



Viktor Shnirel'man. 2017. "Kolenno Danovo". *Eskhatologiya i antisemitizm v sovremennoi Rossii* ["The Tribe of Dan." *Eschatology and Antisemitism in Modern Russia*]. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo BBI (in Russian). — 631 p.

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Viktor Alexandrovich Shnirel'man has released another *magnum opus* distinguished by its fine methodology and meticulous research. This huge volume explores several key aspects of contemporary Russian culture by using Post-Soviet "modernity" as a mirror to examine Judeo-Christian religious memory in *fin-de siècle* Russia. The author draws links between several modern phenomena: Christian eschatology as a theological tradition and cultural practice; the folklore and urban apocalypticism of Russia's turbulent twentieth century; Judeophobia (and concurrent Judeophilia) as religious and ethno-national narrative archetype; pre- and post-Soviet anti-Westernism, anti-liberalism, and anti-globalism; and Russia's ultra-right, nationalist subculture. Shnirel'man draws intuitive connections between all these phenomena and examines how they manifested in pre- and post-Soviet

Russia. Readers will be in awe of the sheer amount of material that Shnirel'man has processed. His deep textual readings and nuanced ethnographic approach provide a deep immersion into revolutionary and post-Soviet Russia, in particular their texts and actors.

Before moving to Shnirel'man's main conclusions, it is useful to explore the content and structure of the work. The first-fifth of the work is devoted to a historical overview through the late imperial period, in which the author describes deep-seated anti-Judaism in Christian, and in particular Orthodox, eschatology. He not only analyzes stereotypically anti-Semitic theologians, but also deeper-seated Judeophobic reflections by Sergei Bulgakov and Vasily Rozanov; by Judeophile thinkers from Vladimir Solovyov to Nikolai Berdiaev; and by Orthodox writers and publicists, led by the notorious Sergei Nilus. The

work explores *fin-de siècle* anti-Semitism within the context of the unfolding revolutionary situation, paying particular attention to key concepts, such as the apocalypse and the millennium; the Antichrist and the *katechon* (a monarch or a nation “withholding” the arrival of the Antichrist); and the trope of *peccatorum Iudaeorum*, the sin of the Jews, which was intensified by racial, nationalist and anti-global sentiment, and ultimately manifested the “Jewish (Judeo-Masonic) conspiracy.” The next sections, devoted to the Soviet period, are much scarcer. The author demonstrates that while there was a near absence of theological debate in the USSR, the continuation of pre-revolutionary anti-Semitic traditions can be observed in émigré theology. Shnirel’man then unpacks the main themes of the book: the general cultural framework of post-Soviet apocalypticism; the revival and reissuing of the texts of Sergei Nilus and other anti-Semitic authors; the rise of apocalyptic anti-Semitism in the ultra-right (nationalist and patriotic) post-Soviet press and literature; the Church’s Orthodox eschatology of the recent decades; and the mass panics that accompanied individualized tax numbers and other similar conspiracies. Shnirel’man also includes a chapter on similar phenomena “outside the Church” —

in new religious movements, such as the “White Brotherhood,” the “Center of the Theotocos,” and the “Church of the Last Testament.” Finally, he adds a short comparative chapter on American millenarianism, which the author calls “eschatological optimism,” characterized by its fundamentally different, positive attitude towards Jews and Israel.

Many of the work’s limitations are the inevitable result of its multi-layered complexity and scope. The last chapters in particular are structurally disjointed (e.g. the position of the Orthodox hierarchy is highlighted after the non-Orthodox movements; the chapter on the murder of the Optina Hermitage elders is not sufficiently integrated; and the chapter on American millenarianism, despite its comparative relevance, seems a bit superficial, etc. . .). The plethora of names and publications are also difficult to keep track of, particularly since they often appear, then disappear, and after a few pages resurface yet again. The abundance of quotations, sometimes in endless sequence, also make the argument difficult to perceive. All of these issues, as well as the structural ones mentioned above, could be referred to as shortcomings that are a result of the work’s merits. The author is “overwhelmed” by his material, making its systematization and

integration into a core argument extremely difficult, and rendering the work hard to grasp and follow, especially as it discusses contemporary anti-Semitism, unfolding in “real time.” These critiques aside, the richness of the work and its overall design are unquestionable. In addition, the desire to challenge the work and ask new questions of it are themselves a productive component of the scholarly process.

The work makes several important contributions. Shnirel'man's ultimate task is to show the connection between Christian eschatology and Judeophobia (anti-Semitism) and to demonstrate how they influenced each other. Such an interpretation may be inescapable since the author proceeds from two primary postulates: firstly, that the apocalyptic (catastrophic) eschatology is characteristic of the “Christian perspective” on history, and secondly, that behind the idea of anti-Judaism rests “the sin of the Jews,” a concept which became central to the apocalypse, linking the image of the Antichrist to the “tribe of Dan.” Although such a scheme dominates in the book, the author avoids conclusions that are overly direct to maintain a sense of ambiguity. It must also be understood that the “Christian perspective of history” is quite a broad concept, which may not include anti-Judaism. Moreover, this perspective,

although in essence eschatological, is not necessarily catastrophic, and interest in the apocalypse *per se* was, on the whole, quite marginal. The author recalls the Russian Church Council of 1917-1918, which, despite the unfolding catastrophe, in the days when Vasily Rozanov was writing his “Apocalypse of Our Time,” deliberately opposed excessive catastrophism (p. 16). Both before and after the Revolution, in the Russian Orthodoxy and in the Western Christian tradition, the expectation of the Antichrist and its connection to the Jews manifested fleetingly, in moments of particular social tension, but in general Christian eschatological thought and liturgical routine proceeded without these two elements.

What is certain, as Shnirel'man notes, is that, whereas interest in apocalyptic (catastrophic) eschatology and the Antichrist in the West has steadily declined (with nineteenth-century American millenarianism as a potential exception), in Russia, from the seventeenth-century Schism to the Revolution, popular cultural myths retained the figure of the Antichrist, the fears associated with it, and the prophecies connected to a sort of applied eschatology of conspiracy. But interest in these subjects erupted only periodically, in times of deep cultural fracture. Russia experienced such a disruption at the end of

the twentieth century, but that too gradually died down by the end of 2000s. As post-Soviet uncertainty quieted and mass anxiety subsided, theological discourse softened (p. 41). Shnirel'man demonstrates that by 2005 the All Church conference on "The Eschatological Teaching of the Church," was clearly oriented towards the expectation of Christ, not the Antichrist (p. 141). The same applies to the "tribe of Dan." Attention to it has decreased in the twenty-first century and has been accompanied by a decline in sociologically recorded anti-Semitism. Interest in the "tribe" was low in the nineteenth century as well, even among such passionate theologians as the Optina and Athos elders; the Professor of the Spiritual Academy, Alexander Beliaev; and the Archimandrite Theodore (Bukharev), the originator of the idea of the Russian tsar as a *katechon*.

Shnirel'man also tracks the shifts from theological discourse to racial ideology and from Christian anti-Judaism to anti-Semitism. Racialized, ethnic anti-Semitism was a new, nineteenth-century phenomenon with deep roots in European nationalism. This ideology originated in Europe and was imported to Russia (as Shnirel'man shows, from France), where it found fertile soil among popular ideas about the Orthodox apocalyptic. Sergei Ni-

lus linked this Orthodox apocalyptic with new anti-Jewish phobias, connecting the image of the Antichrist and the Jew to suspicions of a worldwide "Jewish-Masonic conspiracy." In Nilus' *Protocols*, "the Elders of Zion" were to become both the future army of the Antichrist and the leaders of world government. It is also interesting to note that Nilus used Solovyov's Judeophilic constructions, with the emphases and value judgements inverted, deepening ties between Judeophilia and Judeophobia. (The *fin-de siècle* journalist, Vasily Rozanov, demonstrated this seeming contradiction in one person!).

After the *Protocols*, Orthodox literature — both semi-anonymous popular literature and academic-theological works — was filled with anti-Semitic discourse, which reached a fanatical exaltation in the revolutionary era as the process of Jewish emancipation proceeded. For many Christian observers in exile, the Revolution itself became the best proof of the prophecy. The Bolsheviks, as Shnirel'man stresses, were not only associated with the "Mongol hordes" (p. 89), but also with the Jews. This dramatic change in Jewish destinies and its prominent place in the eschatological discourse deserves more attention.

In the post-Soviet period, the sinister concoction of apocalyptic theology and anti-Semitism

proliferated once again, recalling the atmosphere of a century earlier. Shnirel'man focuses on this very mixture, and with the meticulousness of a true social entomologist examines a corpus of materials from wide-ranging collection. He lists, for example, all the publishers that reissued Nilus and explores anti-Semitism in lesser-known periodicals and works from those such as Konstantin Dushe-nov, Alexander Shargunov, Alexander Dugin, and other relatively unknown or even anonymous authors. Shnirel'man repeatedly emphasizes that there was little unanimity among these writers, however, one trend emerges. When reviewing anti-Semitic conspiracies, the authors introduce different versions and interpretations to invite readers to make their own choice — a rhetorical technique employed to maintain authorial impartiality while capitalizing on the expected anti-Semitic instincts of the audience.

The main question that arises from these post-Soviet cases is to what extent they are representative or marginal. The size and breadth of the book certainly forces the reader to take this phenomenon seriously, but it is paramount to remember that post-Soviet *glasnost* made what was previously beyond the pale fair game and launched an unprecedented increase in publications, surpassing even that of the ear-

ly 1900s. Amidst this tidal wave of publications, prophecies about the end of the world and suggestions of Jewish malevolence may be marginal. The same applies to apocalyptic praxis and the Orthodox elders behind them, resistance to the introduction of individualized tax numbers (presumably containing the “number of the beast”), and the rise of right-wing radical groups. The most important methodological task is thus to maintain proportionality and to be wary of exaggeration or highlighting atypical cases. This, in turn, leads to several other theoretical issues, the social constructive role of myths, the cognitive expectation of stereotypes, and the assumption that while popular lore may be “dormant,” it remains potentially significant and volatile. To put it simply, is it by chance that in the year of the centenary of the murder of the royal family (2018), the myth of “ritual murder” revived?

Another important conclusion is the idea that the Russian apocalyptic (or millenarianism) was not only anti-Semitic, but also anti-Western, and that this is perhaps an even a stronger current in Russian Orthodox thought.¹

1. For a recent work on anti-Western sentiments in Eastern Orthodoxy, see G. Demacopoulos and A. Papanikolaou, eds. *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

While this was the case in the nineteenth century, in the early twentieth century, anti-Semitism was an arguably stronger current. The latter half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century pose the biggest problem for this argument because as the global hegemony of the liberal West deteriorated, so too did anti-Westernism. It is also important to note that in some circumstances this anti-Westernism provoked anti-Semitism or could be manipulated to encourage it if desired; most often, however, the two remained separate as the author demonstrates even though it detracts from his principal argument.

With this work, Shnirel'man completes his trilogy, the first two parts of which were devoted to the "Khazar myth" and the "Aryan myth" in Russian culture.² All three studies are connected by one main theme — anti-Semitism. For the most part, the works discuss ideological, discursive practices and although they occasionally address popular, im-

plicit, and often unarticulated anti-Semitism, such subjects are explored in much less detail.

Anti-Semitism — whether popular or eschatological — is an awkward topic for academic research. On the one hand, there are norms that compel scholars to go beyond the scope of academic studies and to cast anti-Semitism as an absolute evil — the most concentrated form of xenophobia. On the other hand, academic ethos requires objectivity, balance, and caution so as not to replace scrutiny and impartiality with emotional impulse. In general, Shnirel'man proceeds with caution and removes charges from his subjects in cases where anti-Semitism is only intuitively expected, but not proven. His restraint when presenting dubious constructions and the occasionally outlandish conspiracies of his characters compels him to use the word "allegedly" 566 times in the book (almost on every page) to question the veracity of their statements and claims. He does not, however, hide his antipathy towards his subjects or their deplorable words. From time to time, the text erupts with ironic exclamations ("oh, how terrible!" — he adds in parentheses, when quoting an anti-Semitic passage, and on another occasion he writes that an author is "possessed" with the idea of "Orthodox globalization" opposed to the "corrupted West.") Though

2. V. Shnirel'man, *Khazarskii mif. Evoliutsiia politicheskogo radikalizma v Rossii i ee istoki* [The Khazar Myth. Evolution of Political Radicalism in Russia and its Origins] (Jerusalem: Mosty kul'tury, 2012); V. Shnirel'man, *Ariiskii mif v sovremennom mire. Evoliutsii ariiskogo mifa k Rossii* [Aryan Myth in the Modern World. The Evolution of the Aryan Myth to Russia] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015).

Shnirel'man is cautious, he does not seek to pass for an unbiased observer, a stance which I support unambiguously! While the author acknowledges the general decline in open, public anti-Semitism in Russia in this century, he is absolutely correct, when he reiterates that public opinion is "as unstable as the weather"; that implicit anti-Semitism persists; that new forms of xenophobia, such as the rejection of the Western and liberal tradition, which political propaganda often support, are no

better; and that the Russian ultra-right, sometimes conjoining with Orthodox alarmism, while currently constrained by the authoritarian control of the state, could, at any moment, exploit events to find fertile ground among both political elites and the general public. As long as these dangers persist, the importance of this book goes well beyond its undeniable academic merits.

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