

Final Report Guidelines

TITLE VIII RESEARCH SCHOLAR PROGRAM

TITLE VIII COMBINED RESEARCH AND LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAM

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Troublesome Women: Policing Faith and Transforming Russian Elites after Napoleon

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Research Abstract: My book project seeks to examine the ideas and life stories of a generation of religious noblewomen who influenced Petersburg society in the Napoleonic period and to examine how and why Nicholas I--together with several high-ranking Orthodox Church officials--made concerted efforts over decades to purge these women and their influence from Russian elite society. During this time Nicholas's government used surveillance, propaganda, and rumors, helped by the strategic testimonies and pressures asserted by individual clergymen, to reshape the Russian aristocracy, cleansing it of all but a very narrow official line on religious doctrine and imbuing it with Victorian values

Research Goals: The research I completed in St. Petersburg on my Title VIII American Councils fellowship very nearly completes the necessary archival work for my monograph in progress, which I hope to begin writing no later than January 2021 for completion the following year. Previous research on this project was conducted over several summers on smaller institutional grants, and I expect that the last few necessary documents will be obtained similarly, having identified what is needed on this recent trip. Although I had hoped that this 6-month trip would complete the necessary archival work for this project, it is in fact good news that there is

still a small amount I will need to obtain in other archives: it is because this trip was many times more fruitful than I ever imagined possible, and because I brought home so much more material than I expected to be able to do, that I will be broadening my project's significance and have identified a number of important figures that will require a small amount of additional research that I hope to conduct through correspondence and with the help of research assistants.

Specifically, I identified through my research in St. Petersburg the importance to the phenomena under study of Archimandrite Fotii of the Yu'rev Monastery near Novgorod and his benefactress, Anna Alekseevna Orlova-Chesmenskaia. Orlova's papers are held in RGADA in Moscow and her home in Novgorod province is currently under reconstruction. While much of Fotii's key papers were in RGIA and I now have copies of them, I hope that I may be able to find out more through contact with the still-active Yu'rev Monastery.

Research Activities: In the six months I was in St. Petersburg, I worked primarily in the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), with additional work in the Institute of Russian Literature, also known as Pushkin House (PD). The most important thing to understand about working in Russian archives is that, unlike almost any other archive in any other country today, direct photography of documents is strictly forbidden, with constant surveillance to ensure compliance.

Russian archives operate under completely different principles than any other archive I know of: rather than facilitating research, the goal of Russian state archives is to control information.

Therefore, the job of researchers is not only to imaginatively search for what sources have been catalogued and read them for what they might say, directly and indirectly, but also to guess what might actually exist -- since finding aids are incomplete, often unreadable, ridden with errors, and badly organized or completely unorganized, and with only the tip of the iceberg entered into

the archives' digital catalogues. Researchers must then go through an incomprehensible series of bureaucratic hurdles to obtain access to the documents themselves, starting with the strict limits of no more than 5 cases ordered per day and retaining no more than 20 cases at any one time; these restrictions are intended to slow research down, and while they certainly do that, they also hinder a researcher's ability to compare documents.

A significant portion of RGIA's vast holdings have been microfilmed or even scanned, but where in other archives that process expands access, in Russian archives the result is the opposite: microfilmed documents can only be viewed in the archive reading room on very old machines with dim bulbs, and can only be reproduced by photographing the microfilm reader's bad screen, compounding its poor quality in the resulting photograph. Similarly, scanned materials can only be viewed on reading room computers and can only be reproduced by photographing the computer screen, which causes distortions that can render the documents unreadable.

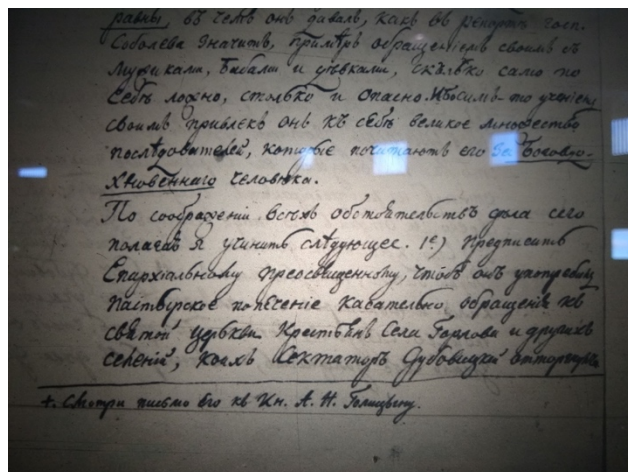


Image 2 Photo taken off a microfilm reader screen, with reflections from reading room windows.

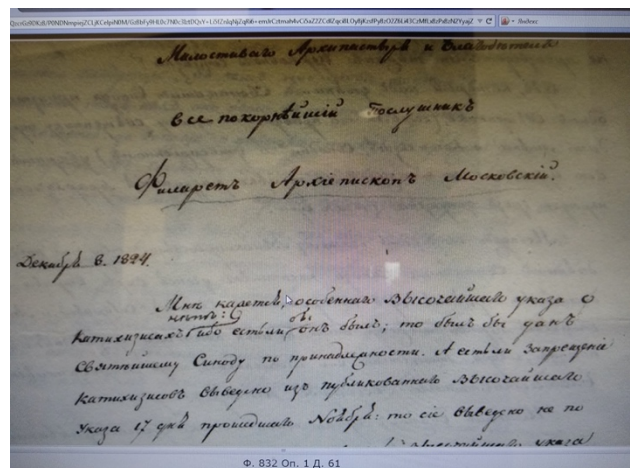


Image 1 Photo taken from desktop PC screen of scanned document, with screen distortion.

Hard-copy originals of documents can be viewed in the general reading room only if they are bound. Researchers can request the right to photograph such documents only in a special room by appointment, paying c. \$.75 per page up to 100 pages, after which the price doubles. The process of obtaining approval for such photography takes a minimum of three days and can be refused at any time for any reason.

Unbound hard copies can be viewed only in the “small” reading room, which has only seven seats. The line to get a seat here can sometimes take all day to get through. Photography of unbound items is forbidden, but researchers can request a scan carried out by archive staff. These scans cost \$1.50 per page up to 100 pages, double thereafter, require 3 days to process approval, and if permitted, 30 days to receive the scans.

Under these conditions, efficient modern research is frankly impossible, yet researchers of Russia must meet the same standards of publishing for hiring and promotion as those who can obtain thousands of documents over a weekend with little to no cash outlay. Without question and without exaggeration, the ludicrous hurdles and expenses of historical research in Russia are a serious detriment to the field, affecting Russian scholars at least as much as foreign scholars, and therefore also a serious obstacle to evidence-based policymaking.



Image 3 The author at work on bound hardcopy documents in the main reading room at RGIA.

Despite these hurdles, over the course of my six months in St. Petersburg I was able to review approximately 350 case files (*dela*) from more than 60 different funds (*fondy*) from the two archives I focused on. In addition to hundreds of pages of my own notes, I have 134

gigabytes of photographs and scans, encompassing 314 different files. In addition to the personal papers of Metropolitan Filaret, including his correspondence with Metropolitan Serafim, with Archimandrite Fotii, and other important figures, and a significant amount of Synod discussions relating to sectarians and other relevant matters, I also obtained scans of four volumes of notes, letters, and reports by Archimandrite Fotii on sectarians, and additional correspondence, speeches, and notes by what I have identified as institutional figures who played significant roles in the process of transformation at the heart of my project: A. N. Golitsyn (a founder of the Russian Bible Society but later leader of the crusade against Tatarinova through the Ministry of People's Enlightenment), K. S. Serbinovich (a prominent censor), S. D. Nechaev (Ober-Prokurator of the Holy Synod 1833-36), D. P. Runich (initially a Mason and member of the Russian Bible Society, later a key figure in targeting these activities through the Ministry of People's Enlightenment), and D. N. Sberbeev (a historian and diplomat closely linked to these other figures, whose extensive papers are held in Pushkin House). In addition to Synod files (from that particularly enormous and badly organized fond, searchable only through thousands of pages of hand-written and badly xeroxed descriptions), I also obtained important documentation on the founding and membership as well as the reception of the Russian bible societies, and many files relating to other contemporary sects and to the simultaneous persecution of Lutheran pastors, especially the several cases against German pastor Johannes Gosner, which involved a follower of Tatarinova and former Bible Society member, V. M. Popov. In addition to the thousand-page Third Section investigation of Tatarinova that I had already obtained in Moscow, Petersburg's RGIA presented me with a 13-part set of her papers that were seized upon her arrest, including a large and crucial correspondence with her brother, who was also in her sect, as well as religious books she owned with her notes and marginalia. This is in addition to an 8-part

file on the investigation of her sect conducted by the Holy Synod, on top of other files of separate investigations into her followers, especially V. M. Popov and Martyn Piletskii-Urbanovich. Finally, to my surprise I found tremendous interest in these 1820s-1830s investigations of sectarians on the part of the Ministry of Finance, revealing yet another angle to the state's concerns. Finally, in Pushkin House I was also able to identify and order copies of some of the most important correspondence from the vast archive of the Sturdza family, which includes letters to and from Aleksandra Sturdza and other figures in my study, as well as a few key letters relating to Metropolitan Filaret and Archimandrite Fotii.

Important Research Findings: My monograph will tell a story of a Russian emperor, Nicholas, his wife, Alexandra, and the mad monk who fatefully persuaded them to carry out a crusade against their own servitor class. While this story may sound familiar, it in fact has nothing to do with Russia's last tsar and Rasputin. The emperor in this case was Nicholas I (whose wife coincidentally took an Orthodox name upon her conversation that would also later be taken by her great-grandson's wife) and the mad monk in question was Fotii, archimandrite of the Yur'ev monastery near Novgorod.

My Title VIII-funded research will allow me to significantly broaden the scope and significance of my project, which is tentatively retitled as *Holy Men and Troublesome Women: The Transformation of Russia after Napoleon*. I argued in my project proposal that by studying the decades-long persecution of women religious mystics who had risen to prominence under Alexander I only to be effectively erased from society by his brother and successor, Nicholas I, I would be able to explain the institutional connections between various Church officials and Nicholas' bureaucracy that led them to see a small group of conservative women as a threat to

Russia's stability and to articulate, in contrast, their own brand of religious and national conservatism, which they imposed partly through the well-known slogan, "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality," propagated by Nicholas's Minister of Education, Sergei Uvarov.

To my surprise, I found that Archimandrite Fotii explicitly spelled out what I had expected to be only implied: that women, as women, were inherently a dangerous influence on the minds of men and that even conservative religious women were, in his words, as "revolutionary" as Jacobins because of their belief in having a direct connection with God. Fotii wrote this explanation to Emperor Alexander I himself in 1821, in a forceful letter clearly intended, beneath its framing of subservience, to tell the tsar he was steering Russia in the wrong direction. While Alexander did from this point on withdraw his support from the religious explorations that had previously marked his reign, and while he also consented to a crackdown on the Russian bible societies (an international charitable organization that translated, printed, and distributed bibles to spread the word of God), it is clear from other documentation that Fotii was not satisfied, and that other key servitors – most significantly, Alexander Golitsyn, at times a Minister of Enlightenment and initially a leader of the St. Petersburg branch of the Russian Bible Society, and Moscow Metropolitan Filaret, then just beginning what would be a long rise to significance as a religious advisor to Nicholas I and Russian moral leader – worked to persuade Nicholas I of the danger they perceived Russia to be in under Alexander. An additional layer of irony and intrigue in this story is that Fotii's zealous activism – and his reconstruction of his monastery – was funded by a patroness, another troublesome woman but on the opposite end of the fight over the nature of Russian conservatism: Anna Alekseevna Orlova-Chesmenskaia, the daughter of Catherine the Great's favorite Aleksei Orlov.

When Alexander died under mysterious circumstances and amid persistent rumors that he did not die but in fact became (under persuasion?) a monk, the succession to the throne was confused by the liberal Decembrist Revolt, followed by Nicholas's accession and the well-known crackdown on secret societies. Whereas I initially believed that the persecution of Ekaterina Tatarinova's mystical circle and the simultaneous discrediting and decline of influence of other religious women of her generation represented an overreach of the tsar and his new secret police's overall crackdown on non-governmental organizations, I now believe I will be able to document that Fotii's initial concern about Tatarinova and other sectarians from 1820-21 was in fact the starting point of a turn among the elite servitor class against Alexander and a preparation for Nicholas's reign—almost a Brezhnev-style “soft coup” that transitioned Imperial Russia from the eighteenth-century “era of palace revolutions” that had brought Alexander I to the throne over the murdered body of his father to the stable--perhaps fatally unadaptive and stubborn--succession of conservative pillars of Orthodox morality that began with Nicholas I. Rather than scaring elites into a more zealous search for revolution around every corner, I will argue that the Decembrist Revolt merely confirmed beliefs the new-style bureaucracy (in state and Church) already held and justified their much broader transformation in thinking about the purpose and ideology of the Russian state.

Policy Implications and Recommendations: My proposal for this Title VIII grant argued that US policymakers need to take seriously the role of the Church as a set of intellectually and politically active and fractious actors intertwined with the state and its goals. As we have seen the Russian Orthodox Church take an increasingly active role since at least 2012, an increasingly religious justification from Putin behind recent actions such as the policy turn against

homosexuality, and the focus of anti-state protestors like Pussy Riot aimed not just on Putin's personal power (as US observers tend to over-emphasize) but also on the influence of Church, oligarchs, and the international mafia. I am far from the only scholar to point out that Putin frequently looks specifically to historical models, precedents, rhetoric, and strategies to support and justify his actions. Rejecting almost all Soviet precedents for a variety of reasons, Putin tends to look to the nineteenth century, a period many Russians today look to as a moment of possibility, when a modernizing Russia might have taken a variety of different and possibly less troubled paths. Specifically, Putin has been observed to frequently quote religious-nationalist thinkers from a variety of points of view. My project does more than unearth another example of such Church-state interactions leading to massive political, social and cultural transformations, or even to identify this as something of a characteristic pattern. My research suggests further that the specific links between massive-scale war--including the Napoleonic Wars as well as the better-studied world wars--teach institutions how to use such weapons as surveillance, rumor, conspiracy, denunciation, and disinformation to control rather than to understand their populations. While this is a well-known phenomenon in twentieth century Europe, my study identifies essentially the same mechanisms applied to a smaller slice of society almost a century earlier and in a context without the Soviet connotations that Putin tends to reject. I would tentatively suggest that policymakers consider not only the very real limits on Putin's control and his dependence on agreement from several broad interests across Russian society, but specifically his efforts in the past decade to construct a new source of political legitimacy that is not grounded in Cold War battles over economic systems or secular ideologies but instead in a national and religious identity that makes claims for unity and stability that carry the weight of deep history and mystical significance.

Co-Curricular Activity: Thanks to the translation of my first monograph appearing in Russian from *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* while I was in Russia, I was able to do two book talks, one in Moscow at the German Historical Institute, and the other in St. Petersburg at European University,



Image 6 Book talk at German Historical Institute, Moscow

which allowed me to meet with several prominent local historians, including Galina Ulianova, Boris Kolonitskii, Denis Sdvizkov, and Soren Urbansky. I've since proposed a panel for ASEES 2020 with one of these Galina Ulianova, received extremely important advice about the



Image 5 Book talk at the European University, St. Petersburg, History Faculty

holdings of Moscow RGADA on Anna Orlova, and generally spread the word about my current interests among Russian scholars. I also gave a paper on textiles and regional economic development for an international conference hosted by the Higher School of Economics, Moscow's International

Laboratory on the History of the Russian Regions, where I met with its director, Ekaterina Boltunova, and a number of graduate students currently working in regional archives. I am still in touch with these scholars, with whom I have agreed to exchange US-based scholarly materials for guidance on regional archival collections, and Boltunova is joining me on an ASEES panel on revising our understanding of Nicholas I. My book talks were well attended, and I was approached by several members of each au



Image 4 Presenting on the Conference on the Regions of Imperial Russia, Higher School of Economics, Moscow

additional helpful discussions. In addition, I was able to travel to Novgorod and visit the Yu'rev

Monastery in person, a key location in my project. While relevant authorities who may have access to materials relating to Archimandrite Fotii or nearby landowner Anna Orlova were not available during my visit, I did obtain important and difficult-to-find contact information to pursue further inquiries. Finally, being in-country allowed me to obtain copies of several recent Russian publications relevant to my project that were published in such small print runs as to be difficult to obtain from the US.

Conclusions: I consider my six months in St. Petersburg extraordinarily productive; in my many years of conducting research in Russia I have never been so astonished at the richness of documentation that was not apparent from the finding aids I could access in the US. Most of what I identified and obtained on this trip was found through intensive searches of RGIA's card catalog, located in a



Image 7 RGIA's nearly empty card catalog room

separate room many researchers never even visit, where cataloging dates back to the 1920s, with poorly-handwritten cards that are often incomplete, and with photography even of these findings aids also sometimes limited. While working in Russian archives is logistically challenging almost to the point of impossibility, the opportunities for exciting finds that truly disrupt the master narratives of my field are rich. Thanks to the generous funding of American Councils and Title VIII as well as additional funding from the Research Foundation of the PSC-CUNY, this was the first research trip since my Ph.D. work that was not primarily funded out-of-pocket and consequently the first in which it was possible to obtain documents at anything approaching the

necessary extent to complete top-level research. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity and strongly encourage the stakeholders in this program to continue it.

Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications: My most immediate goal is to use some of my recent archival findings from the Title VIII-funded trip to complete an article in progress on A. P. Dubovitskii, a man persecuted by the Third Section for two decades as supposedly a member of Tatarinova's sect, though he was not. My recent research did, as I had hoped, reveal the sources of disagreement between St. Petersburg Metropolitan Serafim (who at least initially defended Dubovitskii) and Moscow Metropolitan Filaret, who led and continually added impetus to the case against him. Now able to put that story in its proper context, I hope to submit it to an appropriate journal by the end of the summer, 2020. I have also already organized a panel for the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies annual convention in 2020 on re-evaluating Nicholas I, to which I will contribute a paper on his succession to the throne, based on archival findings from my Title VIII fellowship. In addition, I found an enormous amount of material relating to an aspect of the Dubovitskii case: part of the state and Church's concern about his activities and affiliations was due to his running of a school from his home. I found extraordinary attention paid by various Church and state authorities to such private schools during the 1820s-40s, such that I believe another article connecting this concern to the broader development of education in the nineteenth century should be possible by the end of 2020. Alongside these articles and my other responsibilities, I will be organizing and translating the thousands of pages of archival notes, photographs, and scans I gathered in St. Petersburg preparatory to beginning the manuscript for my monograph on this subject, which I hope to focus on as my first priority beginning in January, 2021.

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