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# СЕРГИЙ РАДОНЕЖСКИЙ И РОССИЙСКАЯ РЕЛИГИОЗНОСТЬ

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## SERGIY RADONEZHISKY. RUSSIAN PATH TO SOLIDARITY

The article analyzes the ideological and religious originality of Sergiy Radonezhsky and the impact of his activity on social and political life of Russia at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Radonezhsky's involvement in monastery reform, as well as his role in the introduction of the cult of Trinity, a novelty cult for Russia, are scrutinized in detail. The paper shows that these measures were in fact carried out consciously by the Trinity father superior who had in mind the consolidation of the Russian nation in anticipation of the upcoming events to overthrow the foreign subjugation. The two main periods of Radonezhsky's church and public service are explored in the article: 1) Sergiy's participation in social and political life as a representative of the “national” church party and 2) his acceptance of spiritual leadership amidst the difficulties of the Church crisis caused by the struggle for the vacant chair of the primate after the death of Metropolitan Alexius. Also mentioned are the arguments that allow Sergiy to be hailed as the spiritual leader of the nation on the eve of the Battle of Kulikovo. It is concluded that Sergiy's contemporaries deservedly distinguished him as a significant figure of the epoch of change, and the skepticism present in some historiographical works lacks solid foundation. It was Sergiy Radonezhsky who most audibly expressed the aspirations of the Russian spirit, when destruction, savagery and shock caused by foreign enthrallment, were replaced by the gathering of forces, marching hand in hand with the processes of centralization.

Keywords: Ancient Rus, Sergiy Radonezhsky, Battle of Kulikovo, monastery reform, Trinity cult.

Анализируется идейно-религиозное своеобразие деятельности Сергия Радонежского и его влияние на общественно-политическую жизнь страны в конце XIV в. Детально рассматривается причастность подвижника к осуществлению монастырской реформы и введению нового для страны культа Троицы. В статье показано, что эти мероприятия осознанно проводились троицким игуменом с целью сплочения этноса в преддверии назревавших событий свержения иноземного ига. Сравниваются два этапа церковного и общественного служения: 1) участие Сергия в общественно-политической жизни как представителя «национальной» церковной партии; 2) выход на позиции духовного лидера в труднейшей ситуации церковного кризиса, вызванного борьбой за пустовавшую

после смерти митрополита Алексия кафедру первосвященника. Приводятся соображения, которые позволяют назвать Сергия духовным вождем нации в канун Куликовской битвы. Делается вывод, что ближайшие современники Сергия заслуженно выделяли его как знаковую личность эпохи перемен, а высказываемый в историографии скепсис по этому поводу не имеет под собой прочных оснований. Именно Сергий Радонежский наиболее четко выразил устремления русского духа, когда разорение, одичание и шок, вызванные иностранным поработением, начали сменяться собиранием сил, шедшим рука об руку с процессами централизации.

Ключевые слова: Древняя Русь, Сергий Радонежский, Куликовская битва, общественно-политическая деятельность подвижника, идейно-религиозная ситуация в стране, монастырская реформа, культ Троицы.

The Ancient Russian Chronicle described Sergiy Radonezhsky as “The teacher and the mentor of the Russian Land” [ПСРЛ, стб. 165]. This high evaluation of the works and the influence upon contemporaries of this simple 14<sup>th</sup>-century monk, who was far from being noble or highly positioned, is an exceptional occurrence for the Russian Middle Ages. The crucial role of Sergiy in Russian statehood can be elucidated by the fact that Trinity Monastery, founded by him, became a major national religious center and a place for the pilgrimages of Russian rulers in subsequent times. This fact not only underscores the importance of examining Sergiy’s religious ideas, but also the political significance of his activities. Many existing versions of Sergiy’s ‘Life’ served the biases of a particular historical period; as a result, the true features of his personality were changed by multiple editors and substituted for hagiographic stereotypes.

Questions separate from his religious activities have been considered fruitless by many researchers who prefer to primarily concentrate upon the sacred meanings of his activities and to view the religious person himself within a broader context of Church doctrine and history. This approach is understandable and justifiable for the purpose of understanding religious ideas; however, Sergiy also acted passionately as a leader of social change, and thus his actions, outside of Church scholarship, carry historical significance and should be scrutinized.

Sergiy Radonezhsky appears to be a unique personage among the known historical figures of the time of the Battle at Kulikovo (1380). He never took a high position within the Church, nor formulated a textual plan, nor even wrote a single literary work. Sergiy was merely a monastery founder and an abbot, one of many at the time. Nevertheless, he is mentioned at least twelve times in the Chronicles and is cited in seven official documents. This attention to father superior demonstrates that the fame of the ascetic had been firmly established in public opinion, and the lay authority was interested in the father superior of the Trinity Monastery. The extreme authority of the ascetic cannot be explained simply by the proximity to some political party or acknowledgement of his preaching activities. What, then, were the reasons that would make the Chronicles’ authors focus on Sergiy?

Church veneration of Sergiy the Founder begins during the time of Grand Duke Vasilii (1389–1425), who continued his father's, Dmitry Donskoy, politics of collecting lands. The initial events, in the form of the Finding of the Relics of St. Sergiy, occurred in the last years of the reign of Vasily Dmitrievich (1422). By the 1448–1449 an official veneration of the saint had been established.

By that time an extended 'Life' of the Reverend was written by his closest pupil, Epiphanius the Wise. The finished 'Life' then went through multiple revisions.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of multiple revisions can be explained by the church authorities' desires to correct the depiction of the saint's life. Pachomius, the Serb, was a professional hagiographer, who worked on commission, and was ready to input the corrections on demand.

Epiphanius created his work in anticipation of the new conflicts that were inevitable during the struggle for the legacy of Dmitry Ivanovich Donskoy. The recollection of a consolidation of social forces, the symbol of which, according to 'Life', was St. Sergiy, sounded like a warning. The course of historical events nevertheless made such an interpretation irrelevant. Pachomius' versions originate from 1438–1449, when a feud broke out, and the covenants of the Kulikov era were forgotten. In these circumstances Epiphanius' text fostered a sense of patriotism, which was adapted then by Pachomius to serve internal needs of the Church.

The original text of 'Life' should be reconstructed from later editions. The beginning of 'Life' by Epiphanius can be seen in its fullest version in the *Prostrannaya* Edition (The Longer Version). This edition contains a Preface, ten out of thirty chapters, and a "Eulogy". These sections reveal Epiphanius' work was not typical for the hagiographic genre. There is a noticeable tendency towards accuracy and precision in the reproduction of events, a trait that is not typically practiced in religious works. The descriptions of the miracles by Epiphanius come very close to reality [Петров, с. 195]. The quality of storytelling and the vivid details provide even more ground for concluding that 'Life' is non-canonic [Духанина, с. 70].

The history of the conception of 'Life' and its realization are not typical for such works. According to Epiphanius' confession, he sought to preserve the memory of the founder of the monastery on his own initiative, without the direction of Church superiors, as he assembled the biography of the Trinity Convent abbot. He began to collect material immediately after the death of St. Sergiy on September 25, 1392. At first, Epiphanius uncovered original data and the documents.<sup>2</sup> B. M. Kloss concludes that the major

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<sup>1</sup> Research has uncovered three to five editions of 'Life' within the time period when Pachomius the Serb (Logofet) was active [Кучкин, 1988, с. 110–113; Шибаев, с. 293; Клосс, с. 160–212]. Apart from that, various mosaic compilations that are hard to account for were found stemming from different versions of the saint's veneration [Зубов, с. 145–158]. There are altogether around 400 known versions of the 'Life of Sergiy'.

<sup>2</sup>In his work, Epiphanius was treading on personal memoirs and witness accounts of the people who intimately knew the Saint. He appeared in Trinity-Sergiy Monastery not earlier than 1374, he took the vows in 1375, and died in 1422 [see: Клосс, с. 95, 96, 100].

work happened between 1418–1419 [Клосс, с. 17]. Thus, the initial biography was written before the acquisition of the relics in 1422, a fact that speaks for the veneration of St. Sergiy among the monastic brotherhood. His burial in the church confirms the existence of the local tradition of the ascetics' worship, contrary to his will of being interred in the monastery cemetery. The reverend did not wish to be considered exceptional among the common monks, even after his death.

Lack of control by church authorities partly explains Epiphanius' freedom of authorship, which amplified his personal tastes and preferences. His 'Life' was devoted more to rethinking the role of the extraordinary personality than to promoting the objectives of Church veneration. A considerable adjustment was needed to make 'Life' fit the traditional Church form and make it useful for liturgical purposes. This task was solved by Pachomius, the Serb. His text omits descriptions of social activities, reproaches of luxury, servility, as well as descriptions of the saint's mercy towards commoners [Клибанов, с. 73–74]. As a result of this adjustment, the political component and indeed lively features of the epoch were trimmed. Instead, descriptions of Sergiy's deeds were embedded in the tradition of Christian cosmopolitanism, and set alongside other Byzantine hagiographies, thus better serving the objectives of official canonization.

Epiphanius was an ardent follower of Sergiy, so ideological preferences for the author of 'Life' can be transplanted onto the saint himself with reservations.

According to 'Life' and the Chronicle, Sergiy started his social service during the turbulent time of the revival, which experienced an increase of hopes, expectations, and capabilities and represented the first sacrificial attempt at overthrowing the Mongol "yoke", which drained, according to Karl Marx, 'the very soul of the Russian people'.

Sergiy, born on May 3, 1322, in Rostov Principality, spent his childhood and younger years under the rule of Ivan Kalita (?–1340). In search of a better life, his parents moved to Radonezh around 1332. Consequently, the ten-year old boy arrived at the place where later the grown man would build the monastery. After the Golden Horde established the Rus's dependence, the Khan bestowed tremendous privileges upon the Church, and it emerged as a major feudal power. This state of affairs created competitive relations between the Church with the lay authority. Canonization of the Galician metropolitan, Peter (1308–1325), who requested to be interred in a town that was neither a capital nor a diocesan seat. [Кучкин, 1962]. Transferring his seat to Moscow, a Greek metropolitan named Theognost (1328–1353) sought to differentiate from Kalita in the collection of levies. Although Theognostus, much like the greedy Ivan Daniilovich, contributed to the rise of Moscow, the time for the union of priesthood and tsardom had not yet come.

New conditions formed only during the time of Theognostus' successor, Alexius (1353–1378.) He was an avid supporter of Moscow's authority and godson of Ivan Kalita; consequently he became the first metropolitan

who stood ready to assemble the anti-Horde forces. The resistance to Tatar control was strengthened not only by feuds within the Horde that began in the 50s, but also by cessation of the period of tolerance, which was due to the conversion of the Khans to Islam [Плигузов, Хорошкевич, с. 122]. Alexius hailed from Moscovite boyars and acted as regent during Dimitry's rule, especially after the early death of Dimitry's father, Ivan the Fair. As a result, priesthood and tsardom moved closer to each other. Consolidation happened with increasing anti-Horde sentiment [Соколов, с. 192–196]. At the time, the Church gradually reflected the interests and expectations of a broader population, especially at the time of Alexius the Baptist, and developed a new bearing, which allowed it to formulate, propagate and defend not only its own, but also the state's ideology.

Owing to Alexius's prompting, Sergiy Radonezhsky moved into the arena of religious and political action [Кузьмин, с. 156–178]. Shortly before his death, Alexius, who guided the so-called 'national party' in the Russian Church (a term coined by A. G. Kuzmin), planned to hand Sergiy the leadership over the Archdiocese. However, the saint refused, faithful to his belief in 'not being a gold-bearer'.

During Alexius' rule over the Russian Church, his ideological and political beliefs emerged. Based upon information in 'Life', historians date the foundation of the Trinity Monastery to 1342, which was soon after Sergiy took his vows. Between 1353–1354 Sergiy became father superior of the monastery; in the 1360s he was drawn into the close circle of Metropolitan Alexius; and in the 1370s he joined the entourage of Dmitry Donskoy [Петров, с. 200; Кучкин, 2014, с. 32]. Since that time he gained full access to the circles of power and became a part of many political and religious events.

During the 1370s–1380s, when Sergiy's fame increased, Moscovia contested the notion of the center of Russian unity. However, those processes remained controversial and unfinished. On the eve of the Battle at Kulikovo (1380), the prince of Moscow effectively managed to unite only a small part of the Russian lands. The efforts spent on creating a political union with Tver proved fruitless. Allies of the prince of Moscow during the 1375 campaign (Dmitry Konstantinovich of Suzdal with his sons and Boris Konstantinovich) did not join him for the anti-Tatar campaign. It was actually Boris who seized Nizhny Novogorod in spite of his older brother's claim to succession, and Sergiy appealed to Boris after ten years, seeking to hand over the reign, while 'shutting down' the churches. In this conflict, the prince of Moscow offered Dmitry an army to aid his efforts [СЛ, стб. 436]. Both previous allies and primary political opponents (Oleg of Ryazan and Mikhail Alexandrovich of Tver) diverged from the common cause, and the most powerful Russian princes stayed on the sidelines, while minor rulers, such as Vladimir of Serpukhov, or the Princes of Belozersk, Rostov, and Yaroslavl, had little military force. The coalition, created by Dmitry, was apparently insufficient for the overthrowing of the Tatar "yoke". Furthermore, the coalition itself was falling apart at the seams, as the events of the Siege of Moscow by Tokhtamysh in 1382 clearly showed. Even Dmitry's cousin,

Vladimir, distanced himself from the prince of Moscow. The preparation for the decisive battle with the Tatars was complicated by the absence of the metropolitan and the unscrupulous struggle for power in the archdiocese after the death of Alexius in 1378. The convergence of the church and the state, which formed during Dmitry and Alexius, ceased to exist starting with church conflicts that were defined by intrigues, violations of the bringing of vows, and conspiracies that ended in the murder of the prince's candidate for metropolitan, Mikhail (Mityai). Paradoxically, Dmitry led his army against Mamay while being himself under Cyprian's curse. Cyprian, then a nominal head of the Russian Church, represented a notion of unity that served the interests of the Prince of Lithuania, and this notion of 'unity' was unacceptable for the authorities in Moscow. Cyprian tried to unite enemies of Moscow. Sergiy is commonly mistaken as an ally of Cyprian because the metropolitan sent messages to him [Ипoxopов, с. 28–30]. It would be more logical to think that Sergiy stood apart from and refused to participate in the feuds. The argument that the reverend kept the canon in his sympathies and therefore did not accept autocephalous Mityai, but rather went after Cyprian who was nominated by Constantinople seems invalid. Cyprian received his nomination while Alexius was still alive, which was a serious violation of the canonical rules, as recognized by Church historians [see: Капташов]. Simultaneously, Dmitry's nomination of Mikhail (Mityai), who was considered 'the only rival' of Sergiy, was designed to rid all suspicions of autocephalia. After being elected at a council by the Russian bishops, he headed to Constantinople to confirm his position and to receive the archdiocese rule from the patriarch.

The essence of Sergiy's position was to stand above the conflicting parties and to personify the authority of the Church during a critical time for the country. Therefore he did not express preferences towards any political power, which promoted its own candidates; such a stance would endanger the idea of the union. Sergiy Radonezhsky did not wish to be ensnared in intrigues, which demonstrated his desire to follow the evangelical principles that stress one's removal from the discord of the world.

It would be hard to imagine a religious person who would do battle without moral support, which should undergird his sacrifice and willingness to perish 'for the sake of others'. The vacuum of the Church's power at that historic moment was 'covered' by Sergiy Radonezhsky. According to 'Zadonshina' and the 'Tale of the Mamay Battle', Sergiy provided spiritual approval for the Russian army, offering a blessing to the prince of Moscow in his battle against the Tatars.<sup>3</sup> Some suggest that such an interpretation of events is a literary fiction [Данилевский, с. 11–15]. However, politically neutral sources demonstrate that father superior sent the monks, Oslabya and Peresvet, from his monastery to the army [Сказания, с. 10–11; СИЛ, стрб. 467]. This account

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<sup>3</sup> The most logical blessing seems to be one written by Sergiy (СИЛ, стрб. 461). Dmitry's visit of the Trinity Monastery with his whole army, as the "Tale of the Mamay Battle" describes, is unlikely because such visit would have lengthened Dmitry's way to the Don more than twice over.



is obviously unprecedented because the Church did not permit its members to spill blood. With this action, Sergiy Radonezhsky licenced the Mamay campaign as a 'Holy War'. The shortage of military forces was masterfully compensated for by Sergiy by encouraging the belief in the sacredness of the campaign for the prince of Moscow and his warriors. Sergiy operated as the spiritual advisor in the absence of the support of the official church authorities. What, then, were the foundations for such actions?

Sergiy's principles cannot be recovered on the basis of certain prescribed tenets, rather on indirect data of his 'Life' as the saint describes his actions.

Surviving fragments of 'Life' by Epiphanius show that Sergiy came from an impoverished boyar family and witnessed the persecution of his parents by the prince's associates. His aspiration to attain monkhood demonstrates his desire to escape the cruelty, injustice and immorality of civil life.

'Life' consistently offers the image of Sergiy as an ascetic. He maintained his celibacy, did not play with other children, did not participate in games, did not marry and withdrew from the world of vanity. In the beginning of his monastic sacrifice he ceded all inheritance rights to his younger brother and lived like a hermit together with his older brother Stephan [Житие, c. 284–286, 292, 296–298]. With his brother, he lived as a true ascetic, relinquishing mundane privileges that accompany his social status. He and his brother worked hard, founded a small forest convent and built a church where an incoming priest served during the holidays. All who gathered around the Trinity Convent had to lead a village community life. Everyday monastic life was extremely hard. The monks had to endure hardships, and Sergiy complained about hunger, poverty and scarcity [Ibid, c. 304–306]. An ascetic, monastic way of life gradually set in.

In spite of the hardships, there were many volunteers who settled near the Trinity Monastery. Its routines were quite peculiar. During the first years after the foundation of the monastery, Sergiy led a monk's life but did not take his vows. When monks started arriving, he accepted only twelve disciples [Ibid, c. 334].<sup>4</sup> This manifestation of religiosity, striving to distance himself not only from the abominations of life, but also from the church environment of the time, has not passed unnoticed by researchers. Some even suggest that the deliberate distancing from official church life could compare with *strigol'nichestvo*, but, unlike *strigol'nichestvo*, Sergiy did not go so far as to break from the Church [Борисов, c. 6].

As Epiphanius explained, Sergiy wanted to overcome his weaknesses by imposing self-limitations [Житие, c. 290]. Such aspirations usually manifested in neglecting the carnal. However, 'Life' demonstrates that Sergiy lived in harmony with nature and his contemporaries, and the conflict between spirit and body was not known to him.

Indeed severe abstinence, scourging, and intense contemplation of the mundane are not described in 'Life'. Sergiy's daily routine consisted of prayers, vigils and incessant labor, in which he was 'not idle even for an

<sup>4</sup> This detail is rather symbolic. Twelve is the number of the first Apostles. These sorts of routines allow for comparisons with the Irish monkhood.

hour' [Житие, с. 322]. Sergiy's desire for solitude was not motivated by longing to follow the path of the ancient anchorites but to focus on contemplation away from earthly concerns. His asceticism was not an aim in itself, but a consequence of hardships encountered by refusing any external assistance or family inheritance.

This austerity emerged from circumstances. G. Fedotov rightfully observes that Sergiy did not possess ascetic severity in the traditional Christian sense [Федотов, с. 150]. He considers the forest hermit a *hesychast* of a peculiar kind: a "bearer of a special, mysterious spiritual life that was not exhaustive by the feat of love, austerity, and perseverance of pray" [Ibid].

Only a few monks from Sergiy's circle follow a path of strict isolation from the mundane life [Житие, с. 374]. It is perhaps incorrect to see it as the influence of Byzantium's *hesychasm*, as a number of researchers do [Федотов, с. 150–151; Клибанов, с. 79–92].<sup>5</sup> In austere circumstances the disruption between the Egyptian ideal of monkhood and the Russian practice of monk service was indeed drastic [Федотов, с. 147]. Permanent labor did not allow one to enjoy the 'sweetness of silence'.

With the absence of documentary support for the historical circumstances of the time, the communal way of life was defined by the country's hard conditions. Early in its existence, the Trinity Monastery was not like other ancient Russian monasteries. At that time, the Rus had three types of monasteries: 1) reclusive, 2) *ktitor* monasteries and 3) suburban monasteries of collective living. All these monasteries already appeared in the first century after the introduction of Christianity. Many were not able to follow the way of a recluse. This tradition came from Mount Athos, which directs anchorites to heights of spiritual sacrifice, while simultaneously encouraging personal salvation. The practice of reclusion, contemplation and prayer required serious preparation and as such did not develop into a tradition since few wished to withdraw to such an extent.

Monasteries for collective living that followed the traditions of Theodosius of the Caves (Feodosiy Pecherskiy), which included common prayer and collective labor while maintaining the property differentiation of the monks, rapidly declined after the period of Tatar hegemony. *Ktitor* monasteries became the most common type at that time. Founded by the representatives of the wealthy elite, they were closed residences, in which aging members of the higher feudal class could retire while surrounded by their servants. They became the family vaults and political 'nests' of a sort, where adherence to monastic principles was not paramount. Behind the walls of such monasteries, inhabitants brought their household habits and accompanying distinctions based upon wealth and social origin.

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<sup>5</sup> V. N. Toporov noticed the incompatibility of convent's life with mystical practices due to fully immersing oneself into everyday errands and hard labor [Топоров, с. 558–559, 573]. He also observes controversial features due to the presence of silence, reticence in motives of vows [Ibid, с. 567–568]. At the same time, the researcher does not exclude the influence of palamism upon Sergiy [Ibid, с. 577–592]. It is probably B.M. Kloss who is closer to the truth when he considers that one should talk not of hesychasm of the palamite kind but of borrowing of the ideas from Byzantine ascetic literature [Клюсс, с. 37].



In the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Alexius initiated monastery reforms. Changes were based on the introduction of a new liturgical charter, the so-called Jerusalem Charter. In 'Life' the organization of collective living is connected to the initiative of Patriarch Philotheus of Constantinople.<sup>6</sup> From him the monks of the Trinity Monastery received a charter by which they were supposed to 'live as a brotherhood communally' [Житие, с. 366].

According to the calculations of V. A. Kuchkin, this happened in 1374 or even 1377 [Кучкин, 1992, с. 80–81]. The introduction of coenobite living in the Trinity Monastery is dated at the same time [Ibid, с. 82].

Trinity Monastery did not immediately respond to these demands. Apparently Sergiy was on an independent quest.

In the Jerusalem Charter 'emphasis is given to the public service of the Church': non-possession, obedience, prayer, work, respect for authority, and prayer for all Christians [Клосс, с. 48]. One can judge how these principles were followed by turning to 'Life'. The basis of property relations between the monastic brotherhood of the Trinity Convent was the principle of non-possession or renunciation, and the rule was established for anyone owning or calling anything his own: 'no one to possess anything or to call their own but to have everything as communal' [Житие, с. 368].

In the Rules of Athanasius Vysotsky, a corresponding norm was formulated: 'everybody should have everything communal... <they should> exist by the common mind and common prayer' [cit. by: Клосс, с. 53].

As an ardent non-possessor, Sergiy showed indifference to earthly things and possessed no desire to either accumulate or pursue treasure [Житие, с. 418]. Guided by these principles, the father superior categorically refused to accept gifts, often referring to the fact that he was never 'a gold-bearer'. Poverty and the restriction on consumption were also connected to the principle of renunciation (see references to hunger in the convent, and the chapter, 'On torn trousers of Sergiy') [Ibid, с. 342–344, 352–358].

Sergiy's renunciation of property was not only a continuation of the tradition established by Theodosius of the Caves, but also a statement of reproach towards the official Church, which tended to accumulate 'possessions'. Sergiy acted contrary to the established practice of the Church, even still he sought neither high rank, nor gifts, nor did he pay the fee for joining church ranks [Ibid, с. 330].

The principle of renunciation had a social aspect. The monastery served as an example of the village world, and the emphasis on poverty offered a nonverbal criticism of the widening property gap. This sort of monastic practice came to be unattainable but nonetheless existed as a more compassionate and sympathetic ideal for many laymen.

A separate narrative aspect of 'Life' relates to labor. Monastic labor in the Trinity Monastery was a combination of spiritual and physical work.

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<sup>6</sup> Philotheus was the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople from 1353–1354 and 1364–1376. Nominated by the father superior in 1353–1354, Sergiy could not have been known to the patriarch; therefore the message can be dated by the second period.

Sergiy was permanently occupied with providing monks with water, baking communion bread, plowing, delegating responsibilities and overseeing their implementation. Very characteristic are the descriptions of the 'terem works', when the construction of the monk cells was combined with fasting, humility, and austerity [Житие, с. 318–322]. Epiphanius described unforced labor, based on the principles of mutual respect and assistance. Labor was a blessing for the one who works.

Labor was associated with the transformation of one's native land. Epiphanius describes how the land was plowed, wilderness populated, and how the population and number of villages grew around the Trinity Monastery. Depictions of the transformation of devastated and deserted Rus lands formed a sense of optimism in the era of national revival.

The 'Life' designates Sergiy as 'head of the coenobite living'. However, in spite of the *vitae* tradition, Sergiy was not the founder of the coenobite monastic living. A more likely inspiration for the reform of the monkhood was Metropolitan Alexius [Кузьмин, с. 92–93]. He initiated the expansion of the network of coenobite life monasteries,<sup>7</sup> and Sergiy actively supported this initiative. Apart from the Trinity Monastery, the Annunciation Monastery on Kirzhach River (between 1365–1373) and Stromyn Monastery of the Assumption (1381) were founded with Sergiy's direct involvement. The Trinity Monastery was directly connected with the appearance of such coenobite monasteries as the Annunciation on the Kirzhach River, Moscow Andronnikov Monastery (which, according to the testimony of Epiphanius, was decorated by Andrei Rublev), the Annunciation Simonov Monastery (founded by the saint's nephew, Fedor), the Annunciation Golutvinskiy near Kolomna (where Trinity Hieromonk Gregory was sent for service), and lastly the Zachatievsky Vysotsky Monastery in Serpukhov (the abbot of which was a disciple of St. Athanasius) [Житие, с. 368–374, 376–384]. A number of Trinity Convent disciples initiated the creation of monastic coenobites themselves.<sup>8</sup> Indeed Sergiy's disciples founded more than half of all the monasteries in the Russian North during the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, a collection of monasteries, which began to be described as a Russian Thebaid [Муравьев].

The construction of new monasteries turned into a wider monastic colonization of the provinces. In place of the small *ktitor* monasteries in the

<sup>7</sup> With his blessing, the following coenobite monasteries were created: Chudov Monastery in the Kremlin (1365), Blagoveshhensk Monastery in Nizhniy Novgorod (1370), Constantine and Helena Monastery in Vladimir (after 1370), Vvedensky Monastery in Serpukhov (before 1377), Alexeevsky Monastery in which Metropolitan's sister Ulyana 'was the head of coenobite living' (before 1367) [see on this: Крюк, с. 37–42].

<sup>8</sup> Savva founded the Nativity Monastery on Storozhi Mountain (1398–1399), Methodius – Nickolas-Pesnoshsky Monastery near Dimitrov (before 1392), Pathnutius – Nativity Monastery near Borovsk, Stephan – Trinity Makhrishsky Monastery, Sergiy Nuromsky – Transfiguration of Christ Monastery on the Nura River in Vologda region, Pavel Obnorsky – Trinity Monastery again on the Nura River. After meeting with Sergiy, Dmitry of Prilutsk founded the Savior Monastery in Vologda. Kirill of Belozersk first substituted Fedor in Simonov Monastery (1388), and then founded the Holy Assumption Monastery on Siverskoe Lake (1398), and Ferapont who followed him to the north that same year founded the Nativity Monastery [Ibid, с. 35, 43–46, 58–54].

hamlets, large religious and economic centers appeared in different parts of the country [Смолич, с. 116]. Modeled on the Trinity Monastery, the newer monasteries developed vibrant economic communities.

The modest lifestyles of the Russian monk-settlers reflected the daily difficulties of the majority of Russian people, which bolstered the authority of the clergy.

Built on the principles of collectivism and mutual assistance, the monasteries revived communal principles and demonstrated how striving for unity could solve important problems. Sergiy's method for instituting monastery reforms presented a model for interpersonal relationships in communal labor, moderation, mutual assistance, service to God and the state. For the surrounding world and laymen, 'coenobyte living became an ideal basis of the world order' [Клибанов, с. 98], epitomizing a positive and attainable example of unity. These ideological means helped to cement the solidarity of the Rus peoples. Sergiy's activities embodied the values of uniting lands, power and the Church.

The process of monastic colonization of the Russian provinces expanded the capabilities of Christianity to influence the mindset of peoples inhabiting the vast territories, which were poorly controlled by secular and spiritual authorities alike. The outflow of monkhood to the wilderness and rural regions of Russia, which started in the 14th century, connected to political and economic objectives and reflected the growing state and religious activity of the central Russian principalities. The missionary and economic activity of the Church intensified [Смолич, с. 44–46]. New monasteries became bridges linking together ethnically diverse peoples and cultures within an immense Russian domain. Monastery reform, initiated by Alexius, promoted the incorporation of distant lands into Moscow's sphere of religious and political influence, which facilitated the integration of remote lands, and led to the amassing of Rus forces and the consolidation of the nation. As a result, the military units from remote lands were the first allies of Dmitry Donskoy on the Kulikovo Field.

Sergiy differed from the majority of church leaders in ancient Russian times because in his multi-faceted teaching and mentoring activities he never denounced pagan beliefs. On the one hand, it is a hallmark of a gentle and kind abbot who avoided critique and punishment. Indeed the Trinity Monastery's father superior, according to 'Life', never imposed deserved penances upon monks and only lectured violators of discipline codes. [Житие, с. 340]. Instead of reproof and punishment, Sergiy beckoned the sinners to rectify themselves through humility and meekness [Ibid, c. 456]: "And he loved everybody equally and respected equally, neither choosing, nor judging, nor looking at people's faces" [Ibid, c. 418]. Yet, there is another side to his forbearance and benevolence. The establishment of the Trinity Cult within the public consciousness, which was initiated by Sergius, is better understood within the context of extreme tolerance towards the cult's traces from the past. Celebration of the Holy Trinity coincided with the day of Pentecost, which was worshiped by the

Church as the memory of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles on the fiftieth day after Easter. But Sergiy was the first to turn this date into a gala celebration. Trinity Day became one of the most popular and distinctive celebrations within the Church, with some of its features persisting to this day.

The very notion of Trinity (not to be confused with the Trinitarian postulates!) appeared for the first time in Russian literature in the work of Epiphanius the Wise. The hagiographer attributed the exaltation and glorification of the Trinity to the principal achievements of St. Sergiy, who is pictured simultaneously as a disciple and servant of the 'Holy Trinity' [Житие, с. 270, 272, 29]. Sergiy founded the 'Holy Trinity convent' [Ibid, с. 300] and built a church of the same name at his own expense [Ibid, с. 284, 296].

The theme of the Trinity is revealed in 'Life' not by theological, but by artistic means: the trinity motif is repeated three times in the fabric of the narrative; the author refers three times to the main theme of his existence. This style of presentation served to assist the reader who might be unfamiliar with the intricacies of the exegesis. Without delving into the complexity of the religious dogma, the author visually demonstrates the omnipresence of the trinity in human existence. Attention is focused on the existence of the trinity in the real world and on impressions left by the intimate within the sphere of the phenomenal. In this fashion, the doctrine of the trinity is introduced through an associative, visual representation.

As correctly noted by Fedotov: "The Holy Trinity has not been the subject of speculation neither before Sergiy nor after him" [Федотов, с. 150]. There was no church holiday dedicated to Trinity before St. Sergiy, and the texts for relevant services did not exist. This is partly explained by the absence of the Trinity in the Scriptures. Only odd mentions of the Trinity Church in Novgorod (under 1165, 1194, and 1224 Chronicle years) and Pskov (1130) are known to the Rus. The building of temples in honor of the Trinity was not widespread. In the West, the honoring of the Holy Trinity began by forming the Order of the Trinity, which in turn initiated a special holiday of the Trinity (13<sup>th</sup> century) [Георгиевский, с. 1, 7, 9]. According to Pavel Florensky, the Russian cult of the Trinity was associated with the establishment of a 'symmetric triadic formula' in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, an event that effectively encouraged the celebration of the Holy Trinity with liturgical practices in the celebration [Флоренский, с. 18]. Sergiy's participation in this process was recalled and credited decades later, as evidenced by the custom to arrange chapels, dedicated to St. Sergiy, in Holy Trinity Churches ('cult hearths of the Trinity', as coined by A. I. Klibanov) [Клибанов, с. 95].

The holiday of Trinity, introduced into ritual practice, quickly became popular. The Russian cult of Trinity had two sides: formal and informal, with many features of popular beliefs. Trinity celebrations developed as multi-day rites and rituals, called Trinity-Semitsky cycle, or the Mermaid week. In the Church and the agricultural calendars, these days were

dedicated to honoring the vegetative processes of the land; predictions of welfare and the commemoration of ancestors took place at this time. Participants of the Trinity-Semitsk rites were called '*rusal'cy*' (mermaid-followers). '*Rusal'cy*' performed agrarian magical acts in the groves and near the water sources using wreaths, Trinity birches and other ritual objects [Соколова, с. 190–192, 216 и след.; Агапкина, с. 320–325]. These actions were motivated by the faith in the productive power of the Trinity-Semitsk magical performances. All ritual actions were focused on the cult of the earth [Виноградова; Громов, Мильков, с. 302–306; Мильков, с. 128–134].

The Trinity holiday, like no other holiday of the Christian calendar, related the Christian Rus, especially with the Rus that observed the ancient agrarian holidays. For this reason, it is clear why we do not find condemnation of pre-Christian traditions in the 'Life of Sergiy' by Epiphanius. At a time when the objective of marshalling forces became paramount, the leaders and strategists who were thinking on the national level avoided confrontation and clashes on the subject of purity of religious belief. The objective and requirements for consolidation outweighed the need for religious purity. The new cult, although with obvious traits of religious syncretism, served the purpose of overcoming feuds and consolidating the nation.

The principle of the Trinity was thought to be the foundation of the world order, so social ties were scrutinized for this tripartite harmony. Perceptions of unity and harmony at the sacral level were carried over to all other levels of existence. In 'Life' the concept of the sacred was interpreted in a social context. The idea of the Trinity, appearing in the monastic environment in Sergiy's circle, transformed into the idea of harmony in Russian life, a symbol of marshalling national forces in a plan to build a unified Rus, free of internal conflicts. The Church, erected in Trinity Monastery, and other Trinity Churches that followed, took on the value of visual symbols, reminding laypeople that the concord on earth should be built upon the unity of the Trinity. The sacred symbols encouraged the public consciousness to overcome social conflicts and divisions. The monastery, created by Sergiy, turned into a 'unifying center' for the Russian world, and the newly introduced cult of the Trinity became the ideology for this unity [Георгиевский, с. 14–15; Клибанов, с. 93].

Researchers have long discussed the impact of Sergiy Radonezhsky on Andrei Rublev's work, primarily, upon the creation of the main masterpiece of the master from Early Medieval Russia. A typical statement on the subject states: "Rublev was revealing that very Trinity, which St. Sergiy has been teaching about. It was the God of unity and harmony. As the supreme and the sacred endorsement of unity and self-determination of the people, this ideal was proclaimed by St. Sergiy and received an unparalleled artistic and philosophical embodiment in the creation of Andrei Rublev; it indubitably belongs to the history of Russian social thought and culture" [Клибанов, с. 102]. The greatest Russian icon painter used to live among Sergiy's

followers; as such the mindset that presided over the convent, founded by the reverend, even after his death, was reflected in Rublev's 'Trinity' [Клибанов, с. 101].<sup>9</sup>

The clearest and most insightful description of Rublev's 'Trinity' belongs to Pavel Florensky: "Among the powerful circumstances of the time, among the feuds, the international discord, the universal savagery and Tatar raids, amid this deep peacelessness that corrupted Rus, <Rublev> opened a spiritual glance into an infinite, unflappable, indestructible peace, 'the upper world'. Enmity and hatred that prevailed in the lower world, was opposed to mutual love, flowing in eternal harmony, in eternal silent conversation, in the eternal unity of the upper worlds" [Флоренский, с. 19].

Rublev's icon inspired the thought that celestial unity can be a blueprint for earthly unity, and that the world's feuds can be overcome with kindness, humanity and solidarity based on love. He gave, in fact, an answer to the question of how one should live, and this, in turn, signified how the country should exist.

Andrey Rublev, along with Epiphanius the Wise, can be shown to be ideally and spiritually close to Sergiy Radonezhsky. Because of those great representatives of the Russian culture, we can evaluate the program for rebuilding society, which was implemented by the Trinity abbot.

The vibrant and honest image of Sergiy in 'Life' by Epiphanius helped facilitate the acceptance of Sergiy by his contemporaries and successors as a model of Russian sanctity [Алексий (Кутепов), с. 183–193; Топоров, с. 558–559, 573]. Epiphanius succeeded in showing that the sanctity of Sergiy did not manifest in austerity, but in an active civic consciousness, expressed through his multiple good deeds towards others.

The spiritual father for the Russian land initiated the cult that sanctified the unity of the country and called for ceasing feuds. Epiphanius the Wise verbalized the principles, which Sergiy followed in his nation-unifying activities. The same ideals were ingeniously embodied by Andrey Rublev in his famous 'Trinity'. The abbot, the writer, and the icon painter stand in the same row of supporters for nation rebuilding. All of them were monks from the same convent, and all of them were the servants of the Trinity and the promoters of the consolidation of the nation on principles of love, equality, and mutual assistance. They can indeed be named as a trinity within the creation and formulation of a national idea. Sergiy Radonezhsky takes an undisputed leading place in this group. He was a pioneer who roused the Russian spirit by marshalling the warriors for the Battle of Kulikovo and gave the people strength to overcome the difficulties of centralization.

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<sup>9</sup> The 'Tale of the Saint Icon Painters' (the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) directly links the new iconic version of the Trinity to the covenants of St. Sergiy. It is said in 'Tale' that the image of the Holy Trinity was created by Andrey Rublev 'as a praise to his Godfather St. Sergiy the Thaumaturge' [Сергий (Спаский), с. 11]. It is mentioned in the same work that the icon painter was a novitiate at the Trinity abbot, Nikon. This leads to the conclusion that Andrey was a monk at this monastery for quite some time [Кузьмина, с. 110–111, 120–121].



The works of Alexius and Sergiy had a decisive result, the victory at the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380. Sergiy was hardly the first face of Church hierarchy, but his actions demonstrate that he had tremendous influence during those dangerous years in the country's history. The popularity of Sergiy in the eyes of his contemporaries and successors can be explained by the fact that the ideas, which he implemented by his social activities, answered the painful questions of Russian society.

Sergiy acted on the historical stage in an epoch of state, spiritual, and cultural revival of Russia and became one of the central figures of the time of change, which was decisive for the country. Without exaggeration, he can be called the spiritual leader of the Russian world, which was amassing forces to do battle against the Tatar "yoke".

The success of Christianization and the consolidation of the nation at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century were driven by monastic colonization, which was caused by the exportation of Russian monkhood beyond city walls and into remote territories. Gradually, a new image of society was formed as it prepared to do battle against its overlords. Sergiy's contribution to this process is clear. He was a rare type of Early Medieval leader who fascinated his contemporaries with the dream of harmonizing the earthly world, and his actions followed the principles he proclaimed.

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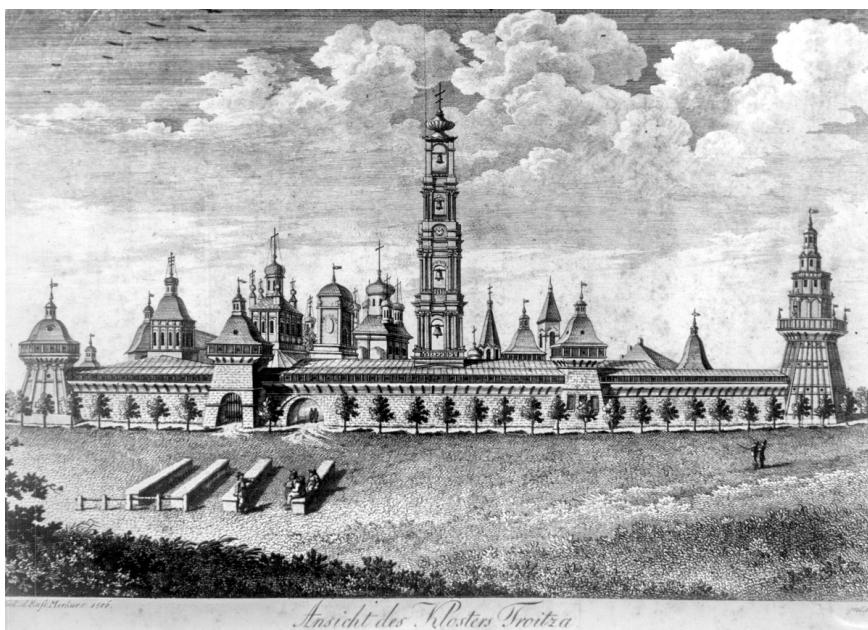
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St. Sergiy Radonezhsky. Embroidered pall, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century



Trinity Lavra of St. Sergiy, view from east side. An alley on the site of filled ditch. Scene from an engraving, 1806



M. V. Nesterov. The Labours of Sergiy Radonezhsky. Central part of the triptych, 1896–1897



N. K. Roerich. St. Sergiy Radonezhsky, 1932



M. V. Nesterov. The Labours of Sergiy Radonezhsky. Left part of the triptych, 1896–1897