a local market from traveling salesmen hawking their collection of religious collectibles and thereby hope to receive the protection of a particular icon's saint. Believers in Aduevo village in Kaluga province purchased icons at the local market from itinerant peddlers from Moscow and Vladimir and showed a preference for the Kazan or Tikhvin Mother of God and St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. While religious items sold at shrines almost by definition were deemed by the faithful to be trustworthy, the goods of traveling merchants were looked upon suspiciously in part because these wandering hawkers were strangers; but they were also known to be swindlers who substituted more expensive icons with those of lesser value or one image with another.[49] When a peddler at a Kaluga market sold an icon of the horse-mounted St. Gregory the Victorious in full pursuit of a dragon instead of one depicting St. Vlasii, the patron saint of cattle frequently depicted riding a chariot who would protect livestock, the woman who bought it from him took a closer look and then scolded him saying, "What sort of St. Vlasii is that? It seems that Vlasii is on some sort of horse …." The clever salesman defended himself by claiming that even Vlasii rode on a horse and the woman relented with a degree of skepticism only after being called an ignorant fool.[50]

Surrogates of well-known icons became integrated into local praxis. Communities in the Khvalynsk district in the southern province of Saratov diverted their limited resources to the purchase of icons that were believed to possess special power in the hope that they would provide protection against common maladies, which were treatable by the modern medicine that had not yet reached their villages.[51] In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the elders of the small village of Khvoshchevatoe (again in Voronezh province) ordered a copy of the wonder-working Kozel'shchinskaia Mother of God icon, which had begun to display miraculous powers only a few years earlier, from the Kozel'shchinsk Nativity-Mother of God Monastery in Poltava province in nearby Ukraine.[52] The icon arrived in the capital of Voronezh and was met by a delegation that stopped in several villages along the route to Khvoshchevatoe. A crowd of peasants met the arriving party and proceeded to the church for ceremonial

prayers. As parishioners paid their respects to the icon the church choir sang hymns to the Mother of God.[53] Through this copy of the Kozel'shchinsk icon — an "offspring" of the original — believers from Khvoshchevatoe created a symbolic link with the host monastery.

As icon proxies became commonplace in late tsarist Russia they served as substitutes rather than replacements for contact with the original objects of veneration which required the traditional arduous journey from home to sacred shrine. The two experiences were never equivalent in the hearts of peasant faithful, yet the availability of cheap reproductions and the temporary visit of wondrous icons were considered acceptable alternatives to pilgrimage. One can assume a hierarchy of hierophantic encounters ranging from religious travel to tin reproductions, but the implicit shared experience that accompanied these items was an attempt by the peasant faithful to reconcile their traditional way of life with the rapidly changing modern world that industrialization and urbanization forced on them.

Icons and Modern Orthodox Identity

Among the many social and cultural changes that swept across the Russian landscape in the decades leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution, the increased mobility of wonder-working icons that the faithful borrowed to protect against disease, ensure good harvests, and provided blessings helped peasants as they encountered the uncertainties brought by perennial poverty. Throughout the late imperial period, peasant Russia looked to icons first and foremost as living entities whose anthropomorphized subjects mediated between believer and God the Creator, and, second, as vehicles of communication between individuals and groups of believers who shared the same faith in wonder-working powers. The expansion of the railroad and the availability of affordable train travel and reliable highways facilitated the growth in pilgrimage among peasants who visited, often for the first time, faraway holy places of importance to Russian Orthodoxy. Despite this growth, pilgrimage remained a minority experience and the vast majority of peasants used improved transportation to move holy objects safely and quickly from village to village. For an even larger number of faithful the mass reproduction

of icons changed the nature of their participation in a larger Orthodox experience. While church officials looked suspiciously on unsanctioned visitations, they also tacitly acknowledged what has recently been described as a "dialogue with the world" centred on modernity and the way the faithful "'embraced,' 'accommodated,' and 'adapted'" to it, as well as their retrenchment through spirituality.[54]

Such was the case of the small district capital of Biriuch in Voronezh province which, during the cholera epidemic of 1847, borrowed the wonder-working icon of the Tikhvin Mother of God that was housed in the nearby village of Userd. One of the most popular sacred images in late imperial Russia, the Tikhvin Mother of God icon was originally from Constantinople (see Figure 3). The icon survived the onslaught of the iconoclasts during one of the most contentious theological controversies of the Byzantine period, disappeared, and then mysteriously reappeared in the fourteenth century to simple fishermen on the northern Lake Ladoga. A chapel was built in honor of the icon in the nearby forest and later the icon was transported to the Tikhvin monastery in Novgorod. Symbolically, this icon represented the translation of Orthodox Christianity's most holy city, the second Rome or Constantinople, to the territory of the northern reaches of early modern Muscovy, whose capital would become known as the third and final Rome. When the Userd community obtained its own redaction of the image, not only did it allude to this connection to the ancient seat of Orthodox Christianity, but also the miraculous powers of the original version appeared to have been transferred. After Biriuch city officials ascribed the immediate end of the cholera epidemic upon the arrival of the Tikhvin Mother of God icon, they spent 22 years sending petitions to diocesan authorities and the Holy Synod requesting an annual visitation until permission was granted in 1869.[55] Biriuch's good fortune was quickly noted by nearby Noven'kaia village located on the route from Userd to Biriuch. Undeterred by the denial of their request for its own annual visitation by the wondrous icon, Noven'kaia believers requested to become an unofficial rest stop for the procession between Userd and Biriuch. When the Holy Synod denied even this limited request, the village was prevented from establishing its own special relationship with the Tikhvin Mother of God icon, a sore point that became part of its communal narrative.[56]

Figure 3. Tikhvin Mother of God Icon.
Church of Ipatev Monastery, Kostroma.

The faithful's desires were not always met but they remained fervently hopeful as can be seen in the determination of Biriuch, as well as the persistence of Noven'kaia, which continued long after the community published its complaint in the pages of a diocesan newspaper and lamented that it had become only an unofficial stopping point on the route of an important icon visitation. Rather than abandon ancient reverence for icons and belief in their wonder-working powers or become disillusioned with church authorities who stood between them and the objects of their spiritual desire, peasant communities throughout the Russian countryside adapted tradition to the new exigencies of seasonal factory labor, personal mobility, and literacy that were set into motion with the emancipation of the serfs

and the subsequent Great Reforms. The hybrid culture that emerged included a belief in the miraculous, which was essential in a society unable to provide basic medical services and agricultural expertise to its population or to solve the ever deepening social and moral crises that plagued the last decades of empire. As the provincial press expanded and provided outlets for local folklorists, ethnographers, and historians, the written word provided a new means of spreading knowledge about wondrous icons and their locations at the same time revolutionary movements at the beginning of the twentieth century increasingly destabilized traditional life. While not always aware of it, traveling religious images reminded both literate and illiterate Russians of the basic cultural fragments that bound them together as members of the same faith, despite the range of devotional expression, and as inheritors and creators of Orthodoxy's central narratives.

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Endnotes:

1 The initial research for this article was supported by a grant from the Academy of Finland; additional funding from the Roosevelt University College of Arts and Sciences enabled me to present a briefer version of this article at the annual conference of the Canadian Historical Association in Waterloo, Ont., in May 2012. I also wish to acknowledge the helpful comments of my colleagues in the Department of History and Philosophy at Roosevelt University.

2 A comprehensive examination of educated Russia's perceptions of the peasantry can be found in Cathy A. Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). The most comprehensive ethnographic project in Russia was conducted under the auspices of the V.N. Tenishev Bureau. A representative volume of its voluminous materials has been published in Russian, B.M. Firsov and I.G. Kiseleva, comps., *Byt velikorusskikh krest'ian-zemlepashtsev. Opisanie materialov etnograficheskogo biuro kniazia V.N. Tenisheva. (Na premiere Vladimirskoi gubernii*) (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo Evropeiskogo Doma, 1993). Russian folklorists and ethnographers were in sync with their European counterparts who looked to their own peasantries to discover the essence of national characters as a prelude to the construction of national identity and nationalism.

3 A formidable literature exists on Russian peasant piety and reconsiderations of the dual faith since the opening of the archives in 1991. Recent examples include Eve Levin, "*Dvoeverie* and Popular Religion," in *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia*, ed. Stephen K. Batalden (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 31–52; Chris J. Chulos, "Myths of the Pious or Pagan Peasant in Post-Emancipation Central Russia (Voronezh Province)," *Russian History* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 181–216; ibid., "The End of Cultural Survivals (*perezhitki*): Remembering and Forgetting Russian Peasant Religious Traditions," *Studia Slavica Finlandensia* 17 (2000): 190–207; and Stella Rock, *Popular Religion in Russia: "Double Belief" and the Making of an Academic Myth*, Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe (London: Routledge, 2007).

4 The fundamental discussion of binary models of Russian culture that has been widely applied to the peasantry, despite criticism for its reductionism, can be found in Iu. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskii, "Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture," in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History: Essays by Iurii M. Lotman, Lidia Ia. Ginsburg, Boris A. Uspenskii*, eds. Alexander D. Nakhimovsky and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1985),

30–66. In his study of popular veneration of saints and their relics in late tsarist Russia, Robert Greene noted the inclusive multiplicity of Orthodox belief that had the power to console believers with the "promise of divine intervention to rectify terrestrial misfortunes and provide solace in this life." Robert H. Greene, *Bodies Like Bright Stars: Saints and Relics in Orthodox Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 5.

5 The intermixing of practices that combined folk, church, and medical prescriptions was widely acknowledged if not encouraged. For example, see the popular and dense manual on the application of herbal medicinal treatments in V. Goretskii and V. Vil'k, comps., *Russkii narodnyi lechebnyi travnik i tsvetnik*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Tip. V.V. Chicherina, 1892–1893); and the ongoing series "Home Medicine Chest of a Parish Priest," which appeared in a diocesan newspaper, "Domashnaia aptechka prikhodskogo sviashchennika," *Voronezhskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti*, no. 22, unof. pt. (1887): 910–15. Even the Tenishev Bureau acknowledged the intermingling of folk, church, and what it termed "empirical medicine." See the Bureau's catalog of everyday folk medicine, G. Popov, *Russkaia narodno-bytovaia meditsina: po materialam Etnograficeskogo biuro Kniazia V. N. Tenisheva* (St. Petersburg: Tip. A. S. Suvorina, 1903).

6 In Russia, where up to 80 percent of the peasant faithful were fully illiterate or only functionally literate by the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, icons were critical to religious instruction and identity. Useful overviews of the icon and its place in Orthodox devotion and Russian culture can be found in Oleg Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, trans. Robin Milner-Gulland (London: Reaktion, 2002); and Jefferson J.A. Gatrall and Douglas Greenfield, eds., *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity*, Studies of the Harriman Institute, Columbia University (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

7 A.A. Lebedeva, "Znachenie poiasa i polotentsa v russkikh semeino-bytovykh obychaiakh i obriadakh XIX-XX vv." in *Russkie: Semeinyi i obshchestvennyi byt',* eds. M.M. Gromyko and T.A. Litova (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), 229–47; I.A. Kremleva, "Ob evoliutsii nekotorykh arkhaichnykh obychaev u russkikh" in *Russkie*, 248–64; and K.V. Tsekhanskaia, "Ikona v russkom dome," *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* no. 4 (1997): 71–85. The role of icons in parish identity is discussed in Vera Shevzov, "Icons, Miracles, and the Ecclesial Identity of Laity in Late Imperial Russian Orthodoxy," *Church History* 69, no. 3 (September 2000): 610–31. In his examination of visual piety, David Morgan considered the power of the image in the construction of social reality in *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), in which he follows the classic work of Peter L. Berger and

Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

8 Motion that was part of the experience of icon visitations included prayers directed by believers to the sacred image and the metaphorical arena of religious community, which included contention over religious authority to declare the object wondrous and to control its movement. On different approaches to metaphorical motion and spaces that are part of popular piety, particularly regarding wondrous icons and pilgrimage, see John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds., *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London: Routledge, 1991); and Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 207–11.

9 Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 89–93.

10 In addition to icons, peasants considered many other objects to be capable of possessing special powers; however, peasants also differentiated between icons, crosses, relics, and holy water and the wonders of nature. When clergymen blessed wondrous wells or streams they implicitly accepted them as part of Orthodox Christian praxis and regularly drew the condemnation of their bishops for appealing to these "simple" beliefs of the peasantry. This left the parish clergy torn between the beliefs of their parishioners (and often their own beliefs) and the teachings of the church. See Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Voronezhskoi oblasti, fond I-6, opis' 1, edinenie khranenie 1734 (1910 g.). Hereafter archival references will use the following abbreviations: f. (fond), op. (opis'), ed. khr. (edinenie khranenie), d. (delo), otd. (otdel/otdelenie), l./ll. (list/listy), and ob. (oborot).

11 Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy*, 195–211.

12 In the last half of the nineteenth century, the Russian Orthodox Church's concerns about devotional praxis were similar to those of the Catholic Church in Europe, as it sought adequate responses to political and intellectual revolutions (particularly engendered by Darwin and Marx). In response to attacks on its authority and rising secularism, the Catholic Church attempted to direct spontaneous devotional practice involving the Virgin Mary by officially sanctioning Marian visions, such as those of Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes, and the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (1854). In the Catholic tradition, Mary was experienced more through visions whereas in Orthodox Russia she was experienced more through icons nothwithstanding reports of visions. For a comparison between the Catholic and Orthodox Marian traditions, see Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy*, chap. 6. Recent studies of Marian visions in the Catholic tradition suggest the complexity of the relationship between Catholic Church authorities and spontaneous piety with

modern variations (including the use of the internet to disseminate information about Our Lady of Fatima). See Suzanne K. Kaufman, *Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Eugene Hynes, *Knock: The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008); and David Morgan, "Aura and the Inversion of Marian Pilgrimage: Fatima and Her Statues," in *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, eds. Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 49–64.

13 The Holy Synod's regulations on icons can be found in S.V. Kalashnikov, comp. *Alfavitnyi ukazatel' deistvuiushchikh i rukovodstvennykh kanonicheskikh postanovlenii, ukazov, opredelenii i razporiazhenii Sviateishego Pravitel'stvuiushchego Sinoda (1721–1901 g. vkliuchitel'no) i grazhdanskikh zakonov, otnosiashchikhsia k dukhovnomu vedomstvu pravoslavnogo ispovedaniia.*, 3rd ed. (St. Petersburg: Izd. knigoprodavtsa I. A.L. Tuzova, 1902), nos. 668–84, 690–94, 696–97. The Holy Synod's regulation of icons was part of its broader censorship of sacred images. Simon Dixon has recently noted the church's administrative apparatus was insufficient to enforce these regulations or to investigate all but a small portion of claims of miracle-working icons. See Simon Dixon, "Superstition in Imperial Russia," *Past and Present*, supplement 3 (2008): 207–28. Vera Shevzov takes a different position and argues that Orthodox hierarchs disrespected folk practice surrounding this most sacred of Russian icons and thus attempted to control reverence for sacred images. Vera Shevzov, "Scripting the Gaze: Liturgy, Homilies, and the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Late Imperial Russia," in *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia*, eds. Mark D. Steinberg and Heather J. Coleman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2007), 61–92.

14 Kalashnikov, no. 696. Numerous regulations regarding abandoned religious items were published between 1893 and 1901. Newspaper accounts and unpublished records of the Holy Synod and Ministry of Internal Affairs suggest that these regulations were also inspired by fears about the implied subversion of peasants who attributed special sanctity to objects that were not officially registered. The imposition of the church hierarchy's authority on this form of personal and communal belief implied a distrust of the faithful and reiterated the ultimate location of institutional power. Local communities of believers quickly learned of the dangers of speaking too loudly about their sacred treasures, for an official declaration could bring with it restrictions far greater than benefits accrued, especially if church authorities declared the item a fraud and confiscated it.

15 A number of other studies have examined the importance of wondrous objects in late imperial folk piety without placing particular emphasis on

the mobility of icons: Vera Shevzov, "Miracle-Working Icons, Laity, and Authority in the Russian Orthodox Church, 1861–1917," *Russian Review* 58, no. 1 (1999): 26–48; Christine D. Worobec, "Miraculous Healings," in *Sacred Stories*, 22–43; Debra Coulter, "Ukrainian Pilgrimage to the *Holy Land*, 988-1914," *Ukrainian Review* 43, no. 3 (1996): 62–77; Chris J. Chulos, "Religious and Secular Aspects of Pilgrimage in Modern Russia," *Byzantium and the North/Acta Byzantina Fennica* no. 9 (1997–1998): 21–58; and ibid., *Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia, 1861–1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 47–52.

16 A comprehensive study of pilgrimage in Russia has yet to be written, although the topic has attracted specialized interest. For example, see Roy R. Robson, *Solovki: The Story of Russia Told through Its Most Remarkable Islands* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Christine D. Worobec, "Unintended Consequences of a Surge in Orthodox Pilgrimages in Late Imperial Russia," *Russian History* 36 (2009): 62–79; Greene, chap. 3; and Scott M. Kenworthy, *The Heart of Russia: Trinity-Sergius, Monasticism and Society after 1825* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), chap. 5. The literature on pilgrimage practice in central and western Europe is particularly rich and has varying models based mostly in the fields of anthropology and cultural studies. A sweeping overview can be found in Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, Studies in Religion, ed. Charles H. Long (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). The ideas of liminality and *communitas* put forth by Victor Turner and Edith Turner in *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), have been widely criticized for emphasizing harmony over the multiplicity of experience and competing discourses. See Eade and Sallnow, eds., *Contesting the Sacred*. Others have argued for a more vibrant and less static understanding of the pilgrimage experience. See Simon Coleman and John Eade, eds., *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), which also examines non-Christian religious travel.

17 The importance of faith in the modernization process has also been observed among factory workers, many of whom came from the peasantry, who hung icons in their workshops, attended spiritual lessons at work, sang in religious choirs for workers, and attended church together. Page Herrlinger has argued that as peasants moved away from their natal villages to work in factories religious tradition become less habit and more "intentional." See Page Herrlinger, *Working Souls: Russian Orthodoxy and Factory Labor in St. Petersburg, 1881–1917* (Indianapolis,

IN: Slavica, 2007), 112. Other studies of workers include Simon Dixon, "The Orthodox Church and the Workers of St Petersburg, 1880–1914" in *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities, 1830–1930*, ed. Hugh McLeod (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 119–41; ibid., "The Church's Social Role in St. Petersburg, 1880–1914" in *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking (London: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 167–92; and Scott M. Kenworthy, "An Orthodox Social Gospel in Late-Imperial Russia," *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 1 (May 2006): 1–29.

18 These reforms are discussed in Terence Emmons and Wayne S. Vucinich, eds., *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova, eds., *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855–1881* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

19 Ivan Stoliarov, *Zapiski russkogo krest'ianina*, Récit d'un paysan russe, with a Preface by Basile Kerblay, notes by Valiérie Stoliaroff, with the assistance of Alexis Berelowitch, *Cultures et societies de l'est* no. 6 (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1986).

20 Ben Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 50–6.

21 Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861–1917* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Kenworthy, *Heart of Russia*, 192–4. On the correlation between rising literacy levels and increased knowledge about the faith, see the knowledge-retention report conducted in Voronezh province, *Dolgo-li pomniat gramotu krest'iane, proshedshie nachal'nuiu nardonuiu shkolu, chitaiut li oni po vykhode iz shkoly, i chto po preimushchestvu, gde berut knigi?* (Voronezh: Tov-vo Pechatnaia S.P. Iakovleva, 1894). Studies conducted in various provinces in the last decades of the nineteenth century until 1914 found similar results. See Eklof, 394–402. On the eve of World War I, literacy rates varied significantly and reached as high as 70 percent among men who had served in the army and in urban areas and only 25 percent among the peasantry. The most comprehensive study of the Russian population was conducted in 1897 and the findings indicate both this divergence but also the impact of primary schooling only 30 years after the Education Statues of 1864 and 1866. See N.A. Troinitskii, ed., *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii, 1897. Obshchii svod po imperii resul'tatov razrabotki dannykh Pervoi vseobshchei perepisi naseleniia, proizvedennoi 28 ianvaria 1897 goda* (St. Petersburg: n.p., 1905), 1, appendix, 6, 38, 40. Also see Brooks, 3–4.

22 While it is difficult to measure the direct impact of literacy and religio-

moral literature on peasant piety, the explosion of pilgrimage between 1861 and 1914 is suggestive. Robert Greene's estimate of more than one million pilgrims traversing the countryside by 1914 was a result of an increase in shared knowledge of pilgrimage sites and travel routes that regularly appeared in local secular and religious periodicals, as well as national newspapers such as the widely circulated *Russkii palomnik* (Russian Pilgrim). See Greene, 6; and Chulos, "Religious and Secular Aspects of Pilgrimage."

23 Popular religious publications were typically short texts accompanied by at least one illustration to appeal to the visual orientation of the newly literate readership. Another consequence of the emerging provincial press was that it simultaneously preserved in literary form what future Soviet scholars would call *perezhitki* (or cultural survivals of the unenlightened past) and encouraged the integration of religion and modernizing reforms as a natural process of social development. The latter was the intention of a parish school teacher at the beginning of the twentieth century who organized a pilgrimage as a type of fieldtrip for his pupils in with the goal of teaching a new generation of Orthodox Christians the importance of sacred travel to holy relics. See "Iz opisaniia sviashchennikom s. Lavrent'evym palomnichestva uchenikov Maronovskoi tserkovno-prikhodskoi shkoly v Savvino-Storozhevskii monastyr'" in *Pravoslavnaia Moskva v 1917–1921 godakh: sbornik dokumentov i materialov,* comp. A.N. Kazakevich, et al. (Moscow: Izd-vo Glavarkhiva Moskvy, 2004), 259–60. This is an excerpt of the original source: S. Lavrent'ev, "Puteshestvie uchenikov Moskovskoi Maronovskoi tserkovn-prikhodskoi shkoly v monastyri Nikolo-Ugreshskii, Savvino-Storozhevskii i Sergievu lavru," *Dushepoleznoe chtenie* nos. 5–8 (1902): 252–5, 258.

24 Rossiiskii etnograficheskii muzei (hereafter REM), f. 7, op. 1, d. 556, l. 4. As in most agrarian societies, Russian peasant women in late tsarist Russia were often depicted and treated as highly localized earth mothers cum domestic mothers of god who combined the generative and protective powers of the actual Mother of God, who perched in the heavens near her son, the God-man Christ. These were the prejudices of the patriarchal society that framed women's lives. The gender inequalities of peasant society were embodied in the ambiguous status of the extremely popular Mother of God, the new Eve whose position as a woman without equals was diminished by her eternal subordination to the authority and significance of her own son. Just as rural Catholic Europe witnessed a proliferation of "Our Ladies," Russian peasants sought compassion and understanding from their mythical Mothers of God, whose ambiguous status in the Christian pantheon reflected the liminal position of village women. On the role of the Mother of God/new Eve/earth mother over-

lap in Russian folklore, see Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and Elena Hellberg-Hirn, "Mother Russia: Soil and Soul" in *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russian* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 111–35.

25 The impact of modern medicine was certainly greater in urban than rural areas. In the agricultural province of Voronezh, by the 1880s, each of its 12 administrative districts reported between three and six medical consultation facilities, at least one clinic with several in-patient beds, and at least one midwife. While these numbers increased steadily, they never matched the capital of Voronezh, which, by 1905, listed 63 doctors (including several women), 35 midwives, 18 dentists, 38 pharmacists, and seven pharmacies who filled more than 133,000 prescriptions (nearly two prescriptions per resident). See Chris J. Chulos, "Rural Russia: Voronezh Province," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Russian History*, ed. Simon Dixon (Oxford: Oxford University Press), forthcoming.

26 Fr. P. Sergeev, "V Divnogorskoi obiteli," *Voronezhskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti* (hereafter *VEV*) no. 36, unof. pt. (1916): 955–8.

27 Fr. I. Vinogradov, "Prebyvanie Chudotvornoi Ikony B.M. 'Sitsiliitskaia' v prikhode s. Staro-Pokrovskoe Bobrovskogo uezda vo vremiia kholernoi epidemii 1910 g.," *VEV* no. 9, unof. pt. (1911): 291–4.

28 REM, f. 7, op. 1, d. 551, l. 15.

29 Ibid., op. 1, d. 536, ll. 9–10.

30 Ibid., op. 1, ed. khr. 883, ll. 6-7, 9–10.

31 Vera Shevzov has described icons as living beings with birth dates and schedules. See *Russian Orthodoxy*, chap. 5.

32 Fr. Grigorii Lebedev, "Zhiva li vera v narode? Prebyvanie chudotvornoi ikony Bozhiei Materi v s. Krasnom, Nizhnedev. u." *VEV* no. 3, unof. pt. (1909): 145–53.

33 People's houses were locally organized and created space for mostly secular edificatory popular entertainment and instruction and usually included tea rooms alongside reading parlors. They staged theatrical productions, provided convenient venues for traveling theatrical troupes, and became known as meeting points for anti-government activists. Although none of these activities were religious in nature and may have been hostile to traditional religious culture, they were often included in processions with wondrous icons. While peasants welcomed these new institutions, they drew the ire of authorities who suspected them of anti-government activities. See G.A. Khaichenko, *Russkii narodnyi teatr kontsa XIX — nachala XX veka* (Moscow: Izd-vo Nauka, 1975).

34 Church hierarchs were not alone in their condescending view of peasant piety. See my assessment of educated Russia's attempts to comprehend peasant belief in "Myths of the Pious or Pagan Peasant." The rise in pilgrimage and the distribution of mass produced sacred

objects (e.g., crosses, rosaries) in late nineteenth-century Orthodox Russia, as in Catholic Europe, led church leaders to caution against the negative influences of modernization, educated critics to foretell the impending demise of superstitious folk piety, and believers to create new religious practice that accommodated and incorporated aspects of modern life (especially literacy, technology, and personal mobility). Perceived challenges to church authority and religious relevance were usually accompanied by concerns about the commercialization of pilgrimage and other popular forms of spiritual devotion. As Robert Greene has observed, pilgrimage had became a big business in Russia during the last half of the nineteenth century (42). For similar developments in contemporary expressions of piety in Catholicism and Islam, see Suzanne K. Kaufman, "Selling Lourdes: Pilgrimage, Tourism, and the Mass-Marketing of the Sacred in Nineteenth-Century France," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, eds. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 63–88; Alison Frank, "The Pleasant and the Useful: Pilgrimage and Tourism in Habsburg Mariazell," *Austrian History Yearbook* 40 (2009): 157–92; and Michael B. Miller, "Pilgrims' Progress: The Business of the Hajj," *Past and Present* no. 191 (2006): 188–228.

35 Precise numbers of unofficial visitations do not exist and likely exceeded official reports of more than 800 official visitations per. See Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy*, 188.

36 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, f. 796, op. 172, ed. khr. 1749.

37 Ibid., f. 796, op. 172, ed. khr. 1726.

38 Ibid., f. 797, op. 75, ed. khr. 205 II otd., 3 st.

39 Ibid., f. 796, op. 188, ed. khr. 7713, (1907). Unfortunately, the case ended without giving the reaction of the Loseva parish. Such scientific testing foreshadows the methods of Bolsheviks in the early revolutionary years when shrines around the country were desecrated in the name of progress and a better ideology.

40 E.I. Itkina, comp., *Russkii risovannyi lubok kontsa XVIII-nachala XX veka: iz sobraniia Gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo museia Moskva* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 1992), 5–43; Vera Shevzov, "Iconic Piety in Russia," in *A People's History of Christianity*, vol. 6, *Modern Christianity to 1900*, ed. Amanda Porterfield (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 184–91; Tarasov, 345–62; and Brooks, chap. 3.

41 According to Mircea Eliade, a hierophantic object is "the receptacle of an exterior force that differentiates [an object] from its milieu and gives it meaning and value." See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series XLVI

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954; Princeton/Bollingen Paperbacks, 1991), 3–4.

42 According to Scott Kenworthy, icon reproductions at the Trinity-Sergius Monastery were among the top three items sold to pilgrims, which suggests a widespread belief in the efficacy of these proxies. See Kenworthy, *Heart of Russia*, 184–6.

43 For Benjamin's argument, see "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. and with and Introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 220–1.

44 The strengthening of sacred aura through duplication and diffusion is not limited to Russian Orthodox icons. David Morgan has argued that in recent Catholic praxis as copies of famous statues of the Virgin have multiplied, even via the anomic and decentring internet, they have strengthened faith and helped to bring Mary into the highly localized daily life of believers, while "bolster[ing] 'the original,' an image that in turn authorizes its copies and shares its aura with them, but is itself a copy of an original, which was a new version of a predecessor." See Morgan, "Aura and the Inversion of Marian Pilgrimage," 60.

45 This is similar to William Christian's radiating "territory of grace" in *Person and God in a Spanish Valley*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), chap. 2. Kenworthy's study of the Trinity-Sergius Monatery, *Heart of Russia*, provides a detailed account of the connections between local, regional, and national identities. Also see Chris J. Chulos, "Orthodox Identity at Russian Holy Places" in *The Fall of an Empire, the Birth of a Nation: National Identities in Russia (Nationalism and Fascism in Russia)*, eds. Chris J. Chulos and Timo Piirainen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 28–50.

46 *Tserkovnyi vestnik*, unofficial part no. 10 (1876): 13.

47 "V oblasti tserkovno-prikhodskoi praktiki," *Tserkvonyi vestnik* no. 31 (1896): 1007. The response to this question included a reference to an 1833 imperial law restricting the sale of icons and reproductions.

48 The Moscow-based French canning firms of Jacquot and Bonaker were the leading producers of cheap tin icons with the Holy Synod's blessing. See Andrew L. Jencks, *Russia in a Box: Art and Identity in an Age of Revolution* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 58; and Wendy Salmond, "The Tin Icon: Zhako, Bonaker, and the Trade in Printed Icons," unpublished paper delivered at the annual conference of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Los Angeles, 2010. A broader discussion of aesthetics and popular art can be found in Jencks and Gatrall, "Introduction" in *Alter Icons*, 9.

49 I have discussed peasant conceptions of outsiders in Chris J. Chulos, "Friends and Foes in the Late Imperial Russia Village: The Problem of

'Otherness'" in *Venäjä ja Suomi: Juhlakirja professori Timo Vihavaiselle*, ed. Kristiina Kalleinen (Helsinki: Alekstanteri Institute, 2007), 42–58.

50 REM, f. 7., op. 1, ed. khr. 540, l. 3 ob.

51 Ibid., f. 7, ed. khr. 1502, l. 15.

52 The Kozel'shchinskaia Mother of God icon was very old, but its miraculous powers dated only to 1880 when the daughter of Count Kapnist of nearby Kozel'shchina village was cured of a debilitating illness. See *Polnyi pravoslavnyi bogoslovskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo P. P. Soikina, 1913; repr., Moscow: "Vozrozhdenie," 1992), s.v., "Kozel'shchinskaia ikona Bozhiei Materi"; s.v., "Kozel'shchinskaia ikona Bozhiei Materi"; and *Pravoslavnye russkie obiteli* (St. Petersburg: Knigoizd-vo P. P. Soikina, 1910), 500–1. See also Shevzov's description in *Russian Orthodoxy*, 182–3.

53 M. Pogrebnikov, "Vstrecha ikony," *VEV* no. 22, unof. pt. (1895): 817–18.

54 Mark D. Steinberg and Heather J. Coleman, "Introduction," *Sacred Stories*, 9.

55 Fr. M. Mar'evskii, "Chetvertyi krestnyi khod. (Iz Userda v gorod Biriuch s Tikhvinskoiu Ikonoiu Bozhiei Materi 30-go iiunia 1872 goda)," *VEV* no. 20, unof. pt. (1872): 932–9. The importance of linking a community's existence to centres of Orthodoxy was often more concrete and recent as in the case of sacred objects that traveled in the 1860s from Palestine and Mt. Athos, the spiritual centre of Orthodox Christianity, through Belorus and many small villages. See A. Kh., "Prebyvanie v Voronezhe Athonskoi sviatyni i sovershivshiiasia chudesnye istseleniia ot neiia," *Voronezhskii telegraf* no 57 (1869): 2–3; and Pravoslavnyi, "Afonskie sviatyni v Voronezhe," *VEV* no. 42, unof. pt. (1869): 181.

56 "K stat'e: Chetvertyi krestnyi khod iz Userda v g. Biriuch 30 Iunia 1872 goda, s ikonoiu Tikhv. Bozhiei Materi," *VEV* no. 15, unof. pt. (1873): 616–17. The competitive element illustrated in Noven'kaia's attempt to bring the Tikhvin icon to its village suggests the importance of local power struggles that favored large and wealthy towns and cities over small and poor villages.