

Some of the accusations are detailed in an "Extract from the ongoing investigation of various crimes carried out in the Dukhobor and Molokan colonies of Melitopol *uezd*."⁵⁹ In the absence of extant official records from the investigation, this document is potentially important, but it is also problematic, for it is undated, and there is no indication of its provenance. Its most recent testimony dates from 4 March 1836, the year in which, according to Kolosov, the investigation ended.⁶⁰ On the other hand, it describes just nineteen murders, not the twenty-four mentioned by Kolosov, or the figure of twenty-one that appears, uncredited, in the influential study by nineteenth-century Russian historian Orest Novitskii.⁶¹ Still, the nineteen include all four that Kolosov specifically mentions in his report. Whether or not the Extract is complete, it sheds important light on the charges against the Dukhobors. As a closer examination reveals, many of those charges can only be described as unfounded rumour.

To begin with, it must be stressed that some of the alleged murders almost certainly did occur. In two cases the murderers confessed, and one of these, the 1825 murder of

see "Spisok Dukhobortsev prisoedinennykh k pravoslavnoi tserkvi s 27 Maia 1843 goda po 5 Iunia 1844," and "Spisok Gosudarstvennykh krest'ianin iz sekta Dukhoborcheskogo . . . zhelanie obratit'sia v Pravoslavie," *RGLA*, f. 383, o. 5, d. 4319; and "Spisok prisoedinovshikhsia Dukhobortsakh k pravoslavnoi tserkva s 1 Iuna 1842 goda po 27 Maia 1843 goda," *RGLA*, f. 383, o. 4, d. 3212. The figure of twenty-seven families reported by Woodcock and Avakumovic apparently only includes the May 1843 to June 1844 list.

⁵⁹"Vypiska, iz dela, proizvedennogo sledstviem, o raznykh zlodeianiiakh, proiskhodivshikh v Dukhoborskikh i Molokanskikh poseleniakh Melitopol'skogo uezda," (hereafter "Vypiska, iz dela"), n.d., *PJBRMLA*, file 392.

⁶⁰Kolosov said the investigation was ordered by Vorontsov in 1834, and took place in 1835 and 1836. Secondary accounts often refer to a six-year investigation lasting from 1834 to 1839. See, e.g. Baron Von Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire, its People, Institutions, and Resources*, trans. Robert Farie, 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856), 1:293; Woodcock & Avakumovic, *The Dukhobors*, 57. Novitskii says it lasted five years, from 1835 to 1839 (Novitskii, *Dukhoborty*, 144).

⁶¹Novitskii, *Dukhoborty*, 145.

seventeen-year-old Elisaveta Voronova, was probably the most notorious of all the crimes ascribed to the Dukhobors.⁶² The Extract recounts the confession of Ivan Voronov,

Elisaveta's brother:

He told how, finding the maintenance of Elisaveta, a mute and a cripple, a burden on his shoulders, he first intended to bury her in his garden and put a hay stack over the grave, but because his wife Marina refused to go away and stay in the cabin [where she couldn't have witnessed the murder] because she thought he wanted to sneak away to meet with another women, he was forced to dig the grave on the steppe instead.

Ivan was said to have described how he buried his sister alive, then confessed to his mother and the village elders. The unfortunate Elisaveta's body was reportedly moved to an unmarked grave in the village cemetery, then made "invisible by sending cattle to trample over it."

The accusation that Dukhobors buried people alive surfaces again and again in subsequent accounts. Vorontsov abandoned his defence of the Dukhobors in part, he wrote, because they "bury the living in the ground."⁶³ His information was drawn from Kolosov's report, and it thus appears that the example of the single, admittedly gruesome murder of Voronova was exaggerated into a common Dukhobor practice. Haxthausen, in the most famous description of the crimes, says that "bodies were found buried alive," although he gives no proof of the claim, and both Novitskii, and Woodcock and Avakumovic echo Haxthausen.⁶⁴

⁶²Case 12, "Vypiska, iz dela," 31-36.

⁶³Vorontsov to Bludov, 13 August 1838, *RGLA*, f. 1284, o. 197, d. 138.

⁶⁴Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, 1:293; Novitskii, *Dukhobortsy*, 144; Woodcock & Avakumovic, *The Dukhobors*, 57.

The second confessed murder was that of Evdokim Lukianov.⁶⁵ One day in 1827, Lukianov, a convert from the Dukhobor faith to Orthodoxy, reportedly set out for the Dukhobor village of Bogdanovka to borrow some money from his father. Walking along the road he met three Dukhobors, Onisim Botkin and the brothers Semen and Stepan Voikin, who offered him a lift in their wagon. He discovered they were illegally transporting vodka, demanded some, and threatened to turn them in if they refused. In the ensuing brawl, he was killed. Two other alleged murders, although unproved, also have an air of authenticity. In 1803, in a dispute over an unpaid debt, Semen Negreev was supposedly stabbed to death by his brother Pavl and another man.⁶⁶ In 1820, during a dispute over a cow, a certain Karp Susoev was allegedly beaten and later died.⁶⁷ These three cases, if true, were hardly evidence of a religiously-based crusade against converts. Rather, they are the type of mundane violence typical of peasant society throughout Russia. They do not denote a crisis in the Molochna Dukhobor community.

Several cases were less mundane, but also less believable due to their reliance on extremely questionable witnesses. The state's star witnesses were Iosif Gankin, a one-time Dukhobor village elder, and his son Fomin. They testified in six cases involving thirteen accused murderers and seven victims. During a District Court trial in 1828 they had testified in five of these cases, but the charges were dismissed and Iosif and Fomin imprisoned for giving false evidence. The two escaped and ran off to Ekaterinoslav, where they converted to Orthodoxy "for protection," and returned with a letter from the Bishop who had converted them asking for leniency. This did not impress District Court Judge Sokolovskii

⁶⁵Case 14, "Vypiska, iz dela," 45ob.-49ob.

⁶⁶Case 1, "Vypiska, iz dela," 1-2ob.

⁶⁷Case 10, "Vypiska, iz dela," 19-20.

who threw them back in jail. They again escaped, this time to Simferopol where they appealed to Langeron, by now retired from his Vice-Gubernatorial position but still influential. Armed with a letter from Langeron, they returned again, and the still-unimpressed Judge Sokolovskii jailed them again, concluding that Langeron's letter "protected their heads but not their bodies." This time the apparently much-improved penal system managed to hold onto Iosif, but Fomin slipped away again, back to Langeron in Simferopol, who finally contrived to have the charges dismissed. Vindicated, the two returned to the stand to repeat their testimony during the later investigation.⁶⁸

The most interesting case involving the Gankins was the alleged 1821 murder of Petr Plakein and a friend, identified only as "Sergei."⁶⁹ Later anecdotal accounts often mention the exhumation of bodies during the investigation, but the Plakein case is the only example to appear in the Extract.⁷⁰ According to the Gankins, Petr and Sergei were Dukhobors who had been raised in the Molochna and returned in 1820 as army deserters, where they were soon heard making drunken threats to burn down the houses of the elders who had singled them out for conscription. Village officials arrested them, intending to turn them over to the authorities, but the two threatened to reveal names of other deserters in the Dukhobor villages. The Gankins claimed that Vasilii Kalmykov, leader of the Dukhobors, ordered the two murdered to prevent them testifying, and his orders were carried out by five Apostles who disposed of the bodies in a dry well. Dukhobor witnesses, however, disputed the Gankins' testimony, claiming the two men had simply disappeared

⁶⁸The trials and tribulations of Iosif and Fomin are related in Case 12, "Vypiska, iz dela," 31-36.

⁶⁹Case 11, "Vypiska, iz dela," 20-31. Some testimony mentions a third victim, identified only as "Ivan."

⁷⁰See e.g. Woodcock & Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 57.

and were thought to have fled to the town of Azov. During the investigation the commission had the well dug up and found it filled with horse bones, and among them "one bone, broken in two, that resembled a human arm, and also two more bones that resembled human bones." This the commission accepted as verification of the Gankins' story.

The principal witness in six of the other cases was a Molokan woman, Agafiiia Nemanikhina, who had no personal knowledge of the murders and simply relayed rumours heard by her husband Grigorii, who could not testify himself because he was "crazy in the head" [*pomeshatel'stvo v ume*].⁷¹ One of the six cases was that of Elisaveta Voronova, described above, but the others were more dubious. The least convincing is short enough to quote in full:

The Fifth [Case]: Concerning two unknown merchants from the city of Feodosiia who came to purchase wool in an unknown year.

The Molokan woman Agafiiia Nemanikhina reports the rumour that of two merchants who came to the village of Terpenie to buy wool, one was drowned by Dukhobors in the Molochna River, and the other has disappeared; concerning these people nothing further is known.⁷²

Several aspects of the accusations demand comment. To begin with, the nineteen murders alleged in the Extract were not part of a savage mid-1830s spree, but were spread over twenty-six years, from 1802 to 1828. This is in sharp contrast to published accounts, which rely heavily on Haxthausen. According to Haxthausen, Ilarion Kalmykov, who inherited the leadership of the Dukhobors in 1832, was an ineffectual leader who spent his time in drunken orgies, while the real administration of the community fell to a Council of

⁷¹This is explained in Case 2, "Vypiska, iz dela," 2ob.

⁷²Case 5, "Vypiska, iz dela," 9ob.

Elders. The Orphans' Home, the Dukhobor seat of administration, soon became a "den of crime," while the Council of Elders

constituted itself a terrible inquisitional tribunal. The principle, "Whoso denies his God shall perish by the sword," was interpreted according to their caprice; the house of justice was called *Rai i muka*, paradise and torture; the place of execution was on the island at the mouth of the Molochna. A mere suspicion of treachery, or of an intention to go over to the Russian Church, was punished with torture and death.⁷³

In the English version, Haxthausen claims the Council had 200 people murdered, while the German and French versions give the number as 400.⁷⁴ Novitskii cites the French version, but qualifies it, saying "if one does not believe the rumors about the number of Dukhobor murders, one must in any case accept the results of the investigative commission. It, through all of its persistent and skilful unearthing of secret crimes, revealed twenty-one murders."⁷⁵ He then questions his own conclusions, admitting that "unfortunately, the documents addressing this matter, the most interesting and important in the history of the Melitopol Dukhobors during the reign of [Nicholas I], have still not come to light."⁷⁶ Even the most judicious study, by Woodcock and Avakumovic, quotes Haxthausen at length. It rejects his claims regarding the number of deaths, but accepts Novitskii's reduced figure of twenty-one.⁷⁷ The new evidence cited here finally gives firm grounds for dismissing Haxthausen's exaggerated claims.

⁷³Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, 1:293.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 1:293; Haxthausen, *Studien über die innern Zustände, des Volksleben und insbesondere die ländlichen Einrichtungen Russlands*, 3 vols. (Hanover: 1847), 1:409; Haxthausen, *Etudes sur la situation, la vie nationale et les institutions rurales de la Russie*, 2 vols. (Hanover: 1847), 1:376.

⁷⁵Novitskii, *Dukhobortsy*, 144.

⁷⁶Novitskii, *Dukhobortsy*, 145.

⁷⁷Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 59.

Even the nineteen alleged murders described in the Extract were based on the most tenuous of evidence. In only two cases did accused murderers confess their crimes. In nine the bodies of the alleged victims were not found, although in one, that of Elisaveta Voronova, the murderer had confessed. Thirteen of the fourteen cases had previously been investigated without leading to a conviction. One had originally been ruled death by illness, one a suicide, and one a drowning. Eleven relied heavily on rumours related by Dukhobor converts to Orthodoxy, and none of these converts had first-hand knowledge of the events they testified to. Six of the cases had as their primary witness the Molokan Nemanikhina, who relied exclusively on rumours, while another six relied on Iosif and Fomin Gankin, who had previously been jailed for giving false testimony. These reports are no more credible than accusations of ritual murder levelled so often against Jews. They provide no basis for concluding the Dukhobor community was deeply troubled in the 1830s.

A second report of Dukhobor crimes makes the claims of a split in the community even more doubtful. A December 1840 report of Melitopol Uezd *Striapchik* [Procurator] Andreevskii provides a summary of the "crimes committed by Dukhobors in Melitopol Uezd" in the period 1831 to 1840.⁷⁸ According to Andreevskii, there were just fifty-three significant incidents: eleven cases of arson, eleven of robbery, two of desecrating holy icons, two of concealing runaways, one each of illegally freeing a prisoner, possessing counterfeit money, insolence to a village administrator, and abuse of office, one case of carrying out a death penalty on a condemned man without obtaining the proper authorisation of the authorities, twelve premature deaths from illness, four premature deaths from excessive consumption of alcohol, one suicide, one attempted suicide, and finally, one -- *just one* --

⁷⁸Andreevskii to Vorontsov, 6 December 1840, *GAOO*, f. 1, o. 200, d. 52.

murder. The report specifically excluded crimes "presently [under] consideration by the Senate," partly because their disposition had not yet been decided, and partly because they included "cases that occurred prior to the [specified] ten years." Presumably, the excluded crimes were precisely those for which the Dukhobors were about to be exiled. In other words, twenty-two months after Nicholas had ordered the exile, the Senate had still not ruled on them.

Andreevskii's reports of arson must raise the eyebrows of anyone familiar with the history of the Dukhobors in Canada, but due to the dearth of surviving court records regarding crime in neighbouring communities, it is impossible to know if this represents an unusual pattern or incidence of crime.⁷⁹ Desecrating icons was certain to attract the attention of the Orthodox state, but two incidents in ten years could hardly have warranted a wholesale exile. Harboursing runaways was the most common complaint against the Dukhobors, but again Andreevskii reports only two instances. Altogether, the total number of incidents -- an average of just 5.3 per year -- is not indicative of severe disturbances in the community. By comparison, Steven L. Hoch documents an average of 256 disciplinary actions *per year* in the 3500-person serf estate of Petrovskoe in Tambov guberniia in the same era.⁸⁰ Peasant societies are notoriously violent and crime-ridden, and it would be fatuous to claim that no murders occurred in the Molochna Dukhobor villages, but barring the discovery of the records of the investigative commission, the accusations of mass murder must be treated as groundless. Most of the murders probably never happened.

⁷⁹On arson in Canada, see Woodcock & Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 308-331.

⁸⁰Steven L. Hoch, *Serfdom and Social Control in Russia: Petrovskoe, a Village in Tambov* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 160-161.

Unfortunately, the state believed they did, basing its decision on Köppen's report, and by extension on Kolosov's description of the crimes. Kolosov implied the murders were proved beyond doubt, but in truth the accusations were so dubious that District Court Judge Sokolovskii jailed two of the main accusers in 1828. Why were accusations, so definitively dismissed in 1828, reopened in 1835? Although no clear evidence exists in this regard, likely determinants were the cholera epidemic and the Great Drought. Under such circumstances, the Dukhobors' large land holdings may have prompted jealousy among neighbours. Jews in Russia and elsewhere often found themselves singled out as scapegoats in times of crises, and the Dukhobors, as a prominent religious minority, may have suffered from a similar pattern of discrimination.⁸¹

This suggestion does not, however, explain why Köppen accepted Kolosov's version of events. One important factor was undoubtedly Cornies' implicit endorsement. As chairman-for-life of the Molochna Mennonite District's Agricultural Society and a frequent correspondent of Kiselev and other top officials, Cornies was the most powerful, trusted, and influential man in the Molochna.⁸² At the time he was unhappy over what he saw as the Dukhobors' unscrupulous interference in his program to provide merino sheep to the Nogai Tatars. In an 1836 letter to his friend Aleksandr Fadeev, who had recently left the Guardianship Committee to become Chief Guardian of the Kalmyk Horde, he expressed revulsion at the crimes described in the investigative commission's report, writing "I have

⁸¹See, e.g., Michael I. Aronson, "Geographical and Socioeconomic Factors in the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia," *Russian Review* 39:1 (January 1980), 18-31.

⁸²Cornies' political role is described in Harvey L. Dyck, "Russian Servitor and Mennonite Hero: Light and Shadow in Images of Johann Cornies," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984), 9-41. On Cornies' anger about Dukhobor dealings with the Nogai Tatars, see "Prikaz Dzhuretskomu volostnomu pravleniiu," *PJBRMLA*, file 691.

come to an end with the Dukhobors, crime upon crime, it makes your skin crawl.”⁸³ In his report to Kiselev, Köppen named Cornies as a primary informant on Dukhobor religious practices, implying that Cornies supported his conclusions. Cornies’ implied endorsement would have reassured Kiselev, and must have helped create support in the capital for Köppen’s recommendations.

Religious considerations must be given first place in any explanation for the exile, but it is not by itself an adequate explanation. After all, there is no evidence that the Molokans were subjected to similar pressures, despite the common perception they were all but identical to the Dukhobors. Kolosov’s report, so openly hostile to Dukhobors, says only that Molokans were “distinct” from their sectarian neighbours. Köppen gives a fuller description, concluding that “a significant portion of the Molokans, while not renouncing the general tenets of that sect and their mistaken attitudes towards Orthodoxy and the performance of their duties, show in their written addresses the feelings of devotion to the throne of faithful subjects, and are prepared to affirm their obligations.”⁸⁴ It is perhaps possible to discern Cornies’ influence here, too, for he held the Molokans, who were people of the Book, in higher esteem than the Dukhobors. However, there was a second important difference between the two groups. The Molokans were land-poor, and there could have been little profit in levelling accusations against them. The implication is that Kolosov stood to profit from accusations against the Dukhobors. Circumstantial evidence supports this supposition.

⁸³ Cornies to Fadeev, 28 July 1836, *PJBRMA*, file 236.

⁸⁴ Secret Section of the MVD to Vorontsov, 22 February 1838, *GAOO*, f. 1, a. 200, d.

With good land growing increasingly scarce in the Molochna, if the Dukhobors were forced to vacate theirs, someone was sure to profit. A significant result of the investigations of the 1830s was to break the Dukhobors' perpetual lease and free their 26,878 *desiatinas* of prime land for reallocation. A possible beneficiary from this was Kolosov, for although there is no record of him receiving Dukhobor land, he was in a position to influence its allocation, a potentially profitable process for anyone not averse to a little graft. There is support for this inference elsewhere. In 1841, in a petition appealing their exile, Dukhobors specifically identified Kolosov as the true source of their troubles, accusing him of "enriching himself in various oppressive ways with our money and estates."⁸⁵ Another indication the Dukhobors were subject to extortion by local officials came from a group of Dukhobor exiles en route to the Caucasus, who told German zoologist Moritz Wagner that their money "filled many an official pocket."⁸⁶ Intriguingly, in 1903 Joseph Elkinton reported a Dukhobor tradition that their exile was sparked by false accusations of a single, unidentified official angered by their refusal to meet his blackmail demands.⁸⁷ The Dukhobors' accusations are at least plausible. As *Zemskii Ispravnik* Kolosov was in a position in 1835 to institute the investigation, while his former job as Chair of the District Court would have provided direct knowledge of the cases that constituted the charges against the Dukhobors.

⁸⁵Petition from the Dukhobors to Nicholas I, 22 March 1841, *GAOO*, f. 1, o. 151, d. 77. Note that this petition refutes Aylmer Maude's argument, echoed by Woodcock & Avakumovic, that the lack of Dukhobor protests tends to confirm their guilt (Maude, *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors* [New York: Funk and Wagnells, 1904], 149; Woodcock & Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 59).

⁸⁶Quoted in Fry, *The Doukhobors*, 278.

⁸⁷Joseph Elkinton, *The Doukhobors: Their History in Russia. Their Migration to Canada* (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1903), 261-262.

The Dukhobor reference in their 1841 petition to their "estates" is particularly important, for the only Dukhobor land that figured in Kolosov's denunciation was the 26,878 *desiatinas* of leased land that brought the Dukhobors under scrutiny in 1832. Kolosov objected to the advantage Dukhobors gained over neighbouring "land poor" Orthodox state peasants by renting the large tract, and also to their paying only an "insignificant price" for it.⁸⁸ His concerns were echoed by Köppen, who observed that similar land brought lease payments of as much as a ruble per *desiatina*.⁸⁹ In 1838 the confiscation of this "excess land" figured prominently in the Ministry of Internal Affairs' recommendations for dealing with the Dukhobors,⁹⁰ and in 1842, in rejecting a Dukhobor plea to maintain control of the land, an official in the Ministry of State Domains concluded that "in as much as the land is extremely good and contains everything needed for new settlers, and considering that the treasury can realise from it an incomparably greater return, while it now receives only a token payment of twenty *kopecks* per *desiatina* . . . I recommend that it be returned to the treasury, particularly in view of the fact that the Dukhobors have in no way earned such kindness from the state."⁹¹

It is plausible, then, that Kolosov manipulated the state for personal gain. It still needs to be explained why the state might have been open to manipulation. In part, the answer lies in the shift in state policy after Alexander I's death in 1825. Almost immediately after his ascension, Nicholas I introduced sharply reactionary policies toward sectarians. An

⁸⁸Kolosov, "Sekretnaia zapiska," 87ob.

⁸⁹Köppen, "O raskol'nikakh," 44ob.

⁹⁰"Zapiska zakliuchaiushchaia v sebia predpolozheniia o merakh v otnoshenii Malakanov i Dukhobortsov Tavricheskoi gubernii," 22 February 1838, *GAOO*, f. 1, a. 200, d. 52.

⁹¹Ministry of State Domains to Inzov, 3 February 1842, *GAOO*, f. 1, a. 152, d. 16.

important objective of his "Official Nationality," with its tenets of "Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality," was to reaffirm the commonality of goals of church and state.⁹² This rather amorphous principle could have had little focused expression at regional levels, for the inefficiency of tsarist administration in peripheral regions is legendary. Still, the general tenor of Nicholas' policies must have made the Dukhobors an obvious target for regional officials, for the sectarians could no longer expect support from St. Petersburg. On 20 October 1830, Nicholas issued a decree directed at "Dukhobors, Ikonobors, Molokans, Judaizers and others recognised as particularly pernicious heresies."⁹³ Its first clause reflects a sharp turn in Dukhobor affairs, ordering that "all dissenters . . . accused of spreading their heresies and attracting others to them, [and] also [accused of] temptation, unruliness and insolence against the church and the clergy of the Orthodox faith are to be handed over to the courts." The cholera riots of 1830 and 1831 must have further poisoned state attitudes toward Dukhobors, for the riots had scared Nicholas, making him particularly sensitive to any hint of popular unrest.⁹⁴ Although the Molochna Dukhobors, who had acquired a reputation for peaceful prosperity during Alexander's reign, avoided any repercussions until 1835, the decision to exile them must be seen within the context of such policies.

If Nicholas' reactionary policies worked against the Dukhobors, oddly enough so did his peasant reforms. With the state seriously considering reducing land allotments of state peasants from fifteen *desiatinas* per male soul to eight, it is not surprising the large

⁹²Official Nationality was not officially proclaimed until 2 April 1833, but the attitudes underlying it date from the start of Nicholas' reign. The standard account is Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

⁹³VPSZ, 5:4010.

⁹⁴McGrew, *Russia and the Cholera*, 127-128.

Dukhobor allotments attracted attention.⁹⁵ While this may not have been enough to make the state's representatives accept open lies about Dukhobor crimes, it was surely motivation not to question well-phrased exaggerations when the opportunity arose to break the Dukhobor lease.

Unfortunately for the Dukhobors, the state accepted the accusations of Kolosov and others. The 26 January 1841 proclamation of exile reads:

All your crimes have been discovered, and the innocent blood which you have shed calls down upon your heads the rigours of the law. By your actions you have rendered yourselves unworthy of the indulgence and pardon which were granted to you by his Majesty, and you have exhausted the patience of the authorities, who are in the end convinced that you should be transferred into distant regions where you will no longer be injurious to your fellow men.⁹⁶

The Dukhobors did not go without complaint. In March 1841 they petitioned the state, describing their fate in pathetic terms:

We unfortunate 4,000 souls, torn from our homes and the land which we, over dozens of years and with great difficulty obtained, and spilling tears in comprehension of our fate, must set out on a journey, a long journey, and settle in a barren climate on infertile land, impoverished, brought almost to the sacrifice of our lives, comforted only by the knowledge that we are guiltless.⁹⁷

In the petition they asked permission to stay in the Molochna, but adamantly refused to abandon their religious convictions. A second petition, from the group designated for exile without appeal, asked only that the exile be delayed by a year so they could obtain fair prices for the belongings they could not take with them.⁹⁸ A third petition,

⁹⁵First Department of the Ministry of State Domains to Kiselev, 31 May 1843, *RGLA*, f. 383, a. 1, d. 190.

⁹⁶Quoted in Woodcock & Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 59.

⁹⁷Dukhobor elders to Nicholas I, 22 March 1841, *G400*, f. 1, a. 151, d. 77.

⁹⁸Dukhobor elders to Nicholas I, 1841, *G400*, f. 1, a. 151, d. 77.

turning to the question of property, asked that the Dukhobors be allowed to retain control of their 26,878 *desiatinas* of leased land, presumably by subletting it.⁹⁹ All were refused.

As for the final benefactors in the reallocation process, most Dukhobor land went to land-short Orthodox peasants. The Molokans, whose need for land had instigated the affair, also benefited. In 1842 they were granted enough Dukhobor land to bring their total holdings to fifteen *desiatinas* per male soul.¹⁰⁰ This did not completely satisfy the Molokans, for roughly 1,200 of them asked for and received permission to join the Dukhobor trek to the Caucasus.¹⁰¹ Such permission was given only grudgingly, for there were suspicions in some quarters that the Molokans were simply trying to avoid tax arrears that had built up during the crop failures of 1839.¹⁰² Those who remained in the Molochna after 1845 no longer held the state's attention. For the most part, the governor of Tavride guberniia contented himself with one or two sentences in annual reports to St. Petersburg, reassuring the capital that the local sectarians were an exemplary lot, farming their fields, tending their gardens, and keeping their religious views to themselves.¹⁰³

The single largest benefactors of the exile were Johann Cornies and his brother David. In 1845, 4,039 *desiatinas* of the land taken from the Dukhobors passed into their

⁹⁹Ministry of State Domains to Inzov, 3 February 1842, *GAOO*, *f.* 1, *a.* 152, *d.* 16.

¹⁰⁰Ministry of State Domains, Department of Agriculture, Tavride Province to Ministry of State Domains, First Department, St. Petersburg, 14 April 1842, *RGLA* *f.* 383, *a.* 1, *d.* 234.

¹⁰¹The precise number who emigrated is unclear, but between 1842 and 1845 the number of Molokans in the Molochna dropped by 1221, from 2961 to 1740. See "Otchetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov," 1842, *RGLA*, *fond* 1281, *opis* 4, *delo* 73a-1843; "Otchetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov," 1845, *RGLA*, *fond* 1281, *opis* 4, *delo* 69a-1846.

¹⁰²"Po pros'ba Molokan Melitopol'skago Uezda seleniia Astrakhanki . . . o dozvoleniim pereseli'siia zakavkaz," 1841, *RGLA*, *f.* 1284, *a.* 199, *d.* 74.

¹⁰³See, e.g., "Otchetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov . . . za 1847," *RGLA*, *f.* 1281, *a.* 4, *d.* 35a.

hands. The lease price was the same, low, original twenty *kopecks* per *desiatina* per year.¹⁰⁴

There is no small irony that the Cornies brothers received land that was taken away from the Dukhobors in part due to religion, in part because it exceeded the standard state peasant allotment, and in part because the twenty *kopeck* per *desiatina* lease payment was only "token." After all, Johann and David were also not Orthodox, and were themselves state peasants. Of course, the Cornies brothers were peasants in name only. Johann, the most powerful man in the Molochna, had hosted both Alexander I and Nicholas I in his home, and as chair-for-life of the Agricultural Society acted as the Ministry of State Domains' main representative in the area. No doubt he had "earned such kindness" from the state.¹⁰⁵

This account of the Dukhobor exile is of interest on many levels. Most basically, it disputes the accuracy of published accounts of the sect by refuting the charges of mass murder that have been levelled against them and concomitant assumptions about strife and disruptions in their community. Even Woodcock and Avakumovic, who are at once judicious and sympathetic toward the Dukhobors, are constrained to conclude that "it is not impossible that at one moment in their history the Dukhobors, isolated at [the Molochna River] like the Anabaptists in Münster, should have found the sense of their divine mission becoming so demanding that destruction did not seem too bad a fate for the heretical."¹⁰⁶ The violence of the alleged crimes has always stood at odds with the Dukhobors' self-proclaimed belief in the in-dwelling spirit of God and consequently in pacifism, and thus it

¹⁰⁴The terms of the original lease are mentioned in correspondence regarding David Cornies' request to renew it in 1861. See Ministry of State Domains to Governor General of Novorossiia, 24 June 1861, *GAOO*, f. 1, o. 81, d. 90.

¹⁰⁵See footnote 91.

¹⁰⁶Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Donkhobors*, 59.

has raised doubts about the consistency of those beliefs. It has also stood at odds with what is known about their behaviour generally in this time. With evidence of the murders refuted, what remains are accounts of a prosperous and uncommonly unified religious community, victimised by religious persecution, not victimiser.

The Dukhobor story also reflects the Russian state's broader policy toward religious dissent. The standard account emphasises Alexander I's benevolence and Nicholas I's reactionary conservatism. Richard Crummey, in his study of the Vyg community of Old Believers, writes that Nicholas "was often inconsistent and more frequently exhibited inflexibility, insensitivity, and heavy-handed good intentions than malice or deliberate cruelty."¹⁰⁷ Nicholas' inconsistency is evident in the Dukhobor case. They were a target of opportunity, singled out almost by accident by Köppen as he conducted a survey primarily concerned with finding land for state peasants from interior guberniias. However, the exile of the Dukhobors was manifestly cruel, and even malicious, showing a patently cynical willingness to employ criminal accusations to force conversion. There was nothing subtle about this. It was not the crimes but the opportunity to convert the Dukhobors that caught Köppen's attention, and in all subsequent correspondence, this manipulation was openly acknowledged. Yet, curiously, the real objective, conversion, always remained dependent on the criminal accusations. By comparison, the Molokans were never subjected to similar pressures, because, although the state considered them close relatives of the Dukhobors, there were no criminal accusations, and hence there was no opportunity to force their

¹⁰⁷Robert Crummey, *The Old Believers and the World of Antichrist: The Vyg Community and the Russian State 1694-1855* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 202. For a different assessment of the application of Crummey's conclusions to the Dukhobor case, see Fry, "The Doukhobors," 200-201.

conversion. There is an implication here that even the reactionary Nicholas was concerned about public reaction to blatantly unjust religious persecution, and so required a less controversial justification for his actions.

Beyond the treatment of dissidents by the state, and of more direct importance for the present study, the Dukhobor affair also sheds light on centre-periphery relations in Imperial Russia. Sociologists who study centre-periphery relations sometimes make a useful distinction between peripheries, as areas fully subordinated to the centre, and frontiers, as “areas of growth in ‘virgin’ territory.”¹⁰⁸ The Ministry of State Domains’ expectation that land would be available for settlement in the Molochna was based on a perception of New Russia as frontier in this sense. The Dukhobor story shows that this was not the case. Land leased to the Dukhobors in perpetuity for just twenty *kopecks* per *desiatina* in 1824 had by 1837 appreciated by a factor of five, a clear indication that good land was becoming increasingly scarce.

On the other hand, “periphery,” with its connotation of political subordination, is also a problematic label for the Molochna. A defining characteristic of Imperial Russia’s administrative system was the inability of the centre to effectively administer outlying regions. In the Molochna, local officials had been aware of land shortages since at least 1832, when Molokans requested more land, but clearly the same knowledge did not exist in St. Petersburg. The gap between the reality of Molochna conditions and the knowledge of central policy makers formed an important barrier to effective central control.

¹⁰⁸Raimondo Strassoldo, “Centre-Periphery and System-Boundary: Culturological Perspectives,” in Jean Goffman, ed., *Centre and Periphery: Spatial Variation in Politics*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), 50.

Kolosov preyed on this gap between regional reality and central knowledge. Setting aside the human tragedy of the Dukhobor affair, this is probably the most important lesson it has to offer. This obscure regional official was able to bring the full weight of the autocratic state down upon the Dukhobors with a few carefully worded and grossly exaggerated charges. This is an important refinement to existing interpretations of centre-periphery relations, for Kolosov's report could not have affected the Dukhobors if the state were not in a position to exercise its power. This was not a case of a lack of central power, but of its misdirection. A critical element leading to the exile was Köppen's arrival in the region, for as representative of a state intent upon reasserting power over its peasants, Köppen provided Kolosov a channel into the centre. In a classic example of the tail wagging the dog, the regional official directed the power of the centre to his own ends.

By the 1830s, then, the Molochna was neither frontier nor periphery. In fact, what happened to the Dukhobors is best understood as part of a transition from frontier to periphery. Köppen, a prime example of the men W. Bruce Lincoln terms "enlightened bureaucrats," came to the Molochna to conduct a survey in preparation for the reform of the state peasantry.¹⁰⁹ Reform was by definition an assertion of control, and the attempt to bring the Dukhobors into conformity with the majority of Russian state peasants, both by converting them to Orthodoxy and by reducing their land holdings to the state peasant norm, was part of the process of asserting this control. On the other hand, the fraud that justified the exile was only possible because of the state's ignorance, a product of its lack of full control in the transitional period.

¹⁰⁹Lincoln, *In The Vanguard of Reform*, xiv.

By the 1830s, all Molochna settlers faced the need to renegotiate their relationship with the central state. Dukhobors, confronted by both religious prejudice and jealousy because of their large land holdings, could not defend themselves against the abuse of power, and consequently were exiled. The ways other settlers dealt with the need to defend their land holdings against central demands as well as internal demands, is taken up more fully in chapters five and six.