
CULTURE-FORMING ROLE OF THE MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN ALTAI IN THE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

Altai Spiritual Mission was established by the Decree of the Holy Synod of December 24, 1828. However, the actual formation of the mission refers to 1830, when the first permanent missionaries headed by the Reverend Archimandrite Macarius (Glukharev) came to Altai. Since that time, the purposeful work of Christian education in various fields of activities has started: baptism, provision of literacy skills, education, and charity, administrative and organizational initiatives, involving indigenous local communities in the values of the sedentary lifestyle. The article reveals the specificity of the missionary approach in the formation of sedentariness in Altai nomads. Based on the study of the archival documents, new documents on the role of the Altai Spiritual Mission in the formation of the sedentary lifestyle among the indigenous inhabitants of Gorny Altai (Altai Mountains) in the 19th – early 20th centuries are introduced into the scientific circulation.

Keywords: nomads, missionary, activity, Orthodox Church, Altai

1. Introduction

What did Altai, its mountainous part, represent by itself in the early 19th century? The diary records of the travellers, who visited the South of Western Siberia, have been kept. Here is what, for instance, Gelmersen wrote, who visited Altai in 1834: “Tatars, or Teleuts, Kalmyks and Russian settlers live in Altai. It’s hard to say to what North Asian generation the Altai Tatars originally belonged. They speak a mixture of Mongolian and Turkish languages; are engaged in trapping and husbandry. The Kalmyks live in the inner Altai and seem to have intention of moving away from the villages of the Russians, with whom, however, they have trade, which consists mostly in exchange of goods. They have a nomadic, pastoral and hunting lifestyle; pay taxes with animal skins, as well as the Teleuts. Russians here are engaged in farming and mining. More prosperous ones are also engaged in agriculture and trade, sometimes horse-breeding and bee-keeping.” [1]

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Archpriest Stephan Landyshev pointed out that “in the Biysky and Kuznetsky Districts, there are 9,967 settled foreigners of both sexes; nomads, except double tribute payers (dvoedantsy) and the Kirghiz, of whom the number is not officially defined, are considered to be 24,290 persons of both sexes, and with double tribute payers (dvoedantsy) and the Kirghiz it is approximately 26,300 persons. In general, sedentary and nomadic in both counties are about 36,467 people... In the Biysky District, almost all unbaptized nomadic foreigners in their own sense have a nomadic lifestyle in yurts made of birch bark and larch bark, and also felt, and they do not live in societies, except the tribes of Togulevs and Kumandins that although live as nomad camps, in log-crib yurts and houses, but do not have a decent housekeeping... A big part of those having a nomadic lifestyle of the foreigners are poor and receive food from animal crafts and pine nuts; while diligent people receive more from livestock...” [*Zapiska o tserkovnoi Altaiskoi missii protoiereya Stefana Landysheva svyashchenniku Aleksandru Sulotskomu (Note on Altai Ecclesiastical Mission of Archpriest Stefan Landyshev to the Priest Alexander Sulotsky)* (n.d.), in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Tyumenskoi oblasti v Tobolske (State Archive of the Tyumen Region in Tobolsk), Fund 144, Aleksandr Sulotskii, File 44a, p. 24-26] It is clear that the nomadic lifestyle did not contribute to the creation of high culture and arranged life of the people of Altai. Most of them knew neither education nor medicine, nor, sometimes, basic hygienic facilities. They had no permanent settlements; only some nationalities had permanent winter encampments.

2. Methods

The stated issue is interdisciplinary and complex by nature and requires the involvement of research tools in many branches of the Humanities. The use of common methods and procedures of knowledge (systemic, the ascent from the abstract to the concrete, historical and logical analysis, the method of analogies) are supplemented with the use of special methods of historical science (problem, chronological, retrospective, situational).

3. The specificity of the missionary approach in the formation of the sedentary lifestyle in the Altai nomads

The founder of the Altai Mission, Archimandrite Macarius (Glukharev) himself, did much to bring the Altai people to settlement and improvement of their life. He was not satisfied with baptism and teaching the truths of Christianity. To each newly-baptized, as a family man, archimandrite tried to give a house, or cattle, or agricultural tools, in accordance with the meagre funds of the mission. He settled nomadic Altaians closer to the camp and accustomed to a settled life. He requested and obtained for the newly-baptized, living in the Biysky District, an exemption from inclusion them into the peasant districts. The Altaians have remained as before with the special mixed ethnic district that freed them from some complicated peasant obligations to the government. However,

Archimandrite Macarius was a constant applicant before both the civil and the spiritual power, as “a father for their children born by him for the spiritual life” [Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Altaiskogo kraya (State Archive of the Altai Territory) (n.d.), Fund 164, Inventory 1, File 5, Sheet 12, 12 overleaf].

Together with baptism and acquiring literacy skills, the lifestyle changed, ‘foreigners’ acquired new for them skills of household management, farming and husbandry. This also contributed to the spread of the sedentary lifestyle among the indigenous population. Success in household management required a lot of efforts, because most of the work was done manually. People had to learn a lot, to develop economic skills. It was all quite difficult for the indigenous population, mostly nomads. Over time, the missionaries and Russian peasant settlers had been able largely to distribute among the newly-baptized the customs of peasant life, in particular of crop production and horticulture. Among the indigenous communities, more frequently appeared energetic people who, becoming sedentary, planted extensive farms. For example, in one of the reports by the Myyuta missionary, the first Myyuta Altaian was mentioned, who started to use a Lithuanian scythe. It was a newly-baptized Teleut Andrey Mairyk. Such scythes began to appear in Siberia and, in particular, in Altai in the early 1860s. Prior to this, both the Russians and a few Kalmyks mowed hay with sickles (slightly elongated hooks). The mentioned Teleut bought a Lithuanian scythe in Biysk and learned to use it. Upon returning home, he began to travel the lands and cut the grass for Kalmyks for payment. Such activity brought a good income especially in those places where people didn't even know sickles and cut the grass with knives.

4. The positive sides of the presence of the peasant population in the territory of Gorny Altai in the studied issue

The presence of the peasant population in the territory of Gorny Altai in the research question had a number of positive features. The presence of wealthy households contributed to the development of the material life of the newly-baptized. A large number of goods were delivered in the region; more advanced methods of cultivation and other forms of sedentary agriculture appeared. At the same time, albeit slowly, transport communications also developed. With the emergence of, for example, the village of Shebalino (on the Chuysky Trakt), an opportunity appeared to ride in carts and sleds on the beaten track to Onguday. Suffice it to say that in the 1850s there were only two carts: one belonged to the missionary, the other was public.

It is a little-known fact that some of the unbaptized zaisans knew the advantages of the settled way of life over the nomadic lifestyle, including the zaisan Borobosh, who committed himself to proving that nomads could be turned to the sedentary lifestyle, without Christianising them, in other words, without the help of missionaries. For this purpose, he, in fact, forcibly set up a village of unbaptized Altaians. Responding to this gesture of the zaisan, the head of the mission in 1870 wrote: “Is the purpose of the mission in the

settlement and is the settlement a dear perfection of human life?" [2]. But, in doing so, Borobosh repeatedly exceeded the powers of zaisan, showed violence on the residents. In the end, Borobosh was removed from the duties of zaisan, and newly-baptized Mitrofan Katashev was elected to replace him. In the future, due to the preaching of Michail Chevalkov, a former enemy of the mission, Borobosh together with his family was baptized under the name of Alexander and surname Kazagashev; perhaps, that was the name of his godfather. Thus, the missionaries were alien to the artificial intensification of the raising of settlement. This is evidenced, in particular, by the opinion of the chief of the mission Archimandrite Vladimir (Petrov): "forced measures to change the nomadic lifestyle to a settled life would not only be useless but actually impossible for the mission" [3]. This corresponds with the statistics, too. In 1870, among five thousand newly-baptized, more than 1,500 newly-baptized still retained their nomadic lifestyle. In other words, the Christianisation in the understanding of the Altai missionaries was not identified with the sedentary lifestyle.

5. Regarding charitable assistance to newly-baptized people

After baptism, teaching the former nomads to settle down, the mission usually provided necessary charitable assistance to newly-baptized people. "After baptism, poor people were given underwear, necessary clothes, a few measures of barley to eat, a house, and sometimes a horse, a cow, necessary agricultural tools and seeds for first crops." [4] Some newly-baptized people began to treat the charity with parasitism. Then Archimandrite Vladimir (Petrov) established newly-baptized parish guardianships, which, consisting of the best newly-baptized people, would collect information on truly moneyless persons in need and provided donations. Thus, the guardianship learned about the people in need and intelligently distributed benefits, and positively influenced the neophytes, setting an example of brotherly mutual help. The guardianship also helped to fight against drunkenness, laziness and other vices.

At first, assistance was provided free of charge – the purchase of horses, cows, seeds for sowing; for the holidays, the most moneyless people received meat. Later, they began to lend the money, and "experience has taught that the benefits are more valued than certainly given charity. The return of the loans was faithful; besides, returning the debt people added some contribution from themselves to benefit others, who, like them, were in need." [4, p. 208] The affairs of charity under Archimandrite Vladimir (Petrov) from being random one-time acts turned into permanent voluntary commitments.

6. The practice of establishing new settlements for the newly-baptized Altaians

Among the most effective measures for the development of the settlement, the practice of creating new villages for the newly-baptized Altaians should be

mentioned. Here, the missionaries taught the nomads to build houses, engage in vegetable gardening, beekeeping; women were taught to keep the house. Settlement in the mission villages was voluntary.

During commanding of Archpriest Stephen, there were 22 villages of the newly-baptized under the responsibility of the mission. Together with the creation of villages, temples and chapels were built, new missionary branches-camps opened. If under Archimandrite Macarius there was one permanent mission camp, then by the mid-1860s there were already eight branches: Ulalinsky, Myyutinsky, Chemalsky, Makaryevsky, Chern-Anuisky, Kuznetsky, Kebezensky, and Ursulsky camps.

Under the third head of the mission – Archimandrite Vladimir (Petrov, 1865-1883), the process of formation of new villages and camps continued. In particular, Chuisky, Chulyshmansky and Mrassky camps of the Altai Mission were opened. An equally important merit of Archimandrite Vladimir was active temple construction. The most significant construction project of those years was the Church in the heart of the mission – Ulala. It happened so that Ulala with the arrangement of the main mission camp began to play the role of a peculiar capital – center of the Spiritual Mission. Since then, the representatives of all the Altai tribes of the Biysky and Kuznetsky Districts lived in Ulala. Nomadic pagans converged here from all corners of Altai and with the help of the mission remained here for a settled life. Even in the second half of the 19th century, when the other camps of the mission were still opened, pagans came to Ulala to be baptized, to stay here in any of the nearby villages. Besides, it was easier to feed and to avoid trouble from the unbaptized relatives in Ulala.

7. How new missionary villages were formed

The basis for the creation of a compact settlement for the newly-baptized in independent missionary villages was the camps of the Altai Mission. With the increasing number of the newly-baptized, and the expansion of the geography of their origin, there was a need to create villages around Gorny Altai. Unfortunately, the critical literature has established a set of preconceptions regarding the activities of missionaries in the missionary plan of arrangement of settlements and, consequently, teaching the Christian way of life to the nomads. In this regard, it is necessary to elaborate the question of the mechanisms for creating the structure of the missionary settlements and territorial organization. It is important to stress that the resettlement of the newly-baptized from their pagan families was objectively necessary. The baptism quite often caused an extremely negative reaction from the immediate family. The moral pressure on the forsaken from the ‘paternal faith’ (paganism) could be so great that further cohabitation was simply impossible. In such circumstances, newly-baptized people looked for support from missionaries, and, of course, received it. The priests built Russian houses for the newly-baptized people. As a rule, the place was mentioned by missionaries or by the newly-baptized themselves. To avoid conflicts, the vacant land outside the encampments of the nomads was used. It is

quite obvious, because to reduce the influence of unbaptized people, the missionary village had to be far enough away from the nomads. Thus, in the 1850s, the village of Tudrala was established. After the construction of the house, a newly-baptized Altaian asked the monk-priest Akakios to put an Orthodox cross at the new house. The chosen place was sanctified by the missionary, a cross was set. "A new village got name mostly by the name of a river or a tract, or its name left unchanged, if applicable. The cross played the same role as the Church of the camps." [5] Other newly-baptized settled next to the first inhabitants. In the beginning, the assistance was provided by the mission, and then newly-baptized people built houses and consolidated by themselves. A sergeant (*desyatnik*), and later a master sergeant (*starshyna*), were elected by the residents from among themselves for administrative management. After that, it could be considered that a missionary village was quite organized and the county's authorities gave the rural seal.

Unbaptized people could make attempts to settle nearby this place. In particular, it was so in Tyudral. However, the residents themselves sharply prevented it, and as a result, a provision was elaborated, which prohibited the unbaptized to settle within a radius of five kilometres from the cross – the centre of missionary villages [6].

With a limited area of lands favourable for farming in mountainous areas, conflict situations could not but occur. First, those Altaians, who grossly violated the Christian way of life and insidiously acted on the rest of the newly-baptized people, were subjected to the eviction from the missionary village. It was brought to the court of missionary priest. However, according to Yablonsky, this right was often taken by newly-baptized people. Second, conflicts also arose in those cases, if the village was on the way of habitual nomads. This problem, in particular, arose with the creation of the Chulyshmansky monastery. However, for Chulyshman people, it was not as burdensome as the possible conflict with the peasants – old believers, who would have taken the Chulyshman Valley if the monastery was not created here. Land oppressions by peasants – old believers were the most difficult problem for the Altaians. The missionaries in this case were to protect the indigenous population. For example, Archimandrite Vladimir (Petrov) had to resort to secular authorities in order to restrain the rate of resettlement of peasants – old believers on the banks of the Katun River in the area of Choposh [7].

8. Unsuccessful attempts to organize missionary villages

There were unsuccessful attempts to organize missionary villages. It was then, when the mission built houses for the newly-baptized people and settled the poorest families there. But over time, due to the 'immaturity' of the inhabitants for such life, the houses were left, and the place remained virtually uninhabited. Saint Macarius (Nevsky) saw the reasons causing such incidents in the following: "1) prior judgments are not always easy to perform; 2) what

comes easy, is little valued and 3) we should not go with financial assistance towards those who are not aware of their needs, even if valid” [5].

Meanwhile, there were circumstances, which indirectly stimulated the desire of the newly-baptized to settle in mission villages. First: very frequent was the refusal of the relatives-pagans from associations with the newly-baptized. The acceptance of baptism for a young person, for example, could lead to a loss of residence, loss of inheritance, loss of livelihood. In such cases, material assistance of the mission was the only way to survive. Second: the poorest families accepting baptism together were able to acquire a vast farm, so living in the mission village became preferable. Third: a number of newly-baptized families settled in the mission villages, as they usually were started on land convenient for tilling, mowing and pasture fields. This guaranteed a certain protection from attacks on land tenures and also stimulated sedentariness. Another significant factor of sedentariness of the indigenous inhabitants, which became relevant at the turn of the centuries, was the desire for civilization. Thus, a sedentary lifestyle gradually became predominant in the South of Western Siberia.

We should add that after these transformations, the position of the newly-baptized people, who passed to a settled way of life, was less favourable in material terms than for their nomadic relatives. Indeed, with the development of infrastructure, the whole list of obligations were laid on the shoulders of the inhabitants of the mission villages and Russian villages, namely: for the maintenance of county's apartments, maintenance of scribes, better roads, construction and support of bridges, the creation of ice-boats for the sudden deaths, etc.

9. The main problems complicated by the conversion of Altaians to Christianity and a settled way of life

One of the major problems, according to Archimandrite Vladimir (Petrov), was the existing pagan administrative management [5, p. 279]. The previously existing system of foreign districts, to which newly-baptized people were attributed, was usually headed by unbaptized zaisans. Zaisans were inherited. It took quite a long period of time that the system of hereditary transmission of authorities of district zaisans was transformed into the election one. Before the establishment of this system, the actions of unbaptized zaisans were openly hostile towards baptism and opposed the spread of Christianity [8]. Opposition was manifested in various forms, for example, physical tortures of those who wished to be baptized. If baptism was possible to be accepted, then those baptized were returned to distant camps and were held there uninterruptedly for several years, which led to the oblivion of the Christian truths. “They forced them to eat things sacrificed to idols; afforded themselves in the presence of the newly-baptized to laugh at their adopted faith, curse the icons, threaten destruction of the church; separated spouses, took wives from husbands, deprived the baptized of public offices, took away their property;

severely punished them with rods or with whips; starved them to death; put them to torture to modifications of the hands and feet; there were cases of murder of the newly-baptized and the seizure of their property; extra taxes were collected from the newly-baptized people; their complaints were not responded, etc.” [9] It should be noted that similar problems occurred not throughout the mission's activities, but mainly in the Central and Southern parts of Gorny Altai. In addition, newly-baptized people were not given land allotments, as their unbaptized nomad relatives; land was allocated in the places of nomadic camps for all at once. In this case, the unbaptized majority significantly restricted the land use of the newly-baptized people.

By the 1880s, all the obedience of the mission, very scattered in the territorial respect, was designated to the different types of settlements: missionary settlements, villages and ails with accommodation for the newly-baptized. The total number, according to the choral registers, was as follows: in 1845 – 3 villages, in 1864 – 22 villages, in 1884 – 95 villages, 1898 – 223 villages, and in 1916 – 434 villages [10]. It must be emphasized that the creation of a new system of administrative organization of Altai ‘foreigners’ served mainly one purpose of the strengthening of the sedentary lifestyle among the newly-baptized people. A nomad was almost not able to perform fully the Christian commandments and, not the least, a nomad was much less protected from the caprices of the challenging mountain climate than a person leading a sedentary life.

10. In what circumstances the Altai Mission carried out its activities

Objectively assessing the work of the missionaries, it must be emphasized that such considerable results were achieved: 1) in a relatively short period of time (about 70 years); 2) at a lack of a stable financing (mostly charitable funds); 3) in the absence of targeted state or church programs; 4) in the territories with low population density; 5) in the absence of all-season roads and other infrastructure; 6) under adverse climatic and social conditions; 7) at a lack of not only of qualified personnel but also ordinary staff.

Overcoming the diverse factors became possible due in large part to the tremendous personal initiative of the management and staff of the mission. However, even the ultimate dedication of the visiting Russian clergy would not have such significant consequences, if they had not managed to establish a mutual productive contact with the local population on the basis of mutual respect. The natives of the newly-baptized people eventually began to occupy a variety of positions – from translators, icon-painters to priests. By the early 1910s, the local population took 75% of the mission's positions. In the end, the interest of the local population in the church building, the development of the system of school and social missionary institutions was formed.

11. One more important aspect

The advent of mission, schools, churches and preaching houses has made spiritual development available for women. In the conditions of nomadic life, the main burden of the economic worries falls on women's shoulders. Conversion to Christianity provided opportunities for women to participate in worship services, spiritual conversations, and learning literacy skills. According to statistics, it is women that have shown the greatest interest in prayer and education. And this is understandable. Burdened with household worries, they increasingly demanded spiritual comfort and satisfaction in prayer and religious practice. Thus, newly-baptized women had the opportunity to deal not only with household domestic matters, but the 'soul', which was an important achievement of the Altai society in the process of transition from a nomadic to a settled way of life based on the Christian worldview.

12. Conclusions

Thus, we can state that everything that was made of the Altai Mission was made primarily by the power of moral influence: pieces of advice, explanations, and beliefs. Certainly, not the last role was played by the financial aid to the newly-baptized, which was often provided at the expense of personal funds of missionaries. Each newly-baptized person got possible assistance in the organization of life, the arrangement of the sedentary lifestyle.

What features of the modern life of the indigenous Altaians can be attributed to the results of activities of the Altai Mission?

- 1) Reverence for the temple: a temple is a sacred place, even if it is destroyed; one can enter the temple only in clean clothes and with carefully wiped feet. Icons and spiritual books are perceived as special sacraments.
- 2) Arrangement of cemeteries, and the remembrance of ancestors. In missionary practice, the prayer houses were primary, around which the burial was arranged. It is also clear that in the bond villages, due to the territorial distance, the missionary could not personally be present at the time of the burial of the dead, so the burial place was chosen without consulting him. In such cases, the preference was given to the consecrated land, which, by conviction of the newly-baptized people, was in close proximity to the prayer houses and chapels. In the centres of the mission offices, where the missionaries lived permanently, educational and charitable institutions were organized. Local cemeteries were organized at a sufficient distance from the village and camp, in line with the legal norms.
- 3) The estate has two houses – summer and winter ones. A summer house is an ail with an open hearth, sometimes without it (made of different materials, including modern ones, depending on the income of the family). Winter dwelling is a warm house with an oven. The entourage is quite peasant. The summer house is almost never used and kept clean.

- 4) Methods of housekeeping – gardening, the use of plough, Lithuanian scythe, haymaking and stacking of hay.

So, what are the real cultural and historical results of the educational work of the Altai missionaries? In modern scientific publications, the role of the missionary activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in general and the Altai Spiritual Mission, in particular, is estimated differently. But the most closest to us is the opinion of Lityagin: “the realia of today reveal the bias of these interpretations. It was the Altai Spiritual Mission that laid the foundation of humanism, tolerance and peace in relations between Russian and Altaian people... The contrastive-comparative analysis of similar processes in the world indicates the absence of the Altai racial discrimination, apartheid, slavery, reservations, colonies, etc.” [11]

Thus, the missionary activities in the South of Western Siberia did not pursue the goal of spiritual and physical enslavement of the Altai ethnic group and sought to attach it to the socio-cultural values of the multinational state, in which it entered. Some researchers believe that the active formation of national identity occurred not because of the mission, but in spite of it, as an instinctive reaction to external interference. We believe that ‘Christian education’ initiated a multifaceted cultural dialogue of the Russian and the local ethnic groups [12]. Here, we agree with the views of a prominent scientist of our time academician D.S. Likhachov that a cultural dialogue is the leading condition for the self-development of the cultural system – the more the culture has internal and external relations with other cultures, the richer it becomes, the higher it climbs in its historical development [5, p. 50].

This is seen as a constructive, culture-forming role of the missionary activities of the Orthodox Church in Altai. In general, the 19th century was an important step on the historical path of the Altaian people, during which the process of conversion of Gorny Altai into the part of the Russian Empire with its laws and regulations was completed. The task of the Altai Mission to bring culture to the Altaian people without its assimilation by Russian settlers was performed. Over time, the indigenous peoples of Altai have achieved a high level of cultural development and became part of the Russian Empire on equal terms. An important milestone on this historical path was the transition of ethnic Altaians from a nomadic to a settled way of life.

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