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RESTITUTIONS OF CHURCH PROPERTY

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RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND THE PRESERVATION OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE ARTIFACTS

Tatiana V. Chumakova

Nowadays, the issue of the Church propriety is in the highlight of discussion. A draft of the law of transferring of the ownership of religious property to religious organizations is at work in the Ministry of Economic Development. A conception of the draft of law was adopted in December 2007 - at the seating of the Commission of the Government of the Russian Federation on the activity in the sphere of drafts of laws. The base of transferring of the ownership of religious property to religious organizations, which is in the state (municipal) property, is the law № 125-ФЗ that came in force in 1997: "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Communities". Corresponding standards of transferring of historical and cultural monuments of religious type to religious organizations are stipulated also by the laws on the protection of objects of cultural heritage (historical and cultural monuments). Recent years, the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has received a significant quantity of religious and cultural monuments in possession. Unfortunately, many **priests** have not a good attitude to such monuments (frescoes are knocked down from the walls, terms of protection of monuments are not hold, an access to them is limited, for instance, Catholics were prohibited to make service in the Anzer Skete of the Solovetsky Monastery where Catholic priests were secluded during Stalin's repressions). Unfortunately, there are such priests who don't understand why it is necessary to protect these monuments; they see only religious but not historical and cultural objects in them. Beside the problems of preservation there is another question under the circumstance of transferring of ownership to the church: what church community exactly this or that object should be given? For example: who has the right of the ownership on icons or other monuments of history and culture - the Moscow Patriarchate or other Orthodox communities existing on the territory of Russia (Russian Orthodox Church of Old Believers, Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church or others)? And what is the measure of validity of transferring the objects, which were given to museums in the times of the Russian Empire? Particularly, it regards an enormous collection

of icons taken by the Russian Imperial government from Old Believers in the 19th century. Even now Old Believers ask: why icons confiscated by the Custom Service in the case of their illegal export from Russia are transferred to the Moscow Patriarchate only? It is a complicated problem that demands a special conference.

The problem of preservation of religious and cultural monuments was set before the Russian State as early as in the 18th century thanks to the efforts of the Academy of Sciences, that began to study Russian history. Although the system of preservation was shaped in 1859 only when the Imperial Archaeological Commission of the Ministry of the Imperial Court was founded. Research communities that appeared in the second half of the 19th century played a great role in the development of the preservation of monuments. In 1869, at the First Archaeological Congress in Moscow they created the Commission on Preservation of Ancient Monuments. So, the All-Russian Congress of artists of Russia was concluded with a project of the Provision on the Preservation of Antiquities (it was offered by the Special inter-agency commission organized in the frames of the Ministry of Domestic Affairs in 1911); there was the following statement: "Transferring according to the draft law as well as preservation of these objects (monuments of antiquity and objects of art being in charge of the St Synod because of their special church service significance) to the ownership of institutions and persons less qualified in their protection would give us, for sure, only negative results... Local spiritual leaders, as it is obvious on the numerous examples of the past, often pursue aims may be important for them personally but **coming** into strict contradiction to the necessity of protecting of monuments of antiquity and objects of art..."¹.

After 1917, the situation with the preservation of religious monuments became even worse, **but many of them** were preserved only thanks to the efforts of the Academy of Sciences. Anxious for the destiny of Russian science and culture, the President of the Academy of Sciences A. P. Karpinsky, Constant Secretary S.F. Oldenburg and many Academicians tried to cooperate with the new authorities in spite of reproaches by their opponents. They had to make maneuvers in their contacts with the state. In February 1921, for instance, the General Assembly of the Academy of Sciences made a decision to come to the Gosizdat with an offer to create a Commission on sorting out books of philosophy and religious and historical issues designed for

¹ Охрана памятников истории и культуры в России. XVIII-начало XX вв. Сб. документов. — М.-1978. — С. 270.

destroying them into pulp². It was connected to the resolution of the Council of Peoples Commissars of the RSFSR in 1919. According to it, the problem of the lack of paper in the country could be solved through reworking of "old and useless archives". In 1920-1921, about 70% of paper was produced of such "waste paper"³. As a result they destroyed hundreds of kilograms of documents of the 18th cent. Just because of the efforts of members of that Commission of the Academy of Sciences, tons of books and documents of the 18–19th century were saved.

In 1922, at the General Assembly of the Academy of Sciences of May 6, they declared the text of a message of the Academy of Sciences to the Chairman of VTsIK M.I. Kalinin on barbarous realization of the Decree of January 2, 1922 on the liquidation of the church property; "the Academy of Sciences takes it for its direct duty to ask You about the urgent measures for preservation of the objects of art both single ones and whole historical and artistic ensembles which are extremely exclusive heritage. Their destruction would put hard responsibility before the civilized world on the Russian people providing a solid ground to accuse the Russian people in the rude destruction of world artistic treasures"⁴. As a result of the intervention of the Academy of Sciences it was possible to save from destruction and robbery treasures of Russian monasteries and churches. So, in July, a decision was taken to bring the archive of the Alexandro-Svirsky Monastery to the Academy of Sciences⁵, in the same year they had a permission to transfer objects of antiquity, manuscripts and documents from the sacristy of the Solovetsky Monastery⁶. In the spring of 1922, books of Church Slavonic printing were transferred from the Tikhvinsky Monastery and from the library of the Marble Palace to the Library of the Academy of Sciences⁷. In 1926, the Library of the Academy of Sciences received a collection of books from the former Roman Catholic Spiritual Academy in St Petersburg⁸.

2 ПФА РАН. Ф. 1. Оп. 1 а. Д. 169. Л. 12 об.

3 Чадаев В. Одной рукой мы создаем, другой мы разрушаем. (Об уничтожении архивов)// Красная газета. 12 января 1921 г.

4 ПФА РАН. Ф. 1. Оп. 1 а. Д. 171. Л. 28 об. - 29 об.

5 ПФАРАН. Ф. 1. Оп. 1 а. Д. 171. Л. 183

6 ПФА РАН. Ф. 1. Оп. 1а. Д. 172. Л. 212.

7 тчет АН за 1925 г. С.50

8 ФА РАН Ф.2. Оп. 1-1926. Д. 75. Л. 174 об. Римско-католическая академия была преобразована в 1842 г. из перевезенной в Санкт-Петербург Виленской Духовной академии. После закрытия академии библиотека академии была разделена между ГПБ (ныне РНБ) и БАН.

Many monuments were destroyed because of the fact that they were not interpreted as cultural monuments but as religious objects only. It was the only chance to save them through the foundation of a special museum of the history of religion.

The idea of the foundation of such a museum was rather obscure and unrealistic in that moment. The only argument for it could be anti-religious propaganda. Unfortunately, for the Soviet period of development of the Russian studies it was just a rule: many researches (not in the history of religion only but also in contemporary western art and music) could be held only under ideological slogans and the auditorium has learnt to read between the lines since childhood. Evidently, the Academy of Sciences set a research, not a propagandist aim; that is why it gave permissions even for antireligious exhibitions for educative purposes only. Longing of researchers to study religion coincided with a desire of the authorities to denounce it with the means of knowledge. So, in 1931, they founded the Museum of the History of Religion of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Thanks to the efforts of the employees of the Museum many icons were saved (the best of them were later transferred to the Museum of the Ancient Russian Culture and Art named after Andrey Rubliov) as well as clothes and books; they preserved the relics of the Russian Saint Seraphim of Sarov in the Museum — they had been kept in the funds for decades and in 1991 they were transferred to the Church. The Museum succeeded to save many objects because in 1940 the authorities of Leningrad gave it the right of the first hand selection in the closed cult centres. Unfortunately, specialists of the Museums not always were in time. Often by their appearance a church building was destroyed, icons were burnt into ashes and other property was just robbed. We know it from numerous archive documents; for instance, in the description of barbarous attitude to Buddhist Datsans in Transbaikalia or destruction of unique frescoes and iconostasis in suburbs of Leningrad.

We would like to hope that all the cultural heritage of the peoples of Russia will be preserved in the future, and transferring of buildings and other cultural monuments to religious organizations will not lead us to new losses.

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