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Author's Subject: new books on Muscovite heresies: Alekseev and Grigorenko

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<[A\[leksei\] I\[vanovich\] Alekseev. *Religioznye dvizheniia na Rusi poslednei treti XIV-nachala XVI v.: strigol'niki i zhidovstvuiushchie*. Moskva: "Indrik", 2012. 560 pp. ISBN 978-5-91674-239-8.](http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-EarlySlavic&month=1308&week=a&msg=Jl/XFcZRURov%2b9b6cF9s9Q&user=&pw=></p></div><div data-bbox=)

A[natolii] Iu[r'evich] Girgorenko. *Dukhovnaia kul'tura Moskovskoi Rusi kontsa XV-pervoi poloviny XVI veka. Monografiia*. Sankt-Peterburg: Sanktpeterburgskii gosudarstvennyi inzhenerno-ekonomicheskii universitet, 2012. 351 pp. ISBN 978-5-9978-0381-0

The huge volume of publication on the so-called "heresies" of the late 14th-early 16th centuries (a term neither of the authors here thinks is really appropriate) has not led to any consensus about what, exactly, the religious dissidents thought. These two books will not end the debate, but both, in very different ways, contribute to our understanding of the religious thought and polemic in that period. Here I can but summarize a few of the important points they make; it is up to someone else to provide a proper review.

Trained as a historian, Alekseev now heads the manuscript division in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. Among his extensive earlier work relating to the subject of his new book are two monographs: *Pod znakom kontsa vremen: Ocherki russkoi religioznosti kontsa XIV-nachala XVI v.* (2002); *Sochineniia Iosifa Volotskogo v kontekste polemiki 1480-1510-kh gg.* (2010).

His new book should challenge all who have written on the "heresies" to re-examine what they thought they knew. He brings to the task not only impressive research based on a study of dozens of the relevant manuscripts and acquaintance with most of the relevant specialized secondary literature in whatever language, but also a broad comparative perspective. The core of his book is a step-by-step re-examination of each of the key sources which constitute a now largely well published corpus of everything relevant to the religious movements. In some cases he finds those sources to be of less value than others have argued. In other cases, after careful textual comparisons, he argues for new datings and a new ordering of the relationship amongst sources that everyone would agree are somehow connected.

Insofar as one of his special interests has been the writings of Joseph of Volokolamsk, Alekseev's conclusions about the primacy of the long version of his *Prosvetitel'* over the short version and also as a source for a number of separate letters (rather than they being sources for it) should attract close scrutiny. An important element in his arguments is based on his conclusion that two of the early Volokolamsk monastery manuscripts containing incomplete copies of the *Prosvetitel'* (and thus relegated by earlier scholars to secondary importance) in fact are witnesses to the earlier stage of authorial work on the text.

Alekseev also devotes considerable attention to the subject of eschatological expectations, not just in Russia as the year 7000 approached but more broadly in the European Middle Ages. Presumably here he is summarizing parts of his earlier book which, he somewhat ruefully comments, has not seemed to attract much attention by other scholars. To the degree that he is probably incorporating into the current book sections of previous publications, one result is quite a bit of unnecessary repetition from one section to the next. This is especially apparent in his final major chapter where he pulls together his reconstruction of the history of the "judaizers" and the response to them.

Alekseev's conclusions are that there is no connection between the *strigol'niki* and the "judaizers". The former movement can be explained entirely within the context of concerns in the local community about issues pertaining to the Orthodox Church—that is, there is no evidence to connect the movement with other dissident religious movements outside of Russia. Once it was finally suppressed in the first half of the 15th century, it left no further traces except rather vaguely in historical memory.

A good deal of the attention given the judaizers revolves around the question of whether the movement really involved Jewish beliefs and practices. Many, including Ia. S. Lur'e whose textual contributions Alekseev greatly admires, argued it did not. Alekseev reaches the opposite conclusion, indicating that the burden of proof to the contrary really still lies on the skeptics, given the consistency of source evidence (thin as it is) about the beliefs of the group and given what he insists was a context both of Jewish proselytism more broadly and a growing attention to anti-Jewish polemics in Muscovy.

In Alekseev's scheme of the history of the judaizer controversy, after the initial outbreak of the "heresy" which ended in its condemnation by the church council of 1490, there was no significant public polemic about the heretics for more than a decade. The forceful polemical activity of Joseph of Volokolamsk against the heretics emerged only in the period 1502-1504. An important consideration here in what was in effect the suppression of any active move against the dissidents in the decade after 1490, is the religious views of Grand Prince Ivan III, which, even after Alekseev's interesting analysis, remain rather elusive.

In contrast to Alekseev, Grigorenko, a professor of philosophy and author of an earlier monograph *Dukhovnye iskaniiia na Rusi kontsa XV v.* (1999), argues that the "judaizers" in fact never abandoned Orthodoxy, even if they were critical of the Church and some of its practices. Grigorenko's approach to the subject is very different from Alekseev's, since his real concern is not so much the specifics of the dissident movement and its history but rather more broadly a number of aspects of Orthodox belief in the period regarding subjects such as icon veneration and the nature of personal piety. To a considerable degree his book is analysis of the religious content of a rather select group of writings, among them works attributed to Joseph of Volokolamsk and to Metropolitan Zosima, whom Joseph condemned. Grigorenko argues that these writings, if often indirectly, provide insights into the religious controversy sparked by the dissidents. He does have a lengthy analysis of the contents of the "Laodicean Epistle" attributed to Fedor

Kuritsyn, but he has little interest in others' arguments as to whether it contains some evidence of Jewish or cabalistic thought and rather is more concerned with what the context of works that accompany it in the manuscript tradition may tell us about attitudes concerning learning in the more general sense. It frequently is found along with the "Dialektika" of John of Damascus and other works relating to grammar.

Grigorenko has in one important case reassessed previously accepted views about attribution of one of the sources connected with the judaizers (and Alekseev has incorporated this material into his own analysis). But for the most part his goal is not to consider anew datings and attributions of the texts. Rather, he accepts the "conventional" wisdom about provenance and concerns himself with analysis of their religious ideas with reference to other church texts. In an appendix, he publishes excerpts from a manuscript *Apokalipsis tolkovyi Andreia Kesariiskogo s pribavleniiami*, which belonged to Metropolitan Zosima, and whose selections may be considered to reflect some of Zosima's ideas.

At various points Grigorenko also brings to bear the writings of modern Orthodox religious philosophers (Florenskii, Bulgakov). Like Alekseev, he has read in Western scholarship on the Muscovite religious movements, but he is much more selective in his engagement with it.