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Old Believer Sketes and Almshouses of the Novgorod Gubernia in the Second Half of the 18th – 19th Century

Abstract

The article attempts to summarize the information on the Old Believer sketes, monasteries, and almshouses of the Novgorod gubernia in the second half of the 18th – 19th century. It strives to highlight the development of the Old Believer monasticism of the period, as well as to identify types of monastic settlements peculiar to Old Believers. The main sources are documents from the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts and from the Russian State Historical Archive, as well as newly discovered Old Believer manuscript and letters of the 19th century stored in the fonds of the Novgorod State Integrated Museum Reserve. Most sources are being introduced into the

scientific use for the first time. Documents show that Old Believer monasteries and almshouses formed a network of self-organization, united Old Believers of neighboring regions, and were their centers of spiritual life. In a way, they were an alternative for monasteries of the official church. The sketes and almshouses were supported by local and metropolitan merchants; they also had patrons among nobility, which disproves the notion that in the 19th century Old Believers were entirely from taxed estates and merchantry. The documents show that representatives of the nobility could be not just benefactors, but monks and founders of the Old Believer monasteries. Adherence to monastic tradition made the Novgorod gubernia one of the centers of the Old Rite, closely connected with Olonets, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Chernihiv, and Baltic communities. In conclusions the author offers a typology of monastic life organization peculiar to Old Believers of the North-West region: reclusory, secluded skete, skete compound, and cemetery almshouse.

Keywords

Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, Russian State Historical Archive, Old Rite, monasticism, Novgorod gubernia, church history.

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