



## **Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program**

### **Research Report**

*The opinions, recommendations, and conclusions of the grantee are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IREX or the US Department of State.*

**Isaiah J. Gruber**  
**IARO 2001-2002**  
**Russia**

#### **The Russian Orthodox Church during the Time of Troubles in the Early Seventeenth Century**

##### **I. Topic of Research**

My IREX grant funded Ph.D. dissertation research on the following topic: "The Russian Orthodox Church during the Time of Troubles, 1598-1613". The Time of Troubles (*Smutnoe vremya*) received its rather cheerless name as a result of the convergence of a wide variety of disasters – including famine, civil war, succession crises, foreign invasion, and governmental breakdown – which beset the Russian state in the early seventeenth century. This tragic period made a deep impression on the Russian consciousness, as is evidenced, for example, by its numerous representations in literature and art. In fact, the later years of Revolution and Civil War (1917-1920s) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991-present) have themselves sometimes been viewed as second and third "times of troubles", respectively.

Throughout early and medieval Russian history, the Orthodox Church played an immense role in shaping society. The dissertation covers not only religion and culture, but also economics, politics, the military, and the penal system. In this way, a study of the Church proves to shed light on nearly every aspect of Russian life during the Time of Troubles. In addition, since "the Church" is a generic title for the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the approximately one thousand

monasteries, and countless local parishes, this research provides the opportunity for multiple perspectives and thus a much fuller picture of the country as a whole. The permeation of Church institutions in nearly every sphere and region is certainly one reason why it emerged, in the absence of governmental authority, as the principal force directing the nation.

## **II. Relevance and Contribution to Field**

As outlined in my proposal, the relevant historiography consists primarily of works devoted to the history of the Russian Orthodox Church (e.g., Makarii) and works devoted to the Time of Troubles (e.g., Platonov). It is by focusing on the intersection of these two topics that the dissertation makes a positive and much-needed contribution to the literature. It is in fact surprising that there is not yet a wealth of studies on the Russian Orthodox Church during the Time of Troubles, since both the institution and the period are generally acknowledged to be of monumental importance in Russian history. Russian and North American scholars in the field of Russian history have expressed to me their opinion that the subject is well chosen. Upon hearing about my research, a pair of university professors in Russia remarked that they had often wondered when someone would finally do this particular topic.

Aside from the project's intrinsic value, it also provides many opportunities for reflection on broader themes of Russian and world history. Looking backward, the Time of Troubles is closely linked to the earlier history of church-state relations and Christianity in Russia. Looking forward, it represents the beginning of the Romanov era, which lasted for more than three centuries, until the Revolutions of 1917. Historians often assign responsibility for major changes in mentality and social structure to the Time of Troubles; one goal of the dissertation is to evaluate such claims in light of evidence from the period itself.

## **III. Summary of Approach and Research Methodology; Research Sites**

For the most part, the approach and methodology I have employed are familiar to all historians – the gathering and examination of sources from the time period, as well as the consideration of later interpretations. I have sought always to understand the worldview of the authors of such documents, as well as the origins and antecedents of their thinking. Following the injunction of Marc Bloch, "*Torturez les documents!*" I have found that a source often gives more information than simply what it "says". This is particularly important for studying the earlier part of Russian history, for which the sources are less numerous and less varied than for the modern period. For example, the Russian scholar Olga Kosheleva used the medieval equivalent of "sympathy cards" – letters to relatives of the deceased – to elucidate popular attitudes toward death and grieving, as well as the differences resulting from character, social standing, and other factors.

The main location for my research was the *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov* (RGADA), or “Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts”, located in Moscow. Most of the documents I perused there had been gathered previously from the archives of individual monasteries. These papers included receipts for economic transactions, land grants, and tax exemptions; religious books; rental agreements; and the records of a variety of other affairs. A *vkladnaya kniga* or “donations book” of the Iosifo-Volokolamskii Monastery suggested several ideas concerning popular piety during the Time of Troubles.

My library research in Moscow took place at the “Historical Library” or *Istoricheskaya biblioteka*; and to a lesser extent, at the Lenin Library, which was under renovation. Among other topics, I was able to gather information on all monasteries known to exist during the Time of Troubles; to read published documents that, in some cases, are no longer extant; and to consult lesser-known Russian historiography of the period. At bookshops in Moscow I found some materials not commonly available in the U.S., such as specialized reference literature on Russian monasteries and churches. In St. Petersburg, I consulted additional unpublished primary sources held by the Russian National Library. I also visited the Museum of Religion and Culture, which is known to have a rich collection of manuscripts; however, the archive itself is temporarily unavailable. Inquiries indicated that the museum’s holdings relevant to the Time of Troubles period are quite scanty and mainly take the form of copies made at a later date.

#### **IV. Summary of Research Findings and Preliminary Conclusions**

The vast majority of relevant documents turned out to be of an economic character, and so the dissertation will necessarily outline the economic activity of Church institutions in some detail. Figures on income and expense, prices, wages, taxes, rents, and other economic matters can be compared to previous, non-Church studies (e.g., Hellie) and to contemporary accounts. Since the reliability of the several narratives written by foreigners in Russia during the Time of Troubles has been challenged, these figures may even help to evaluate the relative accuracy of such accounts. The primary sources furnish ample evidence for discussion of the vast landholdings of the monasteries and hierarchy – a common theme in historiography – and also their extremely prominent role in trade, which is not nearly so well known. A combination of primary and secondary source evidence shows that the Church’s geographical expansion in the period leading up to the Time of Troubles was oriented largely toward the north and northeast of European Russia, an area rich in resources. Meanwhile, peasants pressed by the regulations of serfdom fled in increasing numbers to the south and southwest, where most of the rebellions and uprisings of the Time of Troubles originated. This suggests the preliminary hypothesis that the Church’s economic interest may have contributed to the loss of authority in certain regions and thus to the Troubles themselves.

The many monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church were among the hardest-hit by the catastrophes of the period. Several important sieges, such as that of the Troitskii-Sergiev Monastery, are well known in historiography; my dissertation will also describe the damage or destruction of numerous smaller monasteries, which served as local fortresses. Many key events of the Troubles, including the saving of a young Mikhail Romanov from assassination, are linked to monasteries. Monasterial documents include many other incidents of note, from robberies to prayers, that convey *l'esprit du temps* in a most striking manner. The recovery of the country from this disastrous period also has much to do with the relationship between monasteries and the state; and throughout the period monasteries served as prisons for heads of state, heads of church, and all others who fell out of disfavor in the rapidly changing political environment.

This report is too brief to detail other findings and hypotheses regarding the relationship between tsar and patriarch, an important theme to which I hope the dissertation will make some modest contribution; the role of religious ideology and inherited cultural concepts, as well as the roots of the concepts themselves; and the nature of Russian society as a whole. One more point deserves mention, however. Despite the political, economic, social, military, and (arguably) cultural crises of the Time of Troubles, the ecclesiastical crisis, which could have occurred then, seems to have been postponed to the middle of the seventeenth century, the time of the great *Raskol* or Church Schism. Had the ecclesiastical crisis coincided with all the others, one may well ask whether the Russian state would have survived in a recognizable form. Thus the history of Russia and the history of Russia's Church are shown to be deeply and inseparably conjoined.

## **V. Suggestions for Future Research Agendas**

A related topic that interests me personally concerns the formation of Russian literary culture, which was inherently religious, and the role played in this culture by transformed Hebrew and Biblical concepts. In addition, there is certainly room for further research on the Church and the Russian economy over the period of several centuries. Finally, juxtaposing Russian history to other national histories has the potential to enhance our understanding of such broad themes as Christianity, colonization, and "imperial" or quasi-imperial expansion – including the consequent interaction with other ethnic groups.

## **VI. Recommendations for the U.S. Policy Community**

The political importance of the Orthodox Church in Russian history is very clear. In post-Soviet times, the Church has been seeking to regain this influence, as is evident from items appearing in the Russian press on almost a daily basis. The U.S. policy community would do well to follow this development and to attempt to

determine the impact it might have on the domestic and foreign policies of the Russian Federation.