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Missionary Activity of the Orthodox Monasteries of Transbaikal within the Framework of the Existence of the Second Transbaikal Ecclesiastical Mission

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Abstract---The Second Transbaikal Ecclesiastical Mission significantly changed the situation with the spread of Orthodoxy among the indigenous population of the region – the Buryats, who, for the most part, were adherents of the northern branch of Buddhism – Lamaism. Its activities also had a significant impact on the Old Believer population of the region. The paper analyses the features of the activities of the Orthodox monasteries of Transbaikal, carried out by them within the framework of the missionary work of the second Transbaikal Ecclesiastical Mission, which in many ways changed the situation with Orthodoxy in the region. The mission began its work in 1861 (according to other sources, in 1862) and focused its activities on spreading Orthodoxy among the local Buryat population, predominantly Lamaists, and Old Believers. The author notes that this subject matter is understudied. At the same time, references are made to some archival documents. The result of the study was the conclusion that the Orthodox monasteries of the region quite actively took part in missionary activities.

Keywords---ecclesiastical mission, missionary work, orthodoxy, vicariate.

Introduction

The Second Transbaikal Ecclesiastical Mission significantly changed the situation with the spread of Orthodoxy among the indigenous population of the region – the Buryats, who, for the most part, were adherents of the northern branch of Buddhism – Lamaism. Its activity also had a significant impact on the Old Believer population of the region. Archbishop Parfeny (Popov) of Irkutsk and Nerchinsk is the one to be credited for its foundation. It was he who petitioned for the creation of a mission, the purpose of which would be to work on intensifying the missionary work in the region. The available publications somewhat differ on the date of the mission's foundation. Both 1861 and 1862 are mentioned, although the former date is referred to much more often ([Bogodukhova, 1999](#); [Basalaev, 2000](#)). To date, the agenda of the missionary work of specifically Orthodox monasteries within the framework of the second Transbaikal Ecclesiastical Mission has been understudied. The purpose of the mission was, firstly, “...to attract pagan Lamaists and shamanists into the bosom of the Orthodox Church”, and secondly “...to strengthen baptised foreigners' faith in the truths of the Orthodox religion”.

This purpose predetermined the tasks that were spelled out in the mission rules. These include “...correction of the religious rites and baptism of foreigners, worship on Sundays and holidays at all churches of the mission, preaching during worship, devotion in the Buryat language (according to the book of devotions published by the Kazan translation commission), walking with the Holy Cross and Holy water on holidays, interviews, where the history of the Old and New Testaments is told, travels in yurts and uluses of baptised foreigners (distribution of body crosses, Lives of the Saints, and the announcement of the teachings of the Archbishop of Irkutsk Benjamin in the Buryat language), maintenance of contacts with foreign authorities and influential persons, medical care (in 1893, all the camps of the Trans-Baikal region were supplied with first-aid kits)” ([Connolly, 2019](#); [Lehrer et al., 2012](#)).

Stages of development of the second Transbaikal ecclesiastical mission

The centre of the Second Ecclesiastical Mission in Transbaikal is geographically located in the Posolsky Spaso-Preobrazhensky Monastery. This is conditioned by the fact that the said monastery became the seat of the vicar bishop of the Selenginsky Irkutsk diocese. The establishment of the vicariate is connected precisely with the establishment of the second Trans-Baikal Spiritual Mission. Since 1861 (or since 1862), Benjamin (Blagonravov) had been the vicar bishop, i.e. the person responsible for missionary work in the region. The vicariate at the Posolsky Monastery existed until 1879, when it was transferred to Chita, the administrative centre of the Transbaikal region ([Goihman-Yahr, 2019](#); [Smallman, 1996](#)). The Spiritual Board was established there in 1880. That year, during the mission, the Bishop of Selenginsky, vicar of the Irkutsk diocese, Right Reverend Meletius (Yakimov), consecrated a church in honour of the Holy Apostle Andrew

the First-Called (later to become a bishop's church). It is necessary to focus on the fact that the matter of creating the Trans-Baikal vicariate of the Irkutsk diocese was raised long before the named date. Back at the end of the 17th century, the Siberian Metropolitan Pavel proposed to establish four vicariates (at least two) to spread Orthodoxy. In his proposal, among other territories, he proposed Transbaikal and the Amur region. This project was never implemented (Glinka, 1914; Maevskaya & Aga, 2021).

The independent position of the head of the second Transbaikal Ecclesiastical Mission was approved in connection with the establishment of an independent Transbaikal diocese in 1894 at the request of Right Reverend George (Orlov), Bishop of Transbaikal and Nerchinsk. It is difficult to identify the exact year when the position of the head of the mission was established. The report on the state of the Transbaikal ecclesiastical mission refers to 1904, in the clerical records of Orthodox monasteries in the region, the data on the head of the mission date back to the 1890s. The main missionary work in Transbaikal before the development of the independent Transbaikal diocese was carried out by the inhabitants of the male Posolsky Spaso-Preobrazhensky monastery. The transfer of the vicariate to Chita was not a reason to stop this work (Munier et al., 2019; Radu, 1998). Therewith, apart from the said monastery, monastics from the Selenginsky Holy Trinity and Chikoysky John Predechensky monasteries carried out active missionary activities. Attention should be paid to particular missionaries – the vicar bishop, abbots of the Trans-Baikal monasteries, monastics, those who became most honoured in the missionary field.

Analysis of the activities of prominent missionaries of Transbaikal

The most prominent Orthodox figure who largely determined the missionary work in the region for the entire period of the mission's work, was, perhaps, Meletius (Mikhail Yakimov). Later, he became widely known as the ruling bishop of Ryazan and Zaraty and as a church writer. As a locally revered saint, he was canonized by the Ryazan and Kasimov dioceses, as well as the Irkutsk and Angara dioceses. Meletius appeared in the Posolsky Spaso-Preobrazhensky Monastery in the early 1860s. According to the decree of His Imperial Majesty No. 859 of December 9, 1861 "...to send hierodeacon Meletius to the Posolsky Spaso-Preobrazhensky monastery of the Irkutsk diocese, where he can be useful in missionary activities". In the monastery, he was ordained a hieromonk and appointed as a missionary to the Selenga Buryat department and the Kudarin camp.

Throughout his missionary activity, Meletius saw his main task as affiliation of the "outlanders" to the Orthodoxy. In 1862, at the Kudarin missionary camp, Meletius baptised 10 people, of which 9 were "Buryat shamanists", in 1863 – 56 people, of which 45 were "shamanists", one of the Old Believers, and one of the Lamaists. Sources inform that it was through the efforts of Meletius that a church was built in honour of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul at the Kudarin camp, several churches along the river Khilok. For his missionary exploits, Meletius was awarded an epigonation in 1863, received the blessing of the Synod in 1866, and received archpastoral gratitude for the construction of a missionary church in Kudar (Mishra, 2016; Chesterton, 2012; Koroliova et al., 2021). For some time

Meletius left Transbaikal, and in 1878 a new stage of his missionary activity in the region began. He was appointed vicar bishop of Selenga.

Another prominent missionary – the abbot of the Selenginsky Holy Trinity Monastery from 1884 to 1903, Archimandrite Hirenarchus (Ioann Dmitriev), he worked among the Old Believer population, of which there were a lot in the region. In 1889 Hirenarchus received the blessing of the Synod “For zeal for public education and donations for school buildings”. Later, “...for assistance in the development and consolidation of the Trinity parish school with his personal participation and attention”, gratitude was announced from the vicar Bishop of Selenginsky, Right Reverend Macarius (Darsky). The assistant to the head of the ecclesiastical mission, the abbot of the Chikoi Monastery of John the Baptist from 1888 to 1890, hegumen Abercius proved himself no less prominently in working with the Old Believers. Was awarded with an epigonation ([Zorin et al., 2001](#)).

A significant amount of information on missionary work in Transbaikalia and on the role of monasteries in it at the beginning of the 20th century was kept in the Posolsky monastery. The funds of the State Archives of the Transbaikal Territory contain the “Missionary report on the state of schism and Old Believers and sectarianism in the Transbaikal diocese and on the activities of the diocesan mission against schismatics in 1913”. In it, the acting secretary of the Transbaikal episcopate, priest Stepan Zarnitsky, writes that while working in the archives of the Posolsky monastery, he came across information about the Old Believers in Transbaikal and the struggle of Right Reverend Meletius and Archimandrite Hirenarchus against them ([Biryukova, 2014](#); [Neu & Ocampo, 2007](#)).

The missionary activity of Orthodox monasteries in Transbaikal manifested itself through educational work. Thus, at the there was a missionary school under Posolsky monastery, established, according to various sources, in 1862 or 1863 (sometimes referred to as a missionary school). The school was partially funded by the mission's funds. The teachers were abbots and missionaries, many of whom were monastics ([Friedlander et al., 1986](#); [Kwon, 1994](#)). In the mid-1890s, a school was established to prepare psalmists for the churches of the same religion. There is no direct reference to the training of missionaries, but it is implied that they were preparing for work among the Old Believers. The work of the school was based on the “Rules on the anti-schismatic missionary school” sent by Bishop Guriy (Burtasovsky) of Samara.

At the initial stage of missionary activity, the work of missionaries was aimed at introducing the “outlanders” to Orthodoxy. During the work of the second Transbaikal Ecclesiastical Mission, considerable emphasis was placed on working with Old Believers. The Chikoi Monastery of John the Baptist was surrounded by Old Believer villages. Even before the start of the second Ecclesiastical Mission, the monastery was actively working to spread the same religion. Notably, due to the centre of the second Ecclesiastical Mission being situated at the Posolsky Monastery for almost two decades, missionaries from all over Transbaikal often lived there. The transfer of the management of the second Ecclesiastical Mission to Chita led to a reduction in the number of missionaries at the Posolsky monastery. In 1900, the Posolsky Spaso-Preobrazhensky monastery was

transformed from a male to a female monastery. From that time on, it retired from missionary work. Other monasteries are gradually moving away from missionary work. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, according to the records of the brethren, there was only one missionary in all the monasteries of Transbaikalia – the hieromonk of the Selenginsk Holy Trinity Monastery.

Conclusion

Thus, during the heyday of the second Transbaikalia Ecclesiastical Mission, missionary work by the Orthodox monasteries of the region was carried out rather actively. It was aimed at introducing “outlanders” to Orthodoxy, who were mainly Buryats and Old Believers. For almost two decades, the Posolsky Spaso-Preobrazhensky Monastery had been the centre of the missionary activity of Transbaikalia. Over time, due to both objective and subjective factors, the volume of missionary activity of Orthodox monasteries decreased and by the revolutionary events of 1917 it practically disappeared. Objective factors are the lack of missionaries during certain years, insufficient funding. Subjective factors include poor literacy of missionaries, practically no one knew the language of “outlanders”. To date, the sources suggest a certain idea of the scope of missionary work of the monasteries of Transbaikalia, however, data are not available for all years and often happen to be fragmentary. To recreate a nuanced picture of the missionary activity of the Orthodox monasteries in the region, further study of the sources is required.

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