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Catholic Communities in Russia at the Age of Peter the Great

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The article opens various aspects of history of Catholic communities in Russia under Peter the Great. Some questions of distribution of Catholicism in Russia, quantities of Catholics, national and social structure of parishes are investigated. For this aim author analyzed many published items and archival sources. To these sources can be related the documents of Most Holy Governing Synod, memoirs of contemporaries, reports of Jesuits in Russia and other materials. In consequence of the investigation author had revealed the geography of the Russians catholic parishes and traced the process of catholic churches founding.

Keywords: the epoch of Peter the Great, Catholic Church in Russia, Roman Catholic priesthood and their flock in Russia.

Catholic communities did not play significant role in religious life of Russia till the end of 17th-beginning of 18th centuries. With the beginning of Peter's reign the government started creation of favorable conditions for the unorthodox Christians to enter the country. As a result several Roman Catholic communities were settled in the country. Catholics were inspired with rationalist views of the first Russian Emperor, which led to his abruption with the Russian traditional godliness and gave a hope on Catholic services allowance and Catholic and Orthodox Churches reunion (Andreev, 2007).

In the first part of the 18th century the amount of Catholics in the country were filled up mainly by foreigners, moved to Russia. Economically fast-developing country desperately needed specialists; therefore the questions of their confession were not considered. The guarantee

of Catholic services no disturbance for all immigrants entering Russia for business purposes was Proclamation «On invitation of foreigners to Russia with giving them the freedom of conscience» dated April 16th 1702 (Legislation of Peter the First, 1997). As a consequence of Proclamation realization, the amount of Roman Catholics in the first quarter of 18th century increased drastically. There was the following data on the increasing amount of Roman Catholics: there were 40 Catholics in Russia in 1691, 400 in 1698, 600 in 1721 and over 1000 in 1723 (Winter, 1964). Letters and reports of Jesuits prove this statistics. The report of Moscow Jesuit mission in 1709 informs that there were over 450 Catholics in Russia in general (Letters and reports of Jesuits, 1904, 191). Some of the authors report that there were 2000 Catholics in Russia by 1725 (History of religions in Russia, 2002). Percentage rate of

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Catholics to the Russian population in 20-s, 18th Century, was approximately 0, 013% (Andreev, 2006). Protestantism confidently dominated over Catholicism, because only the amount of Lutherans was over 20 000 in the first quarter of 18th Century. Nevertheless, the existence of such amount of Catholics may be considered as relatively new phenomenon in the Russian history, because Catholic community in late middle ages was represented by only several dozens of people. Bearing in mind traditionally negative attitude to Catholics as to people, distorting governmental and social basis of the country the appearance of 2000 people of Catholic confession in Russia was a significant development in the country religious life (Andreev, 2008).

Archival data, contemporaries' memoirs, letters, reports, complaints, let us identify social and national structure of Russian Catholics in the first part of 18th Century. There was a significant amount of Catholic foreigners doing military service in Russia, foreign officers of the middle and the highest levels. The report of the Military Board in 1722 informs: «there were only five Catholic officers among 10 dragoon regiments»¹. However a lot of Catholic officers served at fleet. Reports of Military Board Admiralties prove that there were 43 Catholics serving at fleet². Demographer A. Hupel also pointed out significant number of officers and foreign officials in Russia in the first part of 18th century: Scottish, English, and mainly German (Hupel, 1786).

Besides military Catholics, serving in Russia, there were different European specialists and merchants in Russian Catholic communities. In 1684 Moscow Catholics signed a request to build a Roman Catholic Churches, which proves the existence of merchants in Moscow Catholic community (Tzvetaev, 1886, 4; Tolstoy, 1876, 126). However the amount of foreign merchants among Russian Catholics was relatively small. In total all trading operations were conducted

by 28 Austrian merchants, about 10 French and several Italian (Zakharov, 1998). The structure of Catholic community in St. Petersburg testifies that military officers, specialists and other officials were dominant in congregation. A lot of church members are named in official documents as masters of stone carving, journeymen, chemists, «His Majesty architects», artists³. Among famous Catholics of St. Petersburg one should know architect Domenico Trezzini, who was a church monitor in the local Catholic community during a long time, his colleague Jean-Baptiste Leblon (1679-1719), sculptor Carlo Rastrelli, sculptor, master of stone carving Nicolas Pinot (1684-1754), artist Louis Karavak⁴ (Baklanova, 1966). Catholic community in Astrakhan in 1719 counted 90 households and consisted «partially of Austrian gardeners, partially of Bavarian soldiers, who had been captured along with Swedish people» (Weber, 1738).

The most significant factor for the Catholic mission development was congregants-officers, because they essentially supported community in moral and material way. Jesuit Franciscus Emilian (Pater Franciscus Milan or Aemilianus) at the beginning of 18th Century pointed out poor conditions of Catholic Community in Moscow in one of his letters and he associated it with the fact that a lot of Catholic officers were killed or captured and only masters, widows and orphans were left (Letters and reports of Jesuits, 1904, 52). Emilian named in details all officers killed at Narva battle, meaning that these people altogether were the basis of Catholic Community: colonels Kragen, Turlavil, Antonij Skhada, Franciscus Kostanka, Lev Gio, Ivan Yust and others (Letters and reports of Jesuits, 1904, 55). Later on in 20-s of 18th Century all Catholic priests and congregants had protection of colonel Peter Gordon, son of general Patrick Gordon (Tzvetaev, 1886, 48).

The national structure of Catholics in Russia was very divers. French, Polish, German and

Italian congregants were the most numerous. In St. Petersburg in the first quarter of 18th Century each of these four groups of congregants was relatively independent, had its own priest what often led to conflicts and confrontation between them⁵. Catholics in Astrakhan were represented mainly by Austrian and Armenian merchants⁶. Austrian resident in Moscow Player mentioned German, Italian and Dutch congregants – ship constructors (Player, 1874).

The most numerous Catholic parishes were located in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In 1723-1724 congregants (parishioners) of Catholic Church in St. Petersburg sent a request to the Russian Government to allow Franciscan Yakov Deolegio (Pater Giacomo d'Oleggio) officiate at the service. Swiss Capuchin Apollinaris von Weber (Apollinaire da Suit, former the head of parish) opposed to Deolegio. As one can tell looking at the request, 183 church-members supported Deolegio⁷. However the Apollinaris party was not less numerous, it had protection of commodore Luka Demyanov and some other foreign officers⁸. Apparently by the end of Peter the First reign one could count no less than 300 of Catholic congregants in the northern capital city of Russia. Catholic community in Moscow consisted of 200 people and more in 1709 (Letters and reports of Jesuits, 1904, 191).

Catholicism was getting popular not only in the Capital cities, but also in the regions. At the times of Peter the First the Catholic parish in St. Petersburg covered cities Kronstadt, Riga, Revel. Catholic priests constantly officiated at the services in the named cities⁹. In 1725 there were about 60 Catholics in Revel¹⁰. Catholics lived also in Azov, Tula, Kazan, Astrakhan and other cities (Tolstoy, 1876, 137). According to the data of Jesuit mission in 1709 there were over 200 Catholics in Moscow, over 50 Catholics by the Azov Sea, 70 in St. Petersburg by the Finnish gulf, 8 in Voronezh, 7 in Astrakhan, and 5 in Kazan. Also there were

15 Catholics in Archangelsk, 100 people in tsar troop (Letters and reports of Jesuits, 1904, 191). A lot of Catholic communities (in Azov, Taganrog, Kazan) were formed by Jesuits interested in catholic communities' structure in those cities at the beginning of 18th Century (Tzvetaev, 1886a; Litzenberger, 2001, 47). Catholic cleric also permanently was on duty in Voronezh by ship-builders from Venice (Tzvetaev, 1886a).

At the beginning of his reign Peter the First did not allow Catholics to build catholic churches and invite Catholic priests to officiate at the services. However as soon as Roman priests had moved to Russia they initiated the process of Catholic cathedrals building in German settlement (Nemetskaja Sloboda) with help of honorable foreigner Patrick Gordon and Italian negotiant Franz Guasconi. Catholic Church in Moscow was mentioned in historical documents for the first time in 1688 (David, 1968). It was a wooden Church, which was later illegally made out of stone in 1694-1695. A pleader by the Ambassadorial Department Ivan Yakimov reported on June 3-d that Catholics had partially built a stoned Church (Tzvetaev, 1886, 44). As it appeared to be later on the request of Franciscus Leffler and Paulus Yarosh (Jaros) to build a new stoned Catholic Church the Russian Government in 1695 allowed the construction of only wooden Church. That Church was built in 1695-1696 and was active only for several years. In the beginning of 18th Century it was burnt away in fire (Korb, 1906; Schlaflly Jr., 2007). The Church was located on the shore of the river Yauza at the crossroad of German street and Starokirochniy (The Old church') lane (former Kirochniy lane) and was named after Saint Peter and Paul (Tzvetaev, 1886, 5-6; Litzenberger, 2001, 44).

The Order of Peter the First dated December 12, 1705 granted unlimited Catholic Church building out of stone (Tolstoy, 1876, 137). As a result Moscow Jesuits absolutely lawfully in

1706 built Church of Holy Trinity on the place of burnt wooden Church named after Saint Peter and Paul, what made Moscow Jesuit community one of the main Catholic centers in Russia (Letters and reports of Jesuits, 1904, 144-159). Kammer-Junker Friedrich-Wilhelm Berkholz in 1722 described stoned Church of Holy Trinity as a prosperous one (Berkholz, 1860). Given Stoned Catholic Church was consecrated in June of 1707 and in 1812 was burnt away in fire (Schlafly Jr., 2007).

Catholic Church building gradually became widespread in Russia. The head of the Jesuit Order Mission Elias (Ilya) Brogio reported to Vatican in 1707 about foundation of many Catholic Churches in Moscow (Theiner, 1859). Memoirists Peter Henry Bruce and Friedrich Christian Weber also confirmed the fact of the first Catholic Churches appearance in Petersburg (Bespjatykh, 1991). Evidently, construction of the first unorthodox Churches took place without prior notification of the government, which is proved by the Order dated May 22, 1721 «On informing Synod about unorthodox churches»¹¹. As a result of spontaneous churches construction, several prayer halls, where services took place as well, were founded in St. Petersburg, besides already existed Catholic Church. The house of famous architect Domenico Trezzini became the first public prayer hall in 1705 (Hankovska, 2001). The first Catholic Church appeared in St. Petersburg in 1710, when foreign court gardener Peter van der Gaar presented piece of land purchased by him for 300 rubles to Catholics, living in Greek village (Grecheskaya Sloboda)¹². This Church was active until the great fire in 1735 in Greek Street, between river Moyka, Tsaritsin Lug (now Marsovo Pole) and German street (now Millionnaya Street)¹³. In July of 1735 Petersburg Catholic services were officiated by four preachers, namely Felucca, Stephan Defondo, Peter Klein and Carlo de Luca¹⁴.

Besides Catholic Church in Greek Street in St. Petersburg in 20-s of 18th century there was one more special place – a small chapel for French church-goers. Franciscan Peter Ceillot served there in 1725 as the French notice shows¹⁵. Probably exactly that chapel was mentioned as a Catholic Church in French Street on Vasilyevskiy Island¹⁶. More than that one Catholic Church in Kronstadt was also active¹⁷. And of course private worships took place at the houses of rear-admiral Matvey Zmaevitch, master of carving Pinot, earl Rastrelli¹⁸. Franciscan Condillier (Koldimer) from Paris officiated at service at Rastrelli house, Franciscan Michael Angelus de Vestigné from Turin officiated at service at Zmaevitch house (Uspensky, Shishkin, 1990, 202). Kronstadt also had its own prayer hall in 1714 where captured Sweden officer was in charge of worshipping sacraments (Bespjatykh, 1997).

Starting in 1718 Catholic worships took place in Astrakhan on a regular basis. By authorization of the Astrakhan Governor the Catholic Cathedral of the Repose of the Virgin was built in 1722¹⁹. It was the biggest Catholic Cathedral in Russia after the one in Moscow. In 1734 the Astrakhan Church had deteriorated and was knocked down. A new Catholic Church was built on that place and named after the Repose of the Virgin as well²⁰.

At the beginning of the 18th Century all Catholic Priests and missionaries in Russia were mainly Jesuits. They worked practically in every Catholic community of the country: in Kazan, Azov, St. Petersburg, Astrakhan, Archangelsk and Voronezh²¹ (Reiche, 1841). The Jesuit Order was founder of the biggest mission in Moscow, which existed until the Order deportation from Russia in 1719. The most active representatives of that Mission were Austrians Franciscus Emilian (Pater Franciscus Milan) and Johann Birulla, who had been working in Moscow from 1698 till 1719. They left detailed correspondence with their

regional managers (Emilian and Birulla were subordinated to Johann Miller, the head of the Jesus community in Bohemian province)²². Jesuits related to Lithuanian province of the Order also founded a missionary location in St. Petersburg in 1713. The head of the Jesuits in St. Petersburg was Daniel Zhirovsky. In 1725 an Austrian Jesuit Johann Bayer arrived at the Northern Capital as an assistant to Zhirovsky²³. In September of 1725 Michael Engel came to Petersburg with references from Liefland bishop Schembeck²⁴

Astrakhan Catholic services were officiated by Italian Capuchins in the first quarter of 18th Century. Generally speaking Italian Capuchins outstood with their academic activity and scholarship. We should especially point out Patricius from Milan (Pater Patricius da Milano). He lived in Astrakhan in 1710-1713 and in 1716-1718 and after that was appointed Superior over the all Catholic Missioners in Russia and officiated services in St. Petersburg and in Moscow. Bonaventura da Città di Castello and Giovan Battista Primavera da Norcia lived in Astrakhan in 1716-1718, Antonius Maria d'Amelia Lualdi lived there in 1718-1723 (Uspensky, Shishkin, 1990, 105).

After the Jesuits exile in 1719 Capuchins, Franciscans and Dominicans were in charge of ministerial work. Right after Jesuits exile from Russia Peter the First issued a special Chart in order to invite Roman Capuchins to serve at Russian ward²⁵. On June 11th in 1720 Swiss Pater Theodosius arrived at St. Petersburg at the head of six capuchins delegation (after having several disputes between Franciscans and Capuchins at St. Petersburg ward Theodosius moved to Moscow and became Superior)²⁶. In July of 1720 catholic priests from Order of Capuchins Pater Udalicus, Pater Ficelis, Pater Casimir and Pater Romanus came to Moscow from Kiev²⁷. On June 27th 1732 three more Capuchins arrived at Moscow headed by Pater Felice²⁸.

Some catholic monks and members of secular clergy were not only at Russian catholic churches and communities, but also in private houses. In the first half of eighteenth century a plenty of the Roman priests lived in Smolensk nobility's (shlyakhta's) houses²⁹.

Catholic priesthood's possibility to influence upon Russian society and Russian religious life was determined by number of clergy and certainly by its material prosperity. During the 18th century the proceeds of Russian catholic missions and parishes repeatedly varied. Catholic communities and missions existed due to donations of parishioners, among which there were some rich patrons (Gordon, 1852). In the end of 17th century general Patrick Gordon had mentioned about «subscribing» reached up to 47, 5 roubles (Gordon, 1841). Thereto the Moscow Jesuits periodically were supported from Viennese Imperial Court (David, 1968). However the financial help to Russian Catholic communities and missions from the European Catholic States was more likely exception, than a rule. More often many communities had no maintenance from abroad of Russia. The Kammer-Junker Berkholtz was writing in 1722: «The church services there (in the Moscow Catholic church) were making by the Jesuits, who received from the Roman Emperor annually the sum of 800 roubles; but now the local Capuchins do not receive anything» (Berkholz, 1860).

The payments of the maintenance to the Moscow Jesuits from the Austrian government were not regular. Austrian diplomat Player in 1710 reported that Moscow Jesuit mission is in a pitiful state. The cause of such state was the local donators' death. Player made to emperor an offer to pay the annual maintenance to the Moscow catholic clerics. Thus, Player testifies that the Austrian payments to Russian Jesuits have stopped (Player, 1874). Russian Jesuits informed to Rome about the extremely miserable

state and asked for aid (Letters and reports of Jesuits, 1904, 57, 77, 147). And even the activity of the Moscow catholic school which enjoyed respect among local nobility, did not bring the income perceptible. Jesuits wrote that they are ready to teach children free of charge if only to have a favour from Russian tsar³⁰. Nevertheless, the financial embarrassment had not prevented to build a grand Holy Trinity's church.

After deportation of Jesuits from Russia the financial possibilities of catholic parishes have worsened (Russia and Spain, 1991)³¹. The given circumstance was making difficult the missionary work and catholic proselytism in Russia (Turgenev, 1842). Only with change of the legal status of Catholic Church in Russia (after the divisions of Poland) the financial possibilities of catholic parishes have been improved.

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Sources

Abbreviations:

CSHA SPb – The Central State Historical Archive of St.-Petersburg;

RSAAA – The Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (in Moscow);

RSHA – The Russian State Historical Archive (in St.-Petersburg).

1. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 2, file 563, p.2.
2. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 4, file 244, p.2-3.
3. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 4, file 540, p.14-17.
4. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 1, file 453, p.11-12.
5. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 4, file 540, p.4-37.
6. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 37, file 90, p.23.
7. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 4, file 540, p.15-17.
8. Ibidem, p.47-48.
9. Ibidem, p.25, 37.
10. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 6, file 126, p.6.
11. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 1, file 286, p.1-2; schedule 4, file 661, p.2.
12. RSHA, collection 821, schedule 125, file 1032, p.31.
13. RSAAA, collection 152, schedule 1 (1719 year), file 1, p.1-2.

14. CSHA SPb, collection 19, schedule 122, file 298, p.26.
15. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 4, file 540, p.71.
16. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 1, file 286, p.12-13.
17. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 1, file 128, p.12.
18. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 1, file 286, p.13-14; RSAAA, coll. 152, sch. 1 (1719 year), file 1, p.2-3.
19. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 37, file 90, p.23; schedule 1, file 744, p.9-10.
20. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 37, file 90, p.23.
21. RSAAA, collection 152, schedule 1 (1716 year), file 2, p.2.
22. Ibidem, p.2-3.
23. Ibidem, p.3-5.
24. RSAAA, collection 152, schedule 1 (1715 year), file 1, p.1.
25. RSAAA, collection 152, schedule 1 (1719 year), file 4, p.1.
26. Ibidem, p.1.
27. RSAAA, collection 158, schedule 2 (1717 year), file 11, p.31.
28. RSAAA, collection 152, schedule 1 (1719 year), file 4, p.1.
29. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 17, file 394, p.2.
30. RSAAA, collection 152, schedule 1 (1718 year), file 1, p.2.
31. RSHA, collection 796, schedule 3, file 1294, p.4; schedule 4, file 540, p.19.