

The ASEC Newsletter

Association for the Study of Eastern Christian History and Culture

Volume I, Issue 1

Autumn, 2003

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE It is most pertinent to commence by expressing gratitude to the scholars who engaged in the process of creating The Association for the Study of Eastern Christian History and Culture (ASEC). Several of them have made a commitment to serve as officers as well. Commensurate gratitude must also go to the scholars who graciously agreed to serve on the Board of Advisers.

In recent years, the interest in various aspects of Eastern Christianity has experienced a rapid expansion (I am almost tempted to say explosion). We see this in the proliferation of articles in scholarly journals, the publication of books, and various conferences specific to this theme. The topics addressed in all of these are substantially broader than they have been in the past. And much of the work is beginning to fill major gaps in the field. Much remains to be done but I submit that there is also a qualitative shift for the better. This is a very positive development, partly due to the greater archival access in the post-Soviet world. But it is no less due to an intense interest in the subject matter itself, in the perceived scholarly ascription of the worth of pursuing research in Eastern Christian studies. The fact that this occurs across many disciplines only strengthens this advancement.

The founding of ASEC evolved out of such considerations. ASEC believes that scholars working in this broad and fertile field will benefit from the communication and facilitation of ideas and research which ASEC hopes to engender. Your interest and support is most welcome.

Nickolas Lupinin, President of ASEC

YALE CONFERENCE A conference on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church was held at Yale University on September 20-21, 2003, hosted by The Yale Center of International and Area Studies and The Council on European Studies. The six sessions were devoted to, respectively, problems of historical study; church and culture; doctrine and representation; the Christian world, east and west; monasticism; sectarianism and the church. The full program may be found elsewhere in this publication. The titles and abstracts of some of the presented papers follow.

George Majeska, "Anthony, Archbishop of Novgorod: The Image of the Saint in Russian Church History." Anthony, Archbishop of Novgorod, attempted to create a sketch-biography of the author of the *Pilgrim Book*, a fascinating description of Constantinople in a.d. 1200, just four years before it was conquered and sacked by the knights of the fourth crusade. On his return to Novgorod he was chosen archbishop as part of the anti-Suzdal political agenda which explains why his rule was interrupted twice.

Fr. Robert Arida, "Another Look at the Opaque Iconostasis." The paper attempts to place the development of the opaque iconostasis in a theological context. It raises questions which try to connect the Russian iconostasis to the conflict between two opposing theologies and their accompanying spiritualities i.e., a balanced hesychasm versus sectarian dualism. It also suggests by way of conclusion how the opaque iconostasis might serve as an important link in the subsequent chain of tensions and schisms which led to the polarization of the Russian clergy and laity.

Cathy J. Potter, "Enlightenment in Seventeenth-Century Russia. Church Politics and Learning."

Before the arrival of “The Enlightenment” from the West, the Russian word enlightenment (*prosveshchenie*) encompassed both sacramental enlightenment and learning, although given the low level of education, enlightenment as “learning” remained highly abstract. In the second half of the seventeenth century debates about church organization and the Eucharist resulted in increasing weight being given to enlightenment as learning, thus expanding the secular potential within the term. The paper explores the shifts in the meaning of enlightenment via an examination of these polemics.

Nikolaos Chrissidis, “Comparative Perspectives on Church Spiritual and Material Culture.” A consideration of indulgences (*razreshitel'nye gramoty*) as a case study of a Western element being adopted (and manipulated) by all classes of Russian society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Nickolas Lupinin, “The Tradition of Elders (*Startsy*) in the Russian Church.” The rise of elders in the nineteenth-century is discussed in various contexts. The relationship to monasticism, society, and the Russian Church is addressed and reference is made to the impact of the elders on their spiritual sons and daughters, both lay and monastic. Three major themes important to the study of elders stand out: humility, spiritual direction and obedience, and asceticism. These themes interlink and strongly help to define the mindset and spirituality of the elders.

Robert Crummey, “Old Believer Communities: Ideals and Structures.” The paper surveys the evolution of Old Believer communities from the end of the seventeenth century to the present. As they struggled to preserve what they considered to be authentic Russian Orthodoxy, the main groups of Old Believers used all of the traditional Eastern Orthodox forms of organization – the cenobitic or idiorrhythmic monastery, the *skit*, the parish, the charitable institution, and the peasant village – and showed remarkable adaptability in choosing the kind of organization that best met their spiritual needs and responded to the external circumstances in which they found themselves. Up to the reign of Catherine II, large monastic communities were the main centers of the Old Belief. From the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, large urban parishes and the associated charitable institutions supplanted them as the focal points of the main Old Believer “accords.” Nevertheless, the call to a monastic vocation remained powerful throughout the Old Believers’ history. They took refuge in *skity* – small, remote communities of the faithful, usually monastics – again and again especially in times of persecution.

Russell Martin, “Death and Commemoration in Russian Orthodoxy.” The paper examines death, commemoration, kinship, and Orthodox eschatological beliefs in the late medieval and early modern periods. The focus of the study is on royal commemorations as they appear in *sinodikons* (liturgical commemoration books). It explores how Muscovite royalty commemorated their dead kin and how, in particular, the commemorative practices of the Romanov boyar clan changed after it became the ruling dynasty in 1613 and afterward. The study throws light on the kinship awareness among Muscovite elites by determining who was prayed for (and who was not prayed for) by the families which held the throne in these centuries.

George Pahomov, “Perceptions of the Trinity in Art and Literature.” The paper explores the theology of the icons of the Trinity with particular emphasis on the icon of Andrei Rublev. The concept of the Trinity and the related concepts of co-being, intersubjectivity, *vzaimoproniknovenie*, and perichoresis are examined in the thought of P. Florensky, N. Lossky, seen through the prism of M. Bakhtin and indicated in Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*.

Jennifer Spock, “The Culture of Northern Russian Orthodox Monasticism.” The renaissance of Russian monasticism (1350–1550) furthered Slavic colonization of the White Sea region and brought local inhabitants into cloisters, interacting with the secular world through trade and production. Most monastics took vows in adulthood, bringing a wealth of trapping and trading experience into the cloisters along with their bad habits of a lifetime. The confluence of a rough, yet experienced, population with the deep convictions of the monastic calling produced vibrant communities that, while not always patterns of deportment, strongly influenced Orthodox culture.

ASEC Executive Committee

President: Nickolas Lupinin, Franklin Pierce College and Center Associate, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University

Vice-President: Donald Ostrowski, Harvard University

Secretary: Russell Martin, Westminster College

Treasurer: Jennifer Spock, Eastern Kentucky University

News Letter Editor: George Pahomov, Bryn Mawr College

ASEC Board of Advisers

Robert Bird, University of Chicago

Robert Crummey, University of California, Davis

Vera Shevzov, Smith College

Paul Bushkovich, Yale University

Alexis Klimoff, Vassar College

Serhii Plokhii, University of Alberta

Gregory Freeze, Brandeis University

Hugh Olmsted, Harvard University

Christine Worobec, Northern Illinois University

Nikolaos Chrissidis, Southern Connecticut State University

George Majeska, University of Maryland