



FIG. 1. Nineteenth-century grave markers in a cemetery by Mekhzavod village, which is near Samara in southern Russia. Locals and Latter-day Saint missionaries have traditionally called markers with this peaked-roof design “Mormon crosses” despite the fact that the Church was not officially established in Russia until over one hundred years after these burials. All photographs courtesy of the authors.

Russia's Other "Mormons"

Their Origins and Relationship to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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In 1990, when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints established its first mission in Russia, the missionaries there almost immediately began hearing and passing on stories from native Russians about long-established "Mormon" communities already there.¹ "Whole tribes of native Siberians call themselves Mormons. Many people in villages around Orenburg and Samara are Mormons but will deny it if you ask them. My grandfather was a Mormon, but he died long ago," are paraphrases of the more common story types.

These rumors intrigued missionaries and Latter-day Saint scholars alike, since the limited missionary resources of the early Church and the effectiveness of both Tsarist and Communist opposition to foreign missionaries kept Latter-day Saints from establishing an official presence in Russia until Gorbachev's reforms in the late 1980s. There is no known historical evidence that the Church had any converts in Russia before 1989, except for one pre-Soviet-era family that left the country. Nevertheless, for over a decade, many Latter-day Saint missionaries and members, scholars, and various Russians have assumed a historical link of some sort between these reported indigenous Russian "Mormons" and the newly arrived Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Some sort of link seemed plausible since locals explained that besides sharing a name, the Russian "Mormons" also often did not smoke or drink, had strong family values, held secret worship services, and may have once practiced something like polygamy. The rumors even alluded to secretly transcribed copies of the Book of Mormon circulating in Russia for decades. Based on such parallels, some Latter-day Saint missionaries tried to reintroduce the local "Mormons" to the official Church but had difficulty finding them. At times they seemed ephemeral. It seemed most stories of "lost Mormons" in Russia would be best understood simply as new additions to a vibrant body of Latter-day Saint missionary folklore about independent "Mormon" groups in remote areas.² Such folklore arises despite the Church's great care to "go through the front door" and obey local laws; for example, eager young missionaries occasionally circulate rumors about secret Church organizational efforts in

countries, such as the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s and China in the 1990s, that are closed to missionaries.³

However, the whole body of stories about Russian “Mormons” cannot be readily dismissed as enthusiastic but spurious rumor. The existence of “Mormons” in various places in Russia long before 1990 is attested to in the works of early twentieth-century Russian religious studies scholars such as S. V. Bulgakov and Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich.⁴ In the 1950s, Russian “Mormons” came to the attention of John Noble. After World War II, this American, who was accused of spying, served time in Vortuka, a Soviet labor camp incarcerating many “religious criminals” near the Arctic Circle. Noble wrote:

Assisting the [Mennonite] bishop in the stockroom was another elderly man, a Mormon. The Mormons in Soviet Russia and its satellite countries are a very small group. They are also relentlessly persecuted, due to the fact that the belief in the Book of Mormon originated in the United States . . . and that the international headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is located in Salt Lake City, Utah. . . . There were only a handful of Mormons in our compound but on their days off they would always meet for meditation and prayer.⁵

Noble suggests that the “Mormons” he came in contact with were the same people who bear this nickname in the United States. However, Bulgakov and Butkevich both claim that some of Russia’s pre-1990 “Mormons,” notably those around Samara, had nothing to do historically with the Utah-headquartered Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but got the nickname *Mormon* only because they practiced something akin to polygamy. The dated and sketchy reports of Bulgakov, Butkevich, and Noble leave a host of questions unanswered about why the term *Mormon* was, and still is, being used in Russia to refer to various people who are not members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and who may or may not practice a related form of religion.

Apart from the informal reports of the Church’s missionaries, no contemporary research has focused on non-Latter-day Saint “Mormons” in Russia today. As with many smaller religious groups, it was not clear if or how well Russia’s “Mormons” had survived the Soviet era. If living representatives of these groups could be contacted and interviewed, perhaps a tangled knot of puzzling historical questions about the origins and current status of “Russian Mormons” could begin to be unraveled. The results could provide insight into the issues of survival and representation that many marginalized religious movements have faced.

Latter-day Saint Missionary Reports

In late 1998 and early 1999, detailed firsthand accounts from returning Latter-day Saint missionaries who had actually spoken with Russian

Mormons began to surface. Tania Rands Lyon, now a sociology doctoral candidate at Princeton, compiled a wide-ranging report identifying Barnaul, Omsk, Orenburg, and Samara as likely places where contemporary Russian "Mormons" might live. She recounts a conversation she had in 1998 with a woman in Samara, "Babushka Nadia," who tacitly admitted to being "Mormon" but denied knowing anything about Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon. The woman balked at Lyon's request to attend a service, explaining they were as sacred and as off limits to outsiders as Latter-day Saint temple ceremonies.⁶

James Scott, now a Brigham Young University undergraduate, served in the mission office of Sheridan T. Gashler, the Russia Samara Mission president from 1998 to 2001. At President Gashler's request, Elder Scott wrote a careful, detailed report chronicling Latter-day Saint missionary encounters with Russians who pointed out "Mormon" neighborhoods and, in at least one oft-repeated case, mentioned having seen a very old, hand-transcribed copy of the Book of Mormon. Locals claimed "Mormons" had long lived in their area, did not drink or smoke, and worshipped secretly. Elder Scott identified three separate areas of such "talk of Mormons" in and around Samara—the Ninth Microregion in Samara itself, the village of Mekhzavod or "Nineteenth Kilometer" near Samara city limits, and the village of Bogdanovka about one hundred kilometers away. A cemetery near Mekhzavod displayed many examples of an unusual cross with a peaked roof (see fig. 1, p. 6). From the locals, the Latter-day Saint missionaries had learned to call these "Mormon crosses."⁷

With the permission of the Area Presidency, President Gashler assigned Elders Justin Cooper and Brent Van Every to Bogdanovka village in spring 1998. The "Mormons" proved elusive and other villagers unreceptive to the missionaries' message. President Gashler withdrew the missionaries immediately after seemingly hostile men in a car almost ran them down.⁸

President Gashler has played a major role in every attempt to document and disseminate information about pre-perestroika "Mormons." The authors' research would not have been possible without his pioneering work, enthusiasm, and generous hospitality. Following the leads provided by Lyon and Scott, we were able to spend the summer of 2000 in Russia working in archives, interviewing Russian scholars of religion, and doing fieldwork in areas where indigenous "Mormons" were said to be.

Origins of the Russian "Mormons"

Latter-day Saints and American scholars of Russian religion encountering reports of pre-1990 Russian "Mormons" have generally assumed them to be Latter-day Saints who operated secretly and separately from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the decades of Communism.⁹

There are several reasons to believe that underground communities of Latter-day Saints theoretically could have survived for many decades. Despite Orthodox efforts to restrict religious diversity and Soviet efforts to eliminate all religion, limited religious practice did exist within Russia. Religious people became adept at secrecy, keeping their faith communities alive under harsh conditions. We heard inspiring personal stories from Molokans, Pentecostals, Baptists, and Seventh-day Adventists who had survived just as precarious an existence as Latter-day Saints would have had to endure. Outside Russia, Latter-day Saint communities are known to have continued during long periods of isolation and separation from the official Church, for example from 1852 to 1892 in French Polynesia,¹⁰ from 1862 to 1888 in Samoa,¹¹ and from 1924 to 1945 in Japan.¹² Doctrinal deviation and reluctance to rejoin the “mother church” often characterized such cases. It would be remarkable if long-isolated Russian Latter-day Saints, if indeed they existed, did not show similar patterns.

The reemergence of pre-perestroika Saints would not be the first case in world history where religious groups have surfaced after long periods of secrecy. In fact, the whole spectrum of Russian religious belief could be said to be emerging from just such a context. In Japan, after over 250 years of living underground, the Kakure Kirishitan (hidden Christians) around Nagasaki reemerged in 1865, much to the surprise of Japanese authorities and returning Christian missionaries alike.¹³ Some of these communities reincorporated into their mother churches. Others continue independent today with Buddhist-Christian syncretic traditions. In such situations, habits of secrecy continue despite the disappearance of oppression—sometimes as mere tradition, sometimes as a prudent precaution, and sometimes as an integral part of the religion itself. It is also noteworthy that a sacred text called the *Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, made up of Bible stories and local religious lore, circulated clandestinely among the Kakure Kirishitan much like the *Book of Mormon* is said to circulate among indigenous Russian “Mormons.”¹⁴

However, recent developments in the scholarly study of crypto-Jews provide a useful caution to anyone who might hope for the reemergence of lost Mormons. From the time of their forced conversion or expulsion from the Hispanic world in 1492 to the present, Jews who have secretly held onto vestiges of their religion (crypto-Jews) have allegedly been reemerging in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal. Recently, folklorist Judith Nuelander has pointed out serious problems in the methodology used to identify purported Jewish cultural traces among the long-established Hispanos of northern New Mexico.¹⁵ (For example, four-sided spinning-tops among the Hispanos have long been regarded as evidence of Jewish origins even though many nearby non-Jewish cultures also use them. Also, while

Ashkenazi Jews used dreidels, they are unknown among the Sephardic Jews from whom crypto-Jew Hispanos are supposed to have descended.¹⁶) Neulander's evidence suggests Hispano Jewishness has a stronger basis in the romantic imagination of Ashkenazi travelers to New Mexico than it does in the Southwest's actual history and culture. Neulander warns that overeager interpretations of artifacts, words, and practices within a limited frame of reference often cause interpreters to overlook more plausible accountings for what seem to be reemergent cultural continuities. "[The] propensity to find what one is seeking, regardless of what is actually there, clearly distinguishes the imaginative 'traveler' from the academic ethnographer, not only in terms of method, but in terms of motivations to discover."¹⁷

Despite these cautions, one conclusion is clear, based on Russian scholarship as well as Noble's, Scott's, and Lyon's reports: Russians in a few specific areas were calling particular neighbors "Mormons" for many years before the 1990 arrival of Latter-day Saint missionaries. But this practice does not answer the question of origins. Four possibilities seem likely to explain the use of *Mormon* in Russia. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive, and in an extremely large country with a history of limiting the free flow of people and information, several possibilities could operate simultaneously, overlapping with each other. We have found no conclusive disproof of any of these possibilities, but the last one is supported by Russian scholars and our fieldwork. It is unique in its ability to account for virtually every reported case of pre-1990 "Mormons" in Russia.

1. Missionaries. Tsarist Russia had strict laws against non-Russian Orthodox proselytizing that would have greatly complicated Church missionary efforts, such as that anticipated, but not undertaken, by Orson Hyde and George G. Adams, who were appointed as missionaries to Russia by Joseph Smith in 1843.¹⁸ Laws relaxed enough before the 1917 revolution to allow the Johan and Alma Lindelof family—ethnic Swedes from the Russian Empire's Grand Duchy of Finland who moved to St. Petersburg—to meet with a Latter-day Saint missionary sent from Sweden at their request. The Lindelof parents were baptized in the Neva River in 1895.¹⁹ By 1905 at least two Lindelof children and another Finnish woman in St. Petersburg had joined the Church. As far as is known, the surviving Lindelofs all eventually fled Russia, some of them after serving time in labor camps.²⁰ Perhaps some Lindelofs made an undocumented return to Russia. Maybe some of this wealthy family's friends or domestic help experienced unrecorded conversions and stayed in Russia as an underground seed that became today's Russian "Mormons."²¹ Despite these possibilities, Latter-day Saint missionaries never established or maintained a continuous, official presence in Russia until 1990.

2. Migration. Another possibility is that converts from other places immigrated into areas that became part of the Soviet Union. For example,

the 1915–16 exodus of 300,000 Armenians from Turkey to the Russian-controlled Caucasus²² may have included Latter-day Saint converts from the 1880–1909 mission to Armenians in Turkey and Syria.²³ Half a dozen officially organized Church units now operate in the former Soviet republic of Armenia. It is unknown whether any of these congregations include Latter-day Saint participants in the Armenian exodus or their descendants²⁴—many of the early Armenian converts immigrated to Utah.

Before the fall of Communism, East Germany had several thousand Latter-day Saints. Much smaller groups also existed in Poland²⁵ and Czechoslovakia. Some Czech members even found a creative and modestly successful way to share their faith through yoga classes.²⁶ Conceivably, the influence of these East Bloc Latter-day Saints might have extended into Russia itself. Since at least one Russian soldier joined the Church in East Germany in heady 1989, perhaps others were converted earlier.²⁷ However, none of these situations seems very likely to have planted seeds capable of germination in Russia, and there is no known evidence that they did.

3. Materials. In countries where the Church is not established, small scraps of information such as a pamphlet or a Book of Mormon can arouse much curiosity and go a long way in influencing people. Often Church literature (even anti-Mormon literature) has spread to even the most isolated places and has produced converts without the aid of official missionaries.²⁸ In the hands of extraordinary individuals, it can lead—even in difficult circumstances—to many conversions. The Sicilian Protestant seminary student Vincenzo di Francesca found a discarded, coverless Book of Mormon and believed it while isolated for decades from Church members.²⁹ With only scant access to Latter-day Saint printed materials, many leaders of indigenous “Mormon” churches in West Africa from the 1950s to the 1970s baptized hundreds, resulting in several thriving congregations without priesthood authority or direction from Salt Lake City.³⁰ Such occurrences suggest there could have been a handful of Russian converts to some aspect of Mormonism between 1830 and 1990—especially since the suppression of religion in Russia often increased curiosity about it. However, whether or not any current “Mormon” groups can trace an origin tributary to such events is still entirely speculative.

4. Misnomer. Bulgakov’s and Butkevich’s assertion that the “Mormons” near Samara are a group unrelated to Latter-day Saints could explain more than just this case of Russian “Mormons.”³¹ Perhaps Russia’s various “Mormon” groups, despite a number of seemingly uncanny similarities, are scarcely related to each other let alone to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Perhaps the multiple applications of a term borrowed from English, rather than the expansion of a religious movement, were behind reports of Russia’s many “Mormon” groups. As our research provided more and more evidence for these possibilities, our efforts shifted

from trying to find long-lost Latter-day Saint cousins to seeking to explain how the term *Mormon* came to be applied to disparate groups in several places in Russia. The history of Russian religious dissent and the history of Latter-day Saint stereotypes in Russian popular culture proved to be the crucial context out of which the application of the term *Mormon* to multiple Russian groups would grow.

Religious Dissent in Russian History

In 988, Kievan Prince Vladimir accepted Orthodox Christianity on behalf of the ancient Rus'. From that time, Orthodoxy has stood beside secular leaders as a companion pillar of power. Yet in the seventeenth century, Russia saw the emergence of watershed religious changes. In the 1650s, Patriarch Nikon began enacting liturgical reforms designed to bring the Russian Orthodox Church in line with what he considered to be the more authentic ritual of the Greek Church.³² Those who opposed these reforms were called Old Believers, since they regarded the reforms to be heretical innovations.³³ The spectrum of Old Believerdom ranged from those who retained icons, priests, and a hierarchy much like Russian Orthodoxy to those who rejected them in favor of more immediate forms of religiosity.³⁴ Fearful of the official church and its supporting state, Old Believers became secretive. Among many congregations today, visitors are still not allowed at services. Despite severe persecution in the past, Old Believers remain the second largest Christian group in Russia, having millions of adherents.³⁵

The religious ferment of the seventeenth century—often emerging from monastic discussions but also from fervent peasants—produced many groups and ideas that influenced and interpenetrated each other. One early and particularly energetic group was the Believers in Christ (*Khristovoveriy*), popularly known as Khlysty³⁶ (in English, "Flagellants"). Later, many other reformist or restorationist groups such as the Dukhobors, Molokans, and Skoptsi³⁷ arose in opposition to the elaborate Russian Orthodox rites and beliefs. These groups generally lessened or rejected Orthodox practices such as praying before icons, crossing oneself ritualistically, emphasizing the cross as the emblem of one's faith, using a formulaic liturgy in difficult-to-understand Old Church Slavonic, believing in the miraculous powers of holy relics, venerating saints, and worshiping the Mother of God (Mary) as humanity's intercessor before Christ. Russian religious dissenters often simplified or jettisoned church sacraments, ordinances, and traditions—such as baptism, the Eucharist, marriage and funeral ceremonies, and fast days, as well as the church's multilayered hierarchical structure. For example, the Molokans (Milk Drinkers) rejected the efficacy of the rites and fast days of the Orthodox Church and drank milk on days when it was forbidden.

For many Russian religious dissenters, the Bible in the hands of the believer or direct communication from the Holy Spirit became the principal source of guidance. Leaders no longer needed to be highly trained graduates of theological seminaries but were chosen of God from among the more simple folk. Common to many of these groups was greater emphasis on inner worship, scripture reading, individual and congregational prayer from one's heart, group singing, family, moral purity, and belief in the rapidly approaching end of the physical world. Abstinence from alcoholic drinks, from tobacco, and, frequently, from meat (especially pork) was common. Even more mainstream Old Believers have often promoted temperance and antismoking and have at times refused to drink tea.³⁸ Not infrequently, lay prophets within these groups claimed revelations from the Spirit, the content of which superseded the Bible or formed new scriptural text to be read in conjunction with it.³⁹

While rejection of ordinances, hierarchy, and the physical world is not part of Latter-day Saint doctrine, most of the rest of this thumbnail sketch is composed of ideas with which a Latter-day Saint's spirit might resonate. Given the widely diverse forms of Russian religious dissent, one can readily comprehend how some of these forms may seem, from certain angles, uncannily similar to Latter-day Saint religiosity. However, these practices and ideas arose independently in the context of Russian religious history and not as a historical consequence of Latter-day Saints proselytizing in Russia.⁴⁰

Images of American Latter-day Saints in Russia

Along with certain currents of Russian religious history, the shifting image of Latter-day Saints in Russian popular culture helped lead to non-Latter-day Saint people being called "Mormons." By the mid-nineteenth century, transatlantic print culture was well enough established that educated Russians would have been exposed to the popular depictions of the day. Reports appeared of religions from abroad, including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which, in Russia, was nearly always called the Mormon Church. As early as the late 1840s, the plight of Latter-day Saints expelled from their city of Nauvoo and the westering Mormon pioneers attracted considerable interest in the Russian press.⁴¹ Especially sensational were accounts of the suffering and death of those crossing the plains and caught in blizzards. Some reporters conflated the story of the snowbound Latter-day Saint Willie and Martin pioneer handcart companies with that of the Donner Party and erroneously reported Latter-day Saint cannibalism.⁴² In addition, rumors of secret polygamy and lurid tales of sexual licentiousness in the Salt Lake Temple titillated the Russian imagination. More significantly, newspaper and magazine articles about Mormons were especially common in the 1870s and 1880s, when the United States

government and citizenry most forcefully opposed plural marriage and Latter-day Saint political autonomy.⁴³

Further, Arthur Conan Doyle's 1887 short novel about polygamy, *A Study in Scarlet* (*Krasnoe po belomu*), appeared in a Russian translation at the beginning of the twentieth century. Russian readers were captivated by the demonizing portrayal of a despotic Brigham Young requiring, through threat of Danite murder, an upright widower, who opposed plural marriage, to give his beautiful adopted daughter to a polygamist.⁴⁴ *A Study in Scarlet*, featuring for the first time Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, was far more popular in Russia than in America and has remained so to the present. A Russian rock band called "Dr. Watson" has enjoyed some success, and a film based on the novel is still occasionally shown on Russian television. When one asks an educated Russian what he or she knows about the Mormons, two frequent answers are polygamy and *A Study in Scarlet*.⁴⁵

In Russia as elsewhere, polygamy forms an ongoing central feature of the Mormon stereotype. However, other, more positive elements have come to figure prominently in more recent years. These features include a strong work ethic, abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, strict discipline and unswerving obedience to a strong leader, a reputation for building close-knit, mutually supportive communities, and a common goal of creating a materially abundant heaven on earth. This perceived uniqueness has spawned articles and TV documentaries on the blossoming of Utah's desert into a somewhat overstated paradise of wealth and comfort.⁴⁶

Along with the stereotypical images mentioned above, another contemporary use of the term *Mormon* shows a basic unfamiliarity with the American religious landscape. As elsewhere in Europe, the Russian subtitles of popular American movies such as Harrison Ford's *Witness* and Randy Quaid's *Kingpin*, which depict stereotypes of German-American pietism, translate *Amish* and *Mennonite* as *Mormon*. In these cases, *Mormon* seems to be used broadly and clumsily to refer to an old-fashioned and peculiar American religion.

A history of loose usage of the term *Mormon* coupled with evolving media images of Latter-day Saints has provided a variety of stereotypical motifs that appear in the various meanings of the term *Mormon* as it is used today in Russia. Russians have found a useful resource in *Mormon* as an epithet with which to brand local groups that show features similar to stereotypes of Latter-day Saints.

How Indigenous Russian Religious Groups Came to Be Called "Mormons"

The successful importation of stereotypical images from America coupled with a history of indigenous religious groups with seeming similarities to

American Latter-day Saints has created an environment charged with the possibility of Russians applying the term *Mormon* to particular fellow countrymen, even though they are not Latter-day Saints. But this possibility provides no evidence of how such connections were first made. Written sources are few, but two religious studies scholars at Orenburg State University, Viktor Vladimirovich Kovalenko and Iakov Vladimirovich Riabinovich, independently provide the following explanation.⁴⁷ Especially in the 1880s and 1890s, some Russian Orthodox priests were much concerned about the persistence and spread of what they deemed abominable sects, such as the Khlysty. Having recently read considerably about the Utah-based Mormons in the popular media, they asked their followers questions such as, “Why all the attention to the American Mormons? Why direct all your disgust and condemnation toward them? We have our own Mormons right here in Russia. For example, just look at the depraved Khlysty all around you! They’re our Russian Mormons!”⁴⁸ Following such exhortations, gradually some Khlysty groups became branded as “Mormons,” a highly pejorative term. Villagers could have referred to their seemingly fanatical or aberrant religious neighbors as Khlysty or as “Mormons,” but the term *Mormon* had the advantage of being foreign, hence possessing a starker semantic field of that which is alien, frightening, and evil. Over time, villagers apparently came to realize *Mormon* could serve as a generic term for many dissident individuals or groups, thereby obviating the need to identify them by specific name.

Kovalenko and Riabinovich’s explanation seems plausible, since Latter-day Saints may have come to be associated with Khlysty in particular because, of all the Russian dissenting religions, the Khlysty were the most infamously associated with sexual deviancy. This widely varied movement had other facets as well that could cause Russians to think of the Latter-day Saints. Upon closer examination, however, the similarities between Latter-day Saints and Khlysty seem superficial and the differences more fundamental.

According to the still often consulted S. V. Bulgakov, a runaway soldier named Danilo Filippov founded the Khlysty movement that at first existed within the Russian Orthodox Church but was later expelled. In the late 1600s,⁴⁹ Filippov began his ministry by claiming the spirit of God Almighty now inhabited his body. Soon Filippov announced his assistant, Ivan Suslov, had become filled with Jesus Christ’s spirit. Suslov’s wife became the receptacle for the Mother of God, and twelve followers housed the spirits of the twelve New Testament Apostles. Many other adherents spiritually became the Holy Ghost and the ancient prophets. While the office of Apostle and a belief in the return of ancient scriptural figures are central to Latter-day Saint belief, any idea of a spiritual indwelling of deceased persons in the living is alien to Latter-day Saint theology.

Unlike Latter-day Saints, who believe the human soul is incomplete without a physical body, a body that should be respected, Khlysty followed a dualistic theology in which the body is inherently and inalterably evil. They were said to practice mortification of the flesh by, among other ways, lashing themselves with switches during worship, hence the nickname *Khlysty* (Flagellants) given them by Russian Orthodox priests. (Again the role of Orthodox priests in applying nicknames to religious minorities appears.) While Latter-day Saints require marriage for the highest level of salvation, tend to have large families, and regard the Fall as a fortunate event unrelated to sexual sin, the Khlysty rejected marriage, believing Adam fell through sexual sin. Children were unavoidably born in sin and despised as shameful proof of parental guilt. Khlysty paralleled Latter-day Saints in abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee but went further in tending to refuse meat, especially pork, as well as sugar, onions, garlic, and potatoes.

Most memorably and sensationally, Bulgakov continues, at their meetings Khlysty were said to practice "striving" or "rejoicing" (*radenie*).⁵⁰ At these sessions, one of their number was posted to prevent any outsiders from entering. Candles or, if the adherents were in the forest, campfires were lit. Then rejoicing began and manifested itself in many forms such as walking, shuffling, dancing, hopping, or whirling around and around in a circle alone, in pairs, or as a large group holding hands while singing and praying ever more ecstatically as they felt the Holy Ghost descend upon them. But the form of *radenie* most talked about and condemned were the times Khlysty reportedly became so physically aroused and overcome with the Holy Spirit that, having extinguished the candle or fire, they collapsed, exhausted, into a heap, and engaged in random sexual activity (*sval'nyi grekh*). According to the reports, children born from these encounters were believed to be of the Holy Spirit and, hence, acceptable. Despite occasional manifestations of spiritual gifts, primarily in the nineteenth century, Latter-day Saint services have historically been sedate and devoid of any kind of worship practice that might be regarded as sensational or ecstatic.

Bulgakov concludes his article on the Khlysty by reporting, "From the end of the nineteenth century and especially during the last decade the Khlysty have begun to come under the influence of rationalist sects, namely the Molokans and especially the Stundists, and also the Tolstoyans, and to break into various persuasions." Bulgakov then lists ten of these persuasions, the second of which are the "Mormons,"⁵¹ by which he apparently means not Latter-day Saints but a group called "Samara Mormons." Bulgakov claims the sect arose in the 1840s. These "Mormons" also practiced *radenie*, "sometimes partially unclothed" (*polurazdetye*). Those who became Samara "Mormons" had to swear an oath to keep their rites secret and to obey no one and no authority but the "living God," their leader. These "Mormons" did eat meat, however, and they reportedly practiced

polygamy. Otherwise they led “a disciplined and abstemious life.” Bulgakov claims the name *Mormon* is “arbitrary” (*proizvol'noe*), given to this group simply because “like the American Mormons they allow polygamy.”⁵²

Confusion about unusual family arrangements is a key factor in the practice of calling indigenous Russian groups “Mormon.”⁵³ Historically, when people have engaged in arrangements other than monogamous marriage as a matter of religious principle, outsiders often mistake disciplined observance for excessive libertinism. According to Eugene Clay, an American specialist in the history of Russian religious sects, many unrelated groups came to be called “khlysty,” and sexual radenie may not have happened at all except in the suspicious imaginations of non-Khlysty Russians who could not believe the Christ Believers’ extraordinary commitment to celibacy.⁵⁴ Khlysty sexual radenie, if it even happened, is only superficially similar to, and uninfluenced by, Latter-day Saint plural marriage, which involved establishing households after the example of Biblical patriarchs. Contemporaneous non-Mormon observers of Latter-day Saint plural marriage found it to follow, and even exceed, restrained Victorian norms in every respect except in the number of wives a man was allowed to marry.⁵⁵ The deepest similarities between Khlysty and Latter-day Saints appear to lie in a shared negative public perception rather than in similar theology and practice.

A more substantial Latter-day Saint similarity to some Khlysty groups—a belief in scripture in addition to the Bible—sheds light on still-circulating reports of people having heard of, or even seen, a large, manuscript, pre-1980 Russian edition of the Book of Mormon.⁵⁶ The Khlysty revered their Book of Life Commandments as scripture and clandestinely circulated hand-transcribed copies.⁵⁷ The Book of Life Commandments collected sacred hymns and sayings of Khlysty leaders, but its believing readers never claimed it was an ancient scriptural record like the Book of Mormon. However, if the Khlysty were called “Mormons,” then people referring to the Khlysty’s book could have referred to “the Mormon book” or “*Kniga Mormona*,” which is “Book of Mormon” in Russian. While rare copies of the Book of Life Commandments still exist, to our knowledge no one in our day has ever been able to produce any indigenous book entitled the “Book of Mormon.” Nor do the rumors of such books contain any details that might suggest a relationship to the Latter-day Saints’ Book of Mormon—even such unforgettable events as ancient Israelites sailing to America or Christ appearing to these people after his Resurrection.

The Khlysty have continued into contemporary times, but much like the Shakers in America (with whom parallels seem much more apparent than with Mormons),⁵⁸ they have lost much of their earlier vigor and numbers.⁵⁹ The use of the term *Mormon* to refer to Khlysty-related groups, and even groups apparently not related to the Khlysty, has proven to be more tenacious than the groups themselves.

Three Contemporary Case Studies of Localized Usage of the Term "Mormon"

Our fieldwork provided ethnographic data to corroborate the two main points of Kovalenko and Riabinovich's explanation: that Russian "Mormons" are historically related to Khlysty and that *Mormon* has been used as an epithet for indigenous Russian religious groups due to Russian familiarity with certain Mormon stereotypes. In Bogdanovka, Orenburg, and Mekhzavod, the residents are familiar with the term *Mormon* but use it with distinct local nuances.

Bogdanovka. In a village just over a hundred kilometers from Samara lives Vasilii Stepanovich Safronov, a self-identified Molokan born in 1914 (fig. 2). Safronov attended several "Mormon" worship services as a youth. He recalled that a guard would be posted at the window to warn of unwanted guests. The worshipers present would sing, take turns reading from the Bible, and pray, repeating sequences over and over at great length. Their worship service, as he demonstrated, included the adherents circling around the room while holding hands and rhythmically shuffling their feet, as they continued to sing and entreat God, at times falling on their knees to pray. After a long time, they might remove a few articles of clothing in order to feel cooler. More singing, praying, and circling the room would follow. Finally the worshippers would fall to the floor exhausted and exclaim, "Ukh, du, du, du," several times. (Safronov's meaning was unclear but *dukh* in Russian means "spirit," a word often reported as occurring in Khlysty chants.) Their candle (or campfire) might then be extinguished, and the participants would rest for a while. Then the worshippers would arise and continue their praying, singing, and circling.

Safronov's detailed description indicates these "Mormons" worshipped in a way similar to the Khlysty and were likely Samara "Mormons." Safronov and other villagers, such as Nikolai Mikhailovich Ovchinniakov and the village administrator, said there had been many "Mormons" and Molokans in the village in the past. Safronov and Ovchinniakov suggested that fairly often people in the past switched from one faith to the other, generally at the time of marriage. Bogdanovkans also suggested that the groups often became blended, sharing doctrines and practices. Only a handful of old Molokans and no "Mormons" now remain in this village.

Orenburg. While in Bogdanovka "Mormons" are barely remembered as a part of community history, in the city of Orenburg "Mormons" are a widely discussed, controversial topic. Everywhere people told us "Mormons" were "bandits," "hooligans," "racketeers," or "Mafia"—best to be avoided. They are probably the best-known group of Russian "Mormons" today. Employees at a "Mormon"-owned store named "*Stanichnyi*" (meaning



FIG. 2. Vasilii Stepanovich Safronov in front of his house in Bogdanovka village, Russia. As a child, Safronov visited indigenous “Mormon” services.

“belonging to a Cossack village”; fig. 3) directed us to the Ivan Ivanovich Zhabin home in the “Mormon” part of town. There we met Tat’iana Mikhailovna Zhabina, Ivan’s wife, who smiled and seemed surprised anyone would want to talk to her. She said her husband, the leader of the extended family group, had gone to his ancestral village at Sofievka about two hundred kilometers away. She laughed out loud when we explained that we were interested in indigenous Russian “Mormons.” She apparently

had heard the term applied to her people before but found it amusing. Tat'iana said her family is all Russian Orthodox, but they do not drink alcohol, smoke, or use profane language. She did not know why others call her family "Mormons," but the Zhabin family do not ever refer to themselves in this manner. She explained they are of a Cossack group (*kazachestvo*) living in a Cossack village (*stanitsa*). She said we might obtain additional information next door by talking with her husband's brother and business partner, Aleksandr Ivanovich. We found Aleksandr, his wife, daughter, and her husband in their well-appointed kitchen and dining area. Aleksandr, born in 1958, did most of the speaking.

Aleksandr explained he did not know why people call his family "Mormons" other than the fact that the Zhabins abstain from alcohol and tobacco. According to his recollection, people have been classifying them as such since the late 1970s. Aleksandr and his family were unfamiliar with Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon, but he had heard of American Mormons being driven out of their homes and of their migration to the West. He knew there now are Latter-day Saint missionaries in Orenburg but expressed a preference to not establish contact with them. He did not know anything about Samara "Mormons" or "Mormon" groups in other cities or villages.

Like his sister-in-law, he explained that his people are Cossacks, or historically independent and free Russians who refused to become serfs. Ivan



FIG. 3. The Zhabin family's store in Orenburg, Russia. Called "Mormon" by other villagers, the Zhabins are actually Russian Orthodox. Their clan may have been conflated with Latter-day Saints because the Zhabins are seen as close knit, hardworking, and well-to-do.

Ivanovich is a Cossack *ataman* (leader of a village or tribe). Ivan and Aleksandr are two of eight children. Their father was a strict disciplinarian, teaching the family to work hard, be abstemious, and care for each other. Any child who violated family standards was punished, for example, by being compelled to cut river ice in the bitter cold. Kostia, the son-in-law, said the power of family example keeps the third-generation children in line. "You see the benefits of the lifestyle," he said. The benefits include not only good health but also involvement in lucrative family financial activities.

Aleksandr and Ivan came to Orenburg in the late 1970s and obtained a vocational education as chauffeurs. Initially they both drove taxis. Their father, meanwhile, helped them obtain a run-down, but private, home on the outskirts of town in the area in which they still live. They remodeled this home and sold it for a profit. Then they purchased and repaired two more homes, selling those profitably and buying more. During Gorbachev's perestroika, it became possible to begin a private construction business, which they were well poised to do. They were energetic, visionary, and capable. Business mushroomed. The Zhabins now have purchased or built several homes, apartment complexes, and gasoline stations; own oil wells; and are ever expanding into other businesses.

Aleksandr said his family is attempting to regenerate their ancestral villages, which formerly had about a thousand farms. In recent years, they have built a flour mill, a meat processing plant, a macaroni plant, a bread factory, and produce-storage facilities. They also provide fuel for farm machinery and have reconstructed one of the two former Russian Orthodox village churches—the Kazan Mother of God. Under the Communists, the church was used to store grain and was finally torn down in the 1970s. Aleksandr seemed forthright and unrestrained. He did not seem reluctant to speak or appear to dissemble.

Strangely, it was only after our interview with the Zhabin family that we began to hear assessments of the Orenburg "Mormons" more nuanced and complex than the initial reports of straightforward criminality. These reports meshed with the general picture the Zhabins painted of themselves and added more details. Several taxi drivers and academics said the "Mormons" are hardworking, close-knit, and wealthy. They take care of one another's needs and resolve their own problems. Several informants observed that the family has had some problems keeping their youth in line with their health code and keeping them from acting like tough-guy outlaws, but these problems have generally been resolved within the family. Several times we heard comments along the lines of "some people say the Mormons are criminals, but I say if everyone in Russia were like them, the country would be much better off."

Crime and wealth are seen as virtually inseparable in most contemporary Russians' minds. In colloquial Russian speech, an *ataman* means a robber or gang leader as well as a Cossack leader. The word *businessman* (*biznesman*) in Russian also has a pejorative connotation. The Russian term *Mafia* is often loosely applied to anyone who is wealthy. (Like *Mormon*, *Mafia* is also an example of a word being reapplied from its original context to refer to a somewhat similar but historically unconnected group in another country.) While the Orenburg "Mormons" are sometimes called *Mafia*, the term is usually used to refer to the "New Russians" or New Rich of the post-Soviet era. Our most knowledgeable informants made a distinction between Orenburg "Mormons," New Russians, and organized crime. They suggested that most New Russians have become much more entangled with criminal organizations than the "Mormons," who form only a small minority of the wealthy people in Orenburg. We do not know to what degree the Zhabins are actually honest or dishonest in business. Such distinctions are difficult to make in the constantly shifting, murky waters of the twenty-first-century Russian economy. The Orenburg "Mormons" probably operate within the complex system of Russian law when possible but work around laws they consider unnecessary or foolish. They have established for themselves what could be called a tacitly sovereign autonomous zone, where they operate according to their own moral, but clannish, set of imperatives.⁶⁰

Often an informant emphasized that there is no other group in Orenburg quite like the "Mormons." Many Orenburg residents felt the "Mormons" were a fascinating and peculiar social phenomenon. However, the further away one gets from intimate interaction with the Orenburg "Mormons" or the more one is suspicious of their success, the easier it is to misplace them into other ready-made social categories. Some conflate them with the *Mafia*, others conflate them with Latter-day Saints. A recent book entitled *Religious Organizations of Tol'iatti* by Russian scholar of religion Vadim Iakunin makes this mistake in a chapter on Mormons. He gives a brief overview of Latter-day Saint history and doctrine and then discusses the capitalist undertakings of the Orenburg "Mormons" without realizing he has shifted from Latter-day Saints to Russian "Mormons":

Essentially everywhere Mormons operate they are very active in attempting to become integrated in the life of the country. Thus, in Orenburg, Mormons are acquiring stocks in enterprises producing natural gas, entire buildings in new housing developments, and infrastructure. They also position their people in local governmental agencies. The work of Mormons in Russia is carried out in strictest secrecy. Thus, virtually nothing is known of their real goals and kinds of activity in our country.⁶¹

We found no evidence that the Zhabins were ever anything but Russian Orthodox or that they ever engaged in unusual sexual arrangements, although they have a tight family clan organization that might be called unusual in contemporary Russia. It is possible that among their ancestors there may have been people involved with, or confused for, members of religious dissident “Mormon” groups known to have historically been prominent in the Orenburg area.⁶² More likely, as Alexandr believes, the Zhabins are called “Mormon” today because of the second, more recent, popular perception of Latter-day Saints as hardworking, self-supporting, tight-knit, disciplined, wealthy builders of a heaven on earth. Common reports in Orenburg seem to indicate enough familiarity with late twentieth-century Latter-day Saint stereotypes to draw this parallel and apply the nickname *Mormon* to the Zhabins.

Mekhzavod. Another quite unusual variant usage of the term “Mormon” can be found in the Mekhzavod (Fur Factory) suburb on the outskirts of Samara. This village of small, but well-kept, private homes is a remarkable haven for religious diversity. Russian Orthodox, Old Believers, Molokans, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and almost certainly others live side by side in close proximity. Such concentrated diversity is unusual for Russia. Paul Steeves, an American scholar of Russian religious history, suggests that the whole Samara region experienced a period in its history somewhat like western New York did in the early 1800s. Hence it still displays features of having once been a “burnt over district” that produced and attracted innovative and diverse forms of religious enthusiasm.⁶³ Mekhzavod is an extreme example of this tendency within the Samara region.

Many Samarans and local Latter-day Saint missionaries unfamiliar with the extent of Mekhzavod’s diversity have claimed that many secretive “Mormons” live in the area. When asking Mekhzavod residents about the location of possible members of nontraditional faiths, we referred to Molokans, Old Believers, Evangelicals, Mormons, and Pentecostals each time so *Mormons* would not stand out. The large majority of the approximately three dozen people we spoke with ignored the other suggestions and replied that “Mormons” do live in the village. Many pointed out houses down the street or around the corner where they thought “Mormons” lived. The occupants of the indicated “Mormon” houses clearly identified themselves as Russian Orthodox, Old Believers, Molokans, Evangelicals, or Pentecostals but never claimed to be “Mormons.” Often people would say something like “I am not a Mormon, but the person in that house around the corner is.” At the indicated house, we only heard again, “I am not a Mormon, but the person in that house down the street might be.” Yurii, the man most often referred to as a “Mormon,” was actually

the local pastor of an American-style nondenominational Evangelical Christian group. Yurii was out of town, but we met his family and observed visiting pastors from America. We also spoke with a local member of Yurii's church. The vehicle and head of this follower were adorned with such unmistakably American pop-Evangelical paraphernalia as an English-language "Go with Jesus, He's #1" bumper sticker and a "You Are Always a Winner with Jesus Christ" baseball hat. This group was clearly neither indigenous Samara "Mormons" nor Latter-day Saints.

We could discern no special reason for people to claim to be of another nontraditional faith if they really were "Mormons." All would have had comparable reasons under the Soviets to be wary of disclosing their affiliation. Apparently, the villagers used the term *Mormon* to identify any unknown "religious other." For them, *Mormon* had become a generic term, now largely nonpejorative but implying someone who is devout, possibly clandestine, peculiar, and "not one of us."

However, the fact that Mekhzavod residents were very familiar with the term *Mormon* while others in the Samara region were much less so did seem to indicate that some group called "Mormons" may have once lived there. In surrounding villages, we were mostly told, "There are no Mormons here." One woman in nearby Starosemeikino said she knew a "Mormon" but took us to a Baptist's house. Another said, "Go to Mekhzavod; there are lots of Mormons there." Despite our success in speaking with many people from formerly suppressed religious groups, one Mekhzavod man who owned a building rumored to be a Mormon church (fig. 4) (which he denied) told us he felt sorry for us. He explained our task would be very difficult since "Mormons" would be reluctant to tell us about their religion because they had been oppressed in the past. Another resident explained, "There are both Molokans and Mormons here, but the Mormons will not let you come to their meetings." This secrecy would be expected of Samara "Mormons" or Khlysty.

Our efforts to meet Mekhzavod's "Mormons" proved fruitless, but the recollections of Dan Jones, one of the first Latter-day Saint missionaries in Samara, suggest we may have missed something. Elder Jones's missionary journal entries reflect his focus on proselytizing at the time and mention little more than "we then went to visit the 'Mormons.' We talked with them about the Church for a while and then decided it wasn't worth it to go out there."⁶⁴

Jones remembers that in May 1993—when Russian curiosity about things Western and religious was still high—a small group of people from Mekhzavod called "Mormons" sought him out to discuss religious matters. Jones recalls, "They did call themselves 'Mormony' but I'm not really clear as to whether they originally called themselves that or if they adopted the name that others gave them."⁶⁵ Only after listening to the missionaries'



FIG. 4. A view of Mekhzavod, showing a building rumored to be a “Mormon” meetinghouse.

message did the “Mormons” reluctantly explain that their religion had a leader or chief, was strictly off-limits to outsiders, and did not proselytize. Even members’ own children were not told of their faith until they were initiated into its absolutely secret practices. Some of their group opposed the delegation’s decision to contact the Latter-day Saint missionaries. In meeting with Jones, these Mekhzavod “Mormon” delegates showed little interest in the Book of Mormon or Joseph Smith but were keen to know about secret Latter-day Saint temple ceremonies. Of course, Jones could not give them the details that they wanted, and they left, reluctant to make any further appointments. Eventually, Jones stopped visiting them. His is the only known, detailed, firsthand account of meeting known “Mormons” in Mekhzavod, people who were probably descendants of Samara “Mormons.”⁶⁶ Jones received the impression that the delegation may have been hoping to fill in gaps in their understanding of their own religion or to find information that may have been lost over the years. However, they quickly concluded that the Latter-day Saint missionaries were not adherents of the same faith and decided to have nothing more to do with them. Apparently, from the point of view of these Mekhzavod “Mormons,” Latter-day Saint missionaries represented the “other Mormons.”

Conclusions

These three case studies show a variety of ways the term *Mormon* is used in contemporary Russia. Local understandings of grave markers in a cemetery near Mekhzavod illuminate several broader issues of representation and misinterpretation concerning Russia's indigenous "Mormons." In this cemetery, along with the predominant Russian Orthodox crosses and abstract geometric Soviet-era markers are found many, perhaps more than a hundred, triangle-capped crosses—the "Mormon crosses" mentioned in Elder Scott's report (see fig. 1). Indeed, the surnames on these crosses can be found among the Mekhzavod residents identified as "Mormons." However, two sextons and the cemetery director, the latter a practicing Old Believer, all confirmed that a peaked-roof cross indicates an Old Believer grave. The Rogozhskoe Cemetery in Moscow at the spiritual center of Old Believerdom contains similar triangular crosses almost exclusively (fig. 5). A priest on duty confirmed that peaked crosses are distinctively Old Believer but ascribed no special significance or function to the design except perhaps "to keep water off."

It is not clear how Old Believer crosses in Mekhzavod came to be called "Mormon crosses." Perhaps the local penchant for identifying as "Mormon" anything religiously unfamiliar is responsible. Whatever the reason,



FIG. 5. Peaked-roof crosses in Moscow's Rogozhskoe Cemetery. These crosses indicate graves of Old Believers, not Latter-day Saints.

Latter-day Saint missionaries have interpreted these crosses as a sign of the existence of long-lost Mormon cousins in Russia. It may seem ironic that Latter-day Saints, who do not use crosses, have interpreted a peculiar cross as a sign of Mormonness. However, the “Mormon cross” looks less crosslike than traditional crosses and could be interpreted as the syncretic accommodation of a religious group trying to survive underground. Or the story of Mekhzavods’ “Mormon crosses” could also be interpreted as a symbolic reminder of the ease with which artifacts’ historical significance can be misinterpreted.

Tania Rands Lyons suggests that the Latter-day Saints’ long curiosity about Russia, speculation about the whereabouts of the lost ten tribes, and the legacy of the Cold War have made Russia into a vast screen onto which some Latter-day Saint imaginations project wondrous speculations.⁶⁷ Such suggestions may be true. However, it was not any naive gullibility or theological agendas on the part of American missionaries that originated the widespread Latter-day Saint folk belief in secret Russian Latter-day Saints. Such a belief came from a quite reasonable process of deduction. When confronted with solid evidence and firsthand reports provided by native Russians of people who do not smoke or drink, who worship separately or in secret, who might have additional scripture, and who are called “Mormons” by their neighbors, the simplest explanation would seem to be that “long-lost religious cousins” had been found. The problem arises not from gullibility but from missionaries’ focused range of language proficiency and lack of time to explore esoteric cultural background knowledge. Even non-Latter-day Saint informed expert observers such as Vadim Iakunin, John Noble, and scholars of Russian religion have assumed Russian “Mormons” and Latter-day Saints are the same or are historically related.

The Russian “Mormon” phenomenon ultimately has less to do with Latter-day Saints in the past or present than it has to do with the way images and information about minority religions circulate in local settings in a modernizing world. Popular media reports in Russia, fictional misrepresentation by Doyle, clumsily subtitled movies, and Orthodox and Communist interference with communication in general and discourse about religion in particular—all these have provided local Russian communities with the opportunity to work out peculiar shared understandings of the term *Mormon* that meet their particular needs. For most Russians, *Mormon* has meant little or nothing—it is an insignificant linguistic resource. For others, it has meant something vaguely distant, religiously subversive, and negative. For others in special historical and geographic circumstances, *Mormon* has been a nickname sometimes interchangeable with others referring to particular groups such as Latter-day Saints, Khlysty, Old Believers, and teetotaling Cossacks. Usage has varied from place to place and time to time.

As a more unfettered media culture emerges in Russia, the complexity of the geographically diverse usage of the term *Mormon* will likely undergo further adaptation. Local folk usages may work their way into print and television, which will in turn influence how local usages develop. Vadim Iakunin's mistake of assuming the Orenburg "Mormons" and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are one and the same gives a new nuance to the term *Mormon* that may or may not be picked up elsewhere in Russia.

Often when Russians use *Mormon*, they are not referring to Latter-day Saints but may not realize this. These findings shed new light on the provocative statements made several years ago by the then politically emergent General Alexandr Lebed, who called Mormons "slime" and "mold."⁶⁸ These statements raised concern in the American media about Russia's fragile religious freedoms. But to whom did the general intend to refer and how clear in his mind were the distinctions between the various kinds of "Mormons" in his own country?

Summary

This study presents a picture of the shifting semantic domain of the term *Mormon* in contemporary Russia. Perhaps the simplest way of describing what we have found is that some Russians, especially those in Mekhzaod, are using the term *Mormon* in a way somewhat similar, but more focused and varied, to the way Latter-day Saints once used the term *Gentile*. If the tenacious hold of Columbus's misapplication of the word *Indian* can serve as a guide, *Mormon* may well retain multiple meanings in Russia indefinitely.

However, the inherent limitations of this project should qualify any of its conclusions. There are 140 million people, eleven time zones, and thousands of isolated villages in Russia. Very likely there are meanings and uses of the term *Mormon* in Russia still unknown to westerners.⁶⁹ Future research may yet reveal actual hand-transcribed copies of the Book of Mormon and people, in addition to the Lindelofs, who display clear historical and doctrinal connections to Latter-day Saints. However, until that happens, the borrowing of a term inspired by popular stereotypes of marginal religious groups rather than the clandestine expansion and rediscovery of a lost branch of Latter-day Saint religion best explains the ongoing use of the term *Mormon* to refer to Russians who are not members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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1. Gary Browning, *Russia and the Restored Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 344–45.

2. Such stories circulate in many areas where Latter-day Saint missionaries are active. For some examples from Japan, see “The Lost Tribes of Israel” web page by folklorist D. Glenn Ostlund, http://www.php.indiana.edu/~dostlund/lost_tribes.htm.

3. On Latter-day Saint missionary folklore, see William A. Wilson, “On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries,” Utah State University Faculty Honor Lecture (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1981); and “LDS-World-Gems, LDS Internet Hoaxes and Mormon Urban Legends,” <http://www.ldsworld.com/gems/ul/>. For a more appreciative look at Latter-day Saint missionary folklore, see D. Glenn Ostlund, “Mormon Missionary Folklore—Virtual Web Archive,” <http://php.indiana.edu/~dostlund/mission.htm>.

4. S. V. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia kniga dlia sviashchenno-tserkovno-sluzhitelei* (Schisms, heresies, sects that go against Christian and Orthodox teachings) (1913; reprint, Moskva: Moskovskii Patriarchat, 1993), 2:1671. Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich, *Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov* (A survey of Russian sects and their beliefs) (Khar'kov: Tipografia gubernskogo pravleniia, 1910), 597–600, also concludes the Samara “Mormons” had nothing to do with Joseph Smith.

5. John Noble and Glenn D. Everett, *I Found God in Soviet Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1959), 126, 141.

6. Tania Rands Lyon, “Soviet Mormons: A Preliminary Report,” February 1999, 12, manuscript in possession of the authors.

7. James Wesley Scott, “Nineteenth Kilometer' Early Converts in Russia: Mission Historical Report,” Russia Samara Mission, June 1998, in possession of Gary Browning.

8. Sheridan T. Gashler, interview by authors, May 16, 2000.

9. Stetson University scholar of Russian Religion Paul Steeves, telephone interview by Eric A. Eliason, July 25, 2000.

10. R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 16–23.

11. Britsch, *Unto the Islands*, 349–54.

12. R. Lanier Britsch, *From the East: The History of the Latter-day Saints in Asia, 1851–1996* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 76, 84–91.

13. Special thanks is due Van Gessel for guiding us to scholarship on the Kakure Kirishitan of Japan. A useful book on this topic was Stephen Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan of Japan: A Study of Their Development, Beliefs and Rituals to the Present Day* (Richmond, Surrey, United Kingdom: The Japan Library, 1998). Japan's Shusaku Endo, regarded by many to be one of the world's greatest fiction writers, wrote several stories specifically about Japanese hidden Christians—for example see “Mothers,” in Van C. Gessel, trans., *Stained Glass Elegies* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1985); and “The Final Martyrs,” in Van C. Gessel, trans., *The Final Martyrs* (New York: New Directions, 1993).

14. Christal Whelan, trans., *The Beginnings of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's Hidden Christians* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

15. Judith Neulander, “The Crypto-Jewish Canon: Choosing to be ‘Chosen’ in Millennial Tradition,” *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 18, nos. 1–2 (1996): 19–58. This

issue of the *Review* is dedicated to the question of crypto-Jews and contains articles and letters expressing many facets of this topic.

16. Nuelander, "Crypto-Jewish Canon," 22.

17. Nuelander, "Crypto-Jewish Canon," 23.

18. Browning, *Russia and the Restored Gospel*, 4–5.

19. A. H. Lund, "Introduction of the Gospel into Russia, St. Petersburg, Russia, June 18, 1895," *Millennial Star* 57, no. 26 (June 27, 1895): 413–15.

20. Browning, *Russia and the Restored Gospel*, 10–12.

21. One slim possibility is that the much-wandering Elder Mischa Markow, who preached in most of Eastern Europe and even one small part of Russia at the turn of the nineteenth century, may have converted some in Russia. See Richard O. Cowan, "Mischa Markow: Mormon Missionary to the Balkans," *BYU Studies* 11, no. 1 (1970): 92–98; and William H. Kehr, "Missionary to the Balkans, Mischa Markow," *Ensign* 10, no. 6 (June 1980): 29–32.

22. Gérard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau, *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995), 83–89.

23. *Deseret News 1999–2000 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1998), 272; "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Information," an informational brochure published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Europe (no other publication information available), 1997, 7.

24. In Samara today, Latter-day Saint missionaries report disproportionate interest among Armenian immigrants. However, this seems to be unrelated to the fact that Russian scholar of religion S. V. Bulgakov mentions "Caucasus Mormons" in his still-consulted *Nastol'naiia*, 2:1636.

25. *1999–2000 Church Almanac*, 377.

26. Olga Kovarova Campora, *Saint behind Enemy Lines* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 60–63.

27. Thomas F. Rogers, *A Call to Russia: Glimpses of Missionary Life* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1999), 153.

28. Latter-day Saint educator and founding BYU president Karl G. Maeser was first attracted to the Church by "reading between the lines" of an anti-Mormon tract. See *Deseret News 1997–98 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1996), 329.

29. "Forty-Year Wait for Baptism," in Hartman and Connie Rector, eds., *No More Strangers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 82–89.

30. For numerous stories of such conversions, see E. Dale LeBaron, *All Are Alike unto God* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990); and Alexander B. Morrison, *The Dawning of a Brighter Day: The Church in Black Africa* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990). While explaining the possibility of Latter-day Saint ideas in pre-1990 Russia to a professor of religion at Omsk State University, we learned that he had never heard of indigenous "Mormons" in particular but that the phenomenon of the individual prophet/leader was common in relatively religiously diverse and active Siberia. He said he would not be surprised at all if Latter-day Saint ideas ended up in the Siberian religious mix. It seemed provocative to us that many of the thousands of German immigrants to Siberia came from regions of high missionary activity and success. Even though most had come from before the arrival of Mormonism in Germany, some came after. No official Russian translation of the Book of Mormon or other Church materials appeared until 1980, but materials in German had been available since 1852.

31. Scholars in the Brigham Young University Germanic and Slavic Languages Department had been aware of the Bulgakov suggestion that the Samara "Mormons"

were unrelated to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but Bulgakov did not suggest that all “Mormons” in Russia were unrelated to the in Church in America. Bulgakov, *Nastol’naia*, 2:1636. We also considered the possibility that *Mormon* was by sheer coincidence a native Russian word but discounted this hypothesis due to lack of evidence.

32. Michael S. Flier, “Court Ceremony in an Age of Reform: Patriarch Nikon and the Palm Sunday Ritual,” in *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Samuel H. Baron and Nancy Shields Kollman (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 73–95.

33. Roy R. Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 4; F. E. Mel’nikov, *Kratkaia istoriia drevlepravoslavnoi staroobriadcheskoi tserkvi* (A brief history of the ancient Russian Old Believer Church) (Barnaul: BGPU, 1999), 22–34.

34. Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia*, 127–29.

35. One estimate puts the number of Old Believers in contemporary Russia at six-tens million. Lyudmila Vorontsova and Sergei Filatov, “Paradoxes of the Old Believer Movement,” *Religion, State, and Society* 28 (March 2000): 53.

36. Recent scholarship suggests that *Khlysty* is better not capitalized since those referred to by the term are not one group but many unrelated ones. However, we kept the traditional capitalization used in most of the sources we consulted. Eugene Clay, email to Eric Eliason, August 16, 2000. See also Eugene Clay, “The Theological Origins of the Christ-Faith [Khristovshchina],” *Russian History* 15 (spring 1988): 21–41; and Eugene Clay, “Literary Images of the Russian ‘Flagellants,’ 1861–1905,” *Russian History* 24 (winter 1997): 425–39.

37. On the Skopsti who emerged from the Khlysty, see Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 26.

38. Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia*, 96, 107–14, 128, 161, 163.

39. The Skopsti, for example, saw the Bible as “but a dead letter.” Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom*, 19.

40. This sketch of the history of non-Orthodox Russian religious groups benefited from consulting the following works: Baron and Kollman, *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia*; Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson, eds., *Russian Religious Thought* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); Jerry G. Pankhurst, “Religious Culture,” in *Russian Culture at the Crossroads: Paradoxes of Postcommunist Consciousness*, ed. Dmitri N. Shalin (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 127–56; A. I. Klibanov, *History of Religious Secularism in Russia (1860s–1917)* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982).

41. V. Skvortsov, *Deianiia 3-go Vserosiiskago Missionerskago S’ezda v Kazani* (Proceedings of the third all-Russia missionary congress in Kazan) (Kiev: I. I. Chokolov, 1897), 115.

42. Victor Vladimirovich Kovalenko, interview by authors, May 12, 2000.

43. See Thomas G. Alexander, *Utah, the Right Place: The Official Centennial History* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1995), 175–78, 186–202.

44. For an overview of anti-Mormon fiction of the time, see Leonard J. Arrington and Jon Haupt, “Intolerable Zion: The Image of Mormonism in Nineteenth Century American Literature,” *Western Humanities Review* 22 (summer 1968): 243–60; and Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 97–120.

45. In fact, Russian academics twice lectured us on how Western literary scholars do not fully appreciate the genius of Doyle and why we should include him in our literary canon where he belongs.

46. Browning, *Russia and the Restored Gospel*, 300.

47. Kovalenko, interview; Iakov Vladimirovich Riabinovich, interview by authors, May 13, 2000.

48. While actual documentation of this rhetorical move has been hard to come by, a similar invocation of the United States as example happened as Old Believers pushed for legal bans on tobacco after the passage of the Act of Toleration in 1905. "If Michigan, Texas and Illinois can ban smoking, why can't we in Russia," argued one writer. S. Bv., "Vragi chelovechestva" (Enemies of humanity), *Zlatostrui*, no. 2 (1910): 33, as quoted in Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia*, 110.

49. The oral tradition among Filippov's followers suggests that he began his ministry in 1645 but available historical documents suggest a later date. Eugene Clay, "Repression of Matriarchy? The Cult of the Kostroma Peasant Danilo Filippovich, 1650–1850," manuscript in author's possession.

50. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia*, 2:1636.

51. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia*, 2:1671. Butkevich, *Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov*, 597–600, also concludes the Samara "Mormons" had nothing to do with Joseph Smith.

52. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia*, 2:1636.

53. Latter-day Saints, Khlysty, and Samara "Mormons" are just a few of many Christian groups to have engaged in religiously motivated sexual arrangements other than monogamous marriage. See, for example, Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 4th ed. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1993); and *The Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* (New York: Garland Press, 1986).

Though nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints are arguably the best-known polygamists, plural marriage inspired by biblical patriarchs is not unique to Latter-day Saints. A small movement among Evangelical Protestants claims the practice of polygamy is still valid today. See "Christian Polygamy: Marriage Authorized by God," <http://www.polygamy.net/> and "The Truth Bearer," <http://www.thestandardbearer.com/Acts2414/Exodus2110/TruthBearer/>.

54. Clay, "Literary Images," 425–39.

55. Eric A. Eliason, "Curious Gentiles and Representational Authority in the City of the Saints," *Religion and American Culture* 11 (summer 2001): forthcoming; Daniel Sylvester Tuttle, *Missionary to the Mountain West: Reminiscences of Episcopal Bishop Daniel S. Tuttle, 1866–1886* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 307–15; B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 84–126.

56. The first official translation of the Book of Mormon into Russian appeared in 1980.

57. V. D. Avdeev, "Bibliia I Kristovoveri," in *Vremia i Bibliia*, comp. V. M. Riabikov (Cheliabinsk, Iuzh.-Ural'sk, 1978), 91.

58. The Khlysty schismatics, the Skoptsi, were aware of, and approved of, the comparison of their own movement to that of the Shakers, who were also known for their dualism, renunciation of sex, ecstatic forms of worship, following of modern prophets, and reputation for sober industriousness. N. M. Iadrintsev, *Russkaia obshchina v tiur'me I ssylke* (St. Petersburg: Morigerovskii, 1872), 257, as quoted in Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom*, 20.

59. Kovalenko, interview.

60. Eric Eliason's idea of a tacitly sovereign autonomous zone emerged as a reaction to radical aesthetic philosopher Hakim Bey's notion of a "temporary autonomous zone." While Bey describes his notion as an ultimately indescribable area of creative chaos apart from everyday rules and authority, the tacitly sovereign autonomous zone is an island or nexus of order and authority within a larger context of chaos and competing authority claims. Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z., the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991).

61. Vadim Iakunin, *Religioznye organizatsie v Tol'iatti* (Religious organizations of Tol'iatti) (Tol'iatti: Sovremennik, 1999), 139; translation by Gary Browning.

62. Browning, *Russia and the Restored Gospel*, 344–45.

63. Paul Steeves, telephone interview by Eric A. Eliason, July 25, 2000.

64. Daniel Jones, missionary journal, June 24, 1993.

65. Daniel Jones, email to Gary Browning, June 9, 2000.

66. Daniel Jones, email to Gary Browning, June 13, 2000.

67. Tania Rands Lyon, "What's in a Name? The Discovery of 'Mormon' Communities in Russia," 3, manuscript in authors' possession.

68. "Lebed Vows to Cleanse Russia of Religious Filth," combined Associated Press and Reuters, Deseret News Archive, June 27, 1996, http://www.desnews.com/cgi-bin/libstory_state?dn96&9606270043.

69. Almost immediately upon returning, Gary received an email from a Latter-day Saint missionary at the Novosibirsk office mentioning an "old Mormon" village in Altai province that we had not found, let alone heard of, despite spending a week there. Elder Beagly, Russian Novosibirsk Mission office, email to Gary Browning, May 12, 2000.