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CHURCH *KRAEVEDENIE*: THE POLITICS OF MEMORY AND RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA¹

This paper is going to address the proliferation of so called church "*kraevedenie*" [*cerkovnoe kraevedenie*] as a manifestation of the politics of memory as intersection of religious and secular activities. It is based on field research carried out in the city of Kaluga (for three months in 2006 and in 2007). "*Kraevedenie*" includes expertise in local history and in local cultural heritage. Church *kraevedenie*, on the other hand, has gained momentum after 2000, after President Putin has come into power. This could be explained by the aspiration to strengthen national-affirmative views in Russian society. Church *kraevedenie* is, therefore, an aspect of the return to Orthodoxy as (historic) identification, after abandoning Soviet political identity.

Key words: Russia; politics of memory; post-socialism; Orthodox Christianity; *kraevedenie*

Introduction. An orientation to the past, whether idealised or imagined, is an obvious particularity of social practices connected to the current religious life in post-Soviet Russia. Besides, this orientation implies not just Orthodoxy, but certain social practices of secular character, as well. How to explain the focus on the past which is imprinted on various aspects and manifestations of the symbolic practices, otherwise projected over the complexities of current everyday life of the Russians? Which are the manifestations of the politics of memory on the local level? These have been questions which intrigued me during the fieldwork in Kaluga in September 2006 and during July and August 2007, and these are, respectively, *the research questions* to which the present article is looking to find answers. It is the aim of the present work to

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provide an analysis of the politics of memory as an aspect of the "religious revival".

Field site and ethnographic methods. The city of Kaluga is located 180 kms southwestern from Moscow. In 2004, the population of the city was 347 500 inhabitants (Statsisticheskij sbornik 2005:7). The first historical reference about Kaluga dates back to 1371 (Pamiatniki 1880:136; Kaluzhskij kraj 1976:22). It is essential to point out a special aspect of the local context: the proximity of Optina Pustyn' monastery. Located 60 kilometres from Kaluga, it is one of the most venerated and most visited monasteries in Russia (Kuchumov 2002:232-238; Zyrianov 2002:314).

There were 33 acting Orthodox temples (respectively, parishes) in Kaluga 2006-2007, including monastic churches and so-called "house temples" ["*domovye hramy*"].² I have chosen to carry out observations in two parishes, and have taken 30 autobiographical, and also a number of informal interviews.

A large range of activities take place in Kaluga, aiming to reconstruct, strengthen and invent memory. The politics of memory could be described in terms of interplay between different institutions and different social actors, both, at the local and the nation-wide level. As it has always been during historical periods of dramatic political changes, a process of intensive production of practices and places of memory is taking place in postsocialist countries (Pine, Kaneff, Haukanes 2004:1) and Russia is far from being an exception. As theoretical point of departure, I support a notion of politics of memory, which unites "official or government sponsored efforts to come to terms with the past" and "unofficial and private initiatives emerging from within society to deal with the past". According to this understanding, the politics of memory is in correlation with the historic legacies of past repressions (Barahona de Brito, Gonzales-Enriquez, Aguilar 2001:1).

The examples from Russia analysed in the following sections confirm the observation that "political and religious movements often involve the same processes, particularly evocations and appeals to the past" (Pine, Kaneff, Haukanes 2004:2). I am going to address the proliferation of so called church "*kraevedenie*" as an intersection of religious and secular activities.

In general terms, "*kraevedenie*" means expertise in local history (and/or geography, archeology, folklore) and especially, in the history of local

² The latter are granted lower status.

cultural heritage,³ knowledge about prominent local personalities, interest in and producing of genealogical reconstructions.⁴

The project of "kraevedenie" is one important branch or aspect of the politics of memory and it can be defined as an intersection of: a) the central state political project; b) the work of local authorities and institutions on projects of strengthening local identity through the politics of memory; c) genuine and spontaneous individual initiatives "from below". *Kraevedenie* has existed at least since the time of socialism and not just in Soviet Union, but in other socialist countries, as well. Moreover, quite similar phenomena of "local historical writing" have been observed in some countries which have never been part of the "socialist camp", as West Germany, for instance. There are remarkable similarities between what has been called German "local historical writings", on one side, and Russian *kraevedenie*, on the other. The parallel is remarkable. As Eidson notes for the German case, "the term local historical writing refers both to relatively naïve compositions by amateurs, usually concerning organizations to which they belong and to more ambitious works by those amateurs or semi-professionals who seek public recognition as authoritative local historians. [...] In fact, public events of different kinds are often accompanied by historicizing gestures and presided over by local historians, that is, librarians, teachers, school directors, civil servants and priests who research and write about local history in their leisure time or after retiring. Local historians are organized in local committees, in state commissions for public history and in regional historical societies" (Eidson 2004:62, 67).⁵

Yet, in this section one should address several specific questions regarding Russian *kraevedenie* and its manifestations in Kaluga, in particular. In which way has it gained momentum since 2000? Which is the profile of *kraevedy* (people involved in *kraevedenie*) as social actors? How to define the status of their occupation in terms of the dichotomy "professional-amateur"?

Kraevedenie in Russia was conceptualized even before, but mostly during the times of Soviet epoch, as a distinct sphere of activity aiming to produce knowledge. Thus, Optina Pustyn' monastery was transformed (though for a relatively short time in the period 1919-1927) into Museum of *kraevedenie* (Pavlovich 1980:88). The Museum of Kraevedenie of the nearby town of Kosel'sk opened a branch of it in Optina three decades later, in 1957; the department of literature of the same museum still exists on the territory of

³ The term "*kraevedenie*" originates from "*kraj*", in the meaning of 'region', 'land', 'country-side'.

⁴ The dictionary defines *kraevedenie* as the 'study of local lore, history and economy' (see *Oxford Russian Dictionary* 1998:164).

⁵ The same author refers to several of his previous articles on that matter. For bibliographical references see Eidson 2004:86-91.

the monastery.⁶ The Museum of History in Kaluga (established since 1922) was renamed to Museum of Kraevedenie after 1930; it exists under the latter name until now.

According to some local opinions, *kraevedenie* has been strongly promoted in Russia, since former President Putin came to power in 2000. A quotation from a slightly sarcastic interview provides a good insight to that phenomenon:

Kraevedenie has become a fashion just after the President [Putin] said that children should be patriotically educated, and the subject of kraevedenie had been introduced into the schools. Until then, no one even knew what sort of subject it was. Nobody had paid attention to kraevedy, they used to write, but [their books] had not been published. But now they [kraevedy] publish, they started organising conferences and printing books. Actually, the problem is that there are lots of fairy-tale tellers among them. That is why they have been fighting at conferences. There will be many such conferences in September and in October [2006]⁷ (Nina, librarian, 32).

This reference is informative concerning some important peculiarities of *kraevedenie*: the semi-professional or amateur status of *kraevedy* (their professions often have nothing in common with academic work), the "patriotic" overtones, and sometimes fictitious additions to the facts and their interpretation. To be more specific, the literature in question counts numerous books, booklets, newspaper articles, albums, etc. Church *kraevedenie* is already a separately marked category on the shelves of church book shops and parish libraries. It is no surprise that *kraevedenie* often tends to function as appropriation of national narrative as local asset.⁸

In the following I will explore more carefully the social and professional profiles of local church *kraevedy*. Most often they belong to local intelligentsia, but are rather close to the background of the local community: teachers, librarians, local writers, museum workers, civil servants and in one prominent exception, a specialist in cars. In principle, *kraevedenie* is an amateur and/or semi-professional occupation, as was referred to. The fact that teaching church *kraevedenie* in Sunday schools might be either on a paid or on a voluntary basis (depending on personal negotiations or agreement between the main priest [*nastojatel'*] and a given teacher) confirms the

⁶ Official Internet site of the Eparchy of Kaluga: www.kaluga-eparhia.ru/abbats_churchs/mon_opt.htm.

⁷ Quotation from an interview taken on 21. 09. 2006. The words and phrases in square brackets are added by the author. All quotations from interviews are translated from Russian by the author.

⁸ For similar observations concerning the practices of commemoration of World War I in Argonne (France), see Filipucci 2004:46.

validity of that observation. The amateur or semi-professional character was prevailing until recently, when professional museum workers got involved in church *kraevedenie*, exploring the original locations of abolished churches and organising exhibitions dedicated to the history of Orthodox religion (Bauer 2001:3). Church *kraevedenie* is certainly not a permanent occupation for museum experts. Their involvement is indicative for a certain development in the direction towards more visible engagement of professionals in *kraevedenie*.

Kraevedenie was institutionalised in Russia, notwithstanding the intermediate status it obtains in terms of "amateurship – professionalism". In particular, the Museum of *kraevedenie* is referred to as an important cultural institution in Kaluga.⁹ In the Belinsky District Scientific Library of Kaluga there is a special department and reading room of "*Kraevedenie*". Courses of *kraevedenie* are also taught in Sunday schools (Razumovskaja 2002:12-13). Exhibitions, seminars and numerous conferences provide occasions where *kraevedenie* gains the momentum of public attention and imposes its claims of "scientific occupation".

The analysis of all the *kraevedenie* publications dedicated to Kaluga, the city and the district, would be beyond the aim and the capacities of this work. I'd rather focus on so called church *kraevedenie* [*cerkovnoe kraevedenie*] as a specific phenomenon, which has been recently discerned. There is indirect evidence in favour of this assumption: publications on the subject date back as early as 2000.

Church *kraevedenie* is involved in discovering the locations of abolished churches, exploring chronicles of existing or vanished temples (Bauer 2001:3), providing archival information concerning biographies and genealogies of pre-revolutionary clergy (Legostaev, Pautova 2004:132-210), data about activities of the parishes in the past, the history of important icons, etc. These activities have practical aspects in the process of so called "religious revival", especially if one takes into consideration the significant loss of Orthodox cultural knowledge in Russia at large (see Kaarinen, Furman 2000:39-41) after more than seventy years of militant atheism. Maybe the first person, who has started searching for locations of abolished churches since 1992, as well as erecting crosses at these locations, was Vitalij Legostaev. The interview with him demonstrates that this is not just an archive and library research but an investigation involving serious efforts in exploring *in situ* different locations, which are often not easily accessible:

⁹ (see <http://kaluga.amr-museum.ru>).

Well, I have worked on it since [nineteen] ninety two. (...) I have studied this county [uezd]¹⁰ of Kaluga for more than ten years. [There are about] sixty temples and they are all listed in a register. We have erected a cross in place of the destroyed temple for the first time in this Eparchy. The cross looks quite nice, made from iron and concrete. I have visited the sites of all these sixty temples. I have made an itinerary and marked them on the map. In the winter, I made the itinerary; and during the summer have travelled there [by car] and put the crosses up. I have also photographed all the sites.¹¹

We can learn from the same interview that this work has been a voluntary one for a long time. Since the first publications of Vitalij Legostaev have gained local popularity and recognition after the year of 2000, he started receiving offers to work on particular projects. It is in this way the amateur work has been transformed in semi-professional one.

Publishing is funded sometimes by public funds, but it is often sponsored by local businessmen (see Legostaev, Pautova 2004:236). Usually, a book of church *kraevedenie* is a mixture of different genres:¹² histories, descriptions and chronicles of churches, publications of archival documents, memoirs, manuscripts, genealogies, etc. Yet, it is difficult to discern and to distinguish it from both *kraevedenie* as construction of the local significance and uniqueness and from the public national-affirmative discourses in Russia as well. This is clearly observed in the implementation of church *kraevedenie* as a discipline taught in Sunday schools. It is worthy to comment on the ideas of the director of a Sunday school concerning teaching church *kraevedenie*, especially regarding the reputation of that particular Sunday school as the best one in Kaluga. It was namely the reflections of said director (published in the Eparchial magazine) that revealed the hardship church *kraevedenie* faces in the efforts to define its own profile:

The native countryside is a small image of the Fatherland – Russia. It is for that reason we need to talk about *kraevedenie*. [...] Following the rather short experience of our [Sunday] school in terms of time (the school opened since 1998, thus three years), I would like to note a different kind of experience we made during implementation of the elements of *kraevedenie*. [...] From the beginning, the work of *kraevedenie* has been conducted fragmentarily, with no particular system, at four levels: at level of the history of the parish, of the city of Kaluga, of the Eparchy, and of the of native land.

¹⁰ *Uezd* has been a pre-Soviet administrative unit of intermediary character; *gubernia* consisted of several *uezd*.

¹¹ The words and phrases in square brackets are added by the author.

¹² The same mixed character of genres has been noted by Eidson 2004.

Yet, the necessity to study the native countryside according to the history of Fatherland has only taken shape over time. But it is impossible to teach Orthodox kraevedenie without knowledge and understanding of national history (Razumovskaja 2002:13).

Apparently, memory and history overlap, the same is valid regarding the sacred and the secular, and local countryside and the native country turn out to be functionally equivalent. The fact that the most active church *kraevedy* do not originate from Kaluga, whose cultural heritage they glorify, may suggest that national bias is stronger than the local one. Some forms of appropriation of national history and imagery as local assets, lead to the same conclusion. This is valid, for instance, regarding the exaggerated attention which is locally paid to the important event of Russian medieval history, known as "Great Standing on River Ugra" [*Velikoe Stojanie na Ugre*]. It took place within the territory of contemporary district of Kaluga, on the bank of the river Ugra. It was the decisive confrontation between troupes of the Russians and the Tatars in 1480, which turned out to be victorious for the Russians and is considered, at least by some Russian historians, as the final act in the shaping of Russian statehood. This historic episode is periodically reminded and symbolically reproduced through different "historicizing gestures" (according to Eidson 2004:67).

One can clearly follow the trajectories of the politics of memory to 1980, when the 500 years jubilee of the event was celebrated. New "places of memory" were produced: an impressive monument near the river, tourist routes in the national park "*Ugra*", pilgrimage travels, including visits of the temples located near the bank of Ugra river (see Makarova, Kalashnikova 2006:351-352). Meanwhile, numerous publications were printed: popular, journalistic, *kraevedenie*, and historical literature (its bibliography counted 160 titles before 2006 – *ibid.*:352-356). The peak of these practices has found an expression in publishing a prestigious collection dedicated to 525 years jubilee of the event; it is titled "1480 in the History of Russia". Here, *kraevedenie* is in collaboration with professional historians. The publication was sponsored by the local and central authorities, and under the auspice of the head of city administration of Kaluga (cf. Chajkina, Chajkin 2006).

Historic narratives about the "Great Standing on Ugra River" have also been coded in the language of religion and this aspect is strongly represented in the literature of church *kraevedenie*. One may find a medieval historical legend about the victory of Russian troupes thanks to the miraculous intervention of the Holy Mother. Due to that legend, locations near the bank of the river Ugra were called "The Belt of the Holy Mother". Similar historical legends are widespread in the Christian world and, of course, this narrative pattern could not be a trade mark neither of Russia, nor of Orthodoxy. What is significant here is that church *kraevedenie* actively reproduces the legend (see Makarova, Kalashnikova 2006:343-344), and due

to that, legend has become known among the local community. Moreover, the perception of the territory of Kaluga and the district as being specially chosen, protected, and sacred gained popularity.

These manifestations of the politics of memory are obviously constructed "from above", with direct involvement of central and local state institutions. One may claim that *kraevedy* play the role of mediators, transmitting important messages between different strata of Russian society. Obviously, local and national, religious and secular are unalienable.

Going back to the question of appropriation of the national history as local asset, one has to note the paradoxical character of this trend. While in some other countries it is the local community which stands behind the invention of memory and the appropriation of national heritage, aiming to outrun neighboring communities (see Forbess 2005:49-51; Benovska-Sabkova 2007:295-296), the practices observed in Kaluga should be interpreted as working in a different direction. Texts of *kraevedenie* and *lieux de mémoire* give me a reason to assume that what we meet here is a symbolic operation in which the local is not just belittled version of the national, but in which former is an epitome of latter.

Yet, it would be simplistic to claim that church *kraevedenie* has been completely constructed "from above". Some of the most active *kraevedy* in present-day Kaluga have spontaneously developed their amateur infatuation in the subject. The initial motivation could have been far from any religious commitment. Vitalij Legostaev, largely known among the local intelligentsia of Kaluga, is a passionate amateur photographer. His pictures of the churches in Kaluga have provoked his intellectual curiosity and since 1984, he started investigations in local state archives. He created an impressive data base, and published whole series of books and booklets (Legostaev 2000a; Legostaev 2000b; Legostaev 2000c; Legostaev 2001; Legostaev 2003; Legostaev, Pautova 2004). His life-history narrative is marked by an obvious split: there are both virtual commitment to religion and infatuation in photography, but he kept them separate until very recently. Nonetheless, the autobiography eloquently demonstrates the spontaneous character of Legostaev's early commitment to *kraevedenie*, but it also reveals how spontaneity has been framed and "disciplined" by the existing socio-cultural practice. It also provides an insight into how *kraevedenie* functions on amateur or semi-professional basis during the late Soviet period:

[Since the 1960-s] I have taken pictures everywhere, wherever I was: I have been taking pictures in the open air, I have been taking pictures when I was still a child, and when I came to Kaluga [1972]: I have photographed it all. [And then already in Kaluga] I had so many photographs that I started sorting them out. I compiled different albums, domestic photos in a domestic album, photographs of workplaces [...], nature, sketches, butterflies, starlings... and also of monuments and

temples. And this particular album I started in 1984, "Temples of the City of Kaluga". It is in black-and-white, I have photographed everything I could find, there are also memoir plaques, and I added annotations concerning the temples. For the cases I had no [information] on, I went to the library and this ultimately started my interest in the literature of kraevedenie. It is from there everything started, with that album. I decided to show it to somebody. Well, in these days the leading representatives of kraevedenie were Alexandr Sergeevich Dneprovskij and Genrietta Mihailovna Morozova. I first met Dneprovskij. There was a club named "Good Will", they used to meet there on Wednesdays, for tea and conversations, discussing, opinions, etc.

Then I approached Morozova. Genrietta Mihailovna used to work here [in the district library], in the department of bibliography. "She said: young man, you have to go to the archive." It was complicated to get into the archive. A letter [of reference] was required, on behalf of the department of culture. "I am going to provide it", she said, "and you are going to go to work".

Apparently, current development of church *kraevedenie* could be defined as an intersection of initiatives "from below" and politics "from above". Latter is the decisive factor which has transformed *kraevedenie* from peripheral individual infatuations into a socially visible and socially significant project.

Conclusion. One may assume that *kraevedenie* aims to strengthen the significance of the past in shaping both, local and national identities. Forging symbolic bounds between the individuals and their native countryside, *kraevedenie* could suggest more answers to the popular question: "What does Fatherland begin with?" ["*S chego nachinaetsia Rodina?*"], if one refers to the famous Russian song under the same title. *Kraevedenie* has the capacity to provide local dimensions for the "national sentiments" (Bendix 1992:768-790). By giving strong religious connotations to this initially secular project, the *church kraevedenie* provides further instance of the synergy "state-church". It supports the sacred aura of both, local and national identities. Church *kraevedenie* is, from the other side, an aspect of the return to Orthodoxy as (historic) identification, which is to fill the vacuum left after disabling Soviet political identity. *Kraevedy* are the social actors playing role of the vehicle in this process; they are also the intermediary passing important messages between distinct social groups of local society. *Kraevedy* and clergy participate together in the struggle for control over memory, which is actually struggle for power. The politics of memory carried out in the context of "religious revival" in present-day Russia aims not just at strengthening the background of this process, but to positively reshape traumatic historic experiences. Thus, both, politics of memory and "religious revival" are involved in the construction of new Russian identity, being parts of the large nationally-affirmative narrative of post-Soviet Russia.

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CRKVENO KRAEVEDENIE: POLITIKA PAMĆENJA I RELIGIJSKA OBNOVA U POSTSOVJETSKOJ RUSIJI

SAŽETAK

Politika pamćenja u postsocijalističkom kontekstu osobito je intenzivna. Rusko je iskustvo specifično barem zbog toga što je dugotrajno sovjetsko razdoblje, kao odgovor na socijalističku politiku potiskivanja pamćenja, dovelo do današnjeg oživljavanja društvenih praksi u najširem opsegu. Ovaj esej proučava širenje takozvanog crkvenog *kraevedenia* [*cerkovnoe kraevedenie*] kao politiku sjećanja na raskrižju religijskih i sekularnih aktivnosti. Zasniva se na terenskom istraživanju u gradu Kalugi 2006. i 2007. godine. *Kraevedenie* podrazumijeva stručno znanje o lokalnoj povijesti i o lokalnom kulturnom naslijeđu. Crkveno *kraevedenie*, s druge strane, došlo je zamah nakon 2000. godine, nakon dolaska predsjednika Putina na vlast, kada se iz sporednog projekta pretvorilo u društveno važan projekt. To se objašnjava težnjom za jačanjem nacionalno-afirmativnih stavova u ruskom društvu. Crkveno *kraevedenie* je stoga aspekt povratka pravoslavlju kao (povijesnoj) identifikaciji nakon napuštanja sovjetskog političkog identiteta.

Ključne riječi: Rusija; politika sjećanja; postsocijalizam; pravoslavno kršćanstvo; *kraevedenie*