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An Old Believers' Skete near Maltsevo, Fort Chaus, Based on Mid-18th Century Documents and Their Comparison with Ethnographic and Archaeological Sources

This study focuses on an Old Believers' skete near the village of Maltsevo, Fort Chaus, north of modern Novosibirsk, where, according to mid-18th century documents, community members committed self-immolation. Documents differ as to where the rite occurred, how many people died, and how the skete was built. As compared to other contemporaneous sketes in Russia, this one is described in more detail. To all appearances, its construction resembled that of other Siberian forts. Similarities include an outer palisade wall, up to 2.45 m high, and the use of the logwork of houses as towers. The reason behind those parallels may be that preachers and community members were familiar with the fortifications of Fort Chaus. Fortified Old Believers' sketes are known in the Upper Ob region. The estimated living space of the log cabins fully corresponds to written data about the number of persons who took refuge in the skete. The search for the actual remains of the skete is ongoing and should be continued because this architectural structure, which existed for no more than one and a half months before the fire (May–June 1756), is a unique site of the late 18th century.

Keywords: Upper Ob region, 18th century, Old Believers, skete, self-immolation, wooden architecture, Russian forts.

Introduction

The mid-18th century in Russia was marked by the last surge of wide-scale self-immolations of Old Believers. Such events took place not only in the European part of Russia (Entala in Ustyuzhinskaya Volost in 1753, Nimenskaya Volost in Kargopolsky Uyezd in 1754), but also in southwestern Siberia (the village of Gilyova in Tyumensky Uyezd in 1751, village of Luchinkina in Tyumensky Uyezd in 1753, in the vicinity of the village of Maltsevo under the administration of Fort Chaus in 1756) (Pulkin, 2013: 266). For over a hundred years since the first publications in the academic literature (Sibirskaya Zhizn, 1897; Belikov, 1905: 38), the incident of self-immolation near the village of Maltsevo has accumulated

a substantial number of inaccuracies regarding the location of the rite (Pulkin, 2013: 85), number of burned persons, and structural features of the skete, which have been reproduced in a number of publications.

There are some discrepancies even concerning the location of the village of Maltsevo. In the late 19th century, it was reported that “self-burning” occurred in the village of “Maltsova located beyond Fort Chaus” (Sibirskaya Zhizn, 1897). A publication of the early 20th century did not indicate the exact location of the village (Belikov, 1905: 38). A modern viewpoint, which does not fit the historical facts, suggests that the self-immolation in the vicinity of the village of Maltsevo took place near the city of Barnaul (Pulkin, 2013: 211). In the first half of the 18th century, Fort Chaus was the nearest

administrative center of the Kolyvan-Voskresensk mining district, with the head office in the town of Barnaul. It administered the population living in the surrounding villages (including the village of Maltsevo). From 1730 to the 1760s, the inhabitants of these settlements were listed as being assigned to factories to work off a part of their state tax (Mamsik, 2009: 5, 11).

Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the location of the skete in the vicinity of the village of Maltsevo in some detail. The choice of the place for self-immolation was determined by several factors: first, the large spread of influence on the part of Old Believers' Orthodoxy and absence of repressions experienced by the Old Believers in the area; and second, the "last straw" effect, when general oppression by the authorities became especially intense (Pulkin, 2013: 85). All these factors were fully present when a skete in the "forests and swamps" was created near the presently non-existent village of Maltsevo (Belikov, 1905: 38). However, the "Petition" containing the reasons for the decision to die voluntarily, which was sent to the authorities by the inhabitants of the skete at the end of May–beginning of June 1756, is a reflection of economic pressure. This document speaks of the hardships and deceit of officials when paying for delivery of state provisions to Yamyshevo fortress in 1747, and problems in executing the order for delivering provisions to the Kolyvan-Voskresensk factory in 1753. The "Petition" also mentions the need for providing supplies of state-owned provisions to the town of Kuznetsk in 1755–1756, and it mentions unpaid work for repairing ships near Fort Chaus (Ibid.: 39). In addition, we should point to the decree of May 1756 in the Siberian Governorate concerning coach horse service along the Tara-Tomsk section of the Moscow highroad (Minenko, 1990: 37). A possible additional reason was that the Cossack Maltsev brothers, who were among the initiators of the self-immolation, might not have received official permission to legalize the place of their new settlement, since in the mid-18th century, the authorities strongly disapproved of such independent resettlement activities, especially in terms of its official recognition of them (Bulygin, 1974: 86).

Speaking about the possible location of the skete in the vicinity of the village of Maltsevo, we should keep in mind that in the mid-18th century administration of Fort Chaus was in the present-day Kolyvansky District of Novosibirsk Region (Mamsik, 2009: 7). However, today, there is no settlement with the name "Maltsevo" in this administrative entity. In the list of settlements of the Novosibirsk Okrug of the Siberian Territory, in the early 20th century, there were several small villages and farms with names "Maltsev" or "Maltsevo" (Spisok..., 1928: 533). However, these all were founded in 1923–1924 and were located

outside the area of the present-day Kolyvansky District of Novosibirsk Region. In this area, within the boundaries existing in 1928, there was "Maltsev's mill", on the Oyash River. The year of its foundation is unknown (Ibid.: 472).

Furthermore, there is no exact indication of where the village of Maltsevo was located on the maps and in the documents of the first half of the 18th century, although an unnamed point corresponding to the symbolic designation of a village was marked northwest of Fort Chaus, in the swampy sources of the Boyarka River, on the "Map of peasant dwellings under the Administration of the Office of the Kolyvan-Voskresensk mining authorities; their distance from the factories and mines, as well as positions of places where they are", composed February 14, 1771 (RGIA. F. 485, Inv. 5, D. 478, fol. 1) (Fig. 1). According to the written sources, the brothers Stepan and Fyodor Maltsev were among the initiators of the skete (Belikov, 1905: 38). Names of villages most often originated from the names or surnames of their founders (Bulygin, 1974: 33). It is possible that the Maltsevs founded a single-household village, which was called after their last name (or nickname). Such a situation was very common in the Novosibirsk part of the Ob region (Minenko, 1990: 40), but was not welcomed by the local authorities in the second half of the 18th century (Bulygin, 1974: 86). There are no such data in the documents of the Chaus administrative office, which are kept in the State Archives of the Novosibirsk Region, but there is a document from October 19, 1755 on the trial and return of stolen property to the Cossack Fyodor Maltsev (GANO. F. D-107, Inv. 1, fol. 138/1298).

The issue of how those events became reflected in the memory of people should also be discussed for



Fig. 1. Fragment of the "Map of peasant dwellings under the Administration of the Office of the Kolyvan-Voskresensk mining authorities; their distance from the factories and mine, as well as positions of places where they are" composed February 14, 1771 (RGIA. F. 485, Inv. 5, D. 478, fol. 1).

locating the burned skete in the vicinity of Maltsevo. According to M.V. Pulkin, who is the leading expert on self-immolation of the Old Believers in the 17th–18th centuries, information about such places and specific aspects of their marking has been preserved in this part of traditional non-material culture. The location of the self-immolation of the Old Believers in 1756 has not yet been identified in the present-day Kolyvansky District, which was once under the administration of Fort Chaus. There may be several reasons for this. One of them is the selectivity and local nature of people's memory (Gromyko, 1991: 227). However, a certain toponymic reflection of the presence of Old Believers in the past in the vicinity of Fort Chaus has still survived in the name of the Kerzhenets River—a small channel of the Kazyki lake system. There were many sketes on the river of the same name in the Nizhny Novgorod Governorate in the 17th–19th centuries. The hydronym “Kerzhenets” later led to the nickname of the Old Believers as “Kerzhaki”.

Materials and sources

In analyzing the modern interpretation of the events in the skete near the village of Maltsevo, one should note the discrepancies concerning the number of Old Believers who were burned to death. The early editions indicated 174 (*Sibirskaya zhizn*, 1897) or 175 persons (Belikov, 1905: 38; Minenko, 1973: 60), while later 172 persons (Pulkin, 2013: 266) to 200 persons (Romanov, 2019: 260). These differences may have been caused by a change in number of people for various reasons during the siege of the skete. One of the reasons could have been the flight of some of those who gathered for self-immolation; another reason could have been voluntary or forcible incorporation of some of the Cossacks who lay siege on the skete into the group of schismatics (Belikov, 1905: 39). In this regard, we can provide a similar example of the siege of a skete of Old Believers in 1742, which took place in the village of Lepikhino under the administration of the town of Kuznetsk. The plan was to send Cossacks and cavaliers (dragoons) dressed in “the fashion of beggars” to penetrate the skete using trickery, and arrest everyone who was planning to die in the fire (Pulkin, 2013: 120).

Other inaccuracies are related to the description of structural features of the inner fence of the skete near the village of Maltsevo. One of the first newspaper publications mentioned that the skete was “surrounded by a palisade with considerable fortifications” (*Sibirskaya Zhizn*, 1897); a publication of the early 20th century said that “log houses were surrounded by a wooden solid post and rail fence (*zaplot*)”, which one person climbed on to escape during the “burning” (Belikov,

1905: 38). A modern monograph on self-immolation of Old Believers in the 17th–18th centuries mentions an episode of someone being saved on the “palisade fence” (Pulkin, 2013: 211). Solid post and rail (*zaplot*) fences and palisades are completely different types of enclosures, which essentially distorts the structural description of the skete. The *zaplot* fence in Siberia meant a solid fence made of boards or logs laid horizontally (*Etnografiya...*, 1981: 116), while a palisade is a wall of logs, vertically dug or driven into the ground to one third of their length (*Tolkoviy slovar...*, 1882: 6). It is known from written sources that the height of *zaplot* fences could reach one sazhen (2.16 m) (Shostyyn, 1975: 256, 259), but they could also be lower than 2 m. For example, a description of the inner fence in Fort Chaus from the first quarter of the 18th century, mentions “a solid post and rail fence (*zaplot*) with planks waist high” (Minenko, 1989: 86).

There is an opinion in the archaeological literature that processing logs and setting up a palisade was more labor-intensive than solid post and rail (*zaplot*) fences. This is explained by the large amount of earth work (palisade ditch) and need to burn the bases of the logs for their better preservation (Skobelev, 2012: 191). However, such processing was not always carried out. Archaeological research has not revealed that the bases of the surviving palisade logs were burned (Borodovsky, 2021a: 373). In addition, even if the amount of earth work during construction of a palisade wall was larger than with digging holes for the infrequent posts of a *zaplot* fence, the amount of wood in both cases was approximately the same. The width of the span between posts was at least 3–5 m; it required no less logs than a similar section of a palisade. Another argument in favor of the *zaplot* fence was that it was difficult to build a palisade on certain types of (stony) soils (Skobelev, 2012: 191). However, this argument was irrelevant for the loam of the Upper Ob region. But a solid post and rail (*zaplot*) fence did have one advantage over palisade walls. Judging by the results of experimental restoration of walls at Fort Umrevinsky, unburned palisade logs quickly began to protrude from their position in the row, if there was no wooden platform on the inside of the palisade; whereas separate sections of horizontally laid logs of the *zaplot* fence had more rigid fastening in the grooves of the supporting posts set vertically. These posts had to be quite thick as opposed to the horizontally laid logs.

The above discussion of the structural features of the inner fence of the skete in the vicinity of Maltsevo should not be viewed as a criticism of the publication by Pulkin (2013), but as desire to correctly interpret the information about this structure in the original publication (Belikov, 1905: 38, 40, 41). It should also be emphasized that it gives probably the most detailed description of an Old Believer skete where “burning” occurred in the 18th century as compared to similar objects (Pulkin, 2013: 266). No less

important is the fact that during construction of the skete in the vicinity of Maltsevo, the technique of setting up defensive structures (palisades) typical for Siberian forts was used. This is not an isolated case in the Upper Ob region. For example, several log houses and a fort were built in the forests along the Chumysh and Losikha rivers in 1739 before the burning incident (Ibid.: 264).

Discussion

Thus, according to the written sources, the skete in the vicinity of the village of Maltsevo was enclosed by a palisade wall on the outside, behind which there was an interior solid *zaplot* fence. The height of the palisade walls was “three and a half arshins” (Belikov, 1905: 38), that is 2.45 m (Shostylin, 1975: 256, 259). Considering that the size of palisade logs dug into the ground had to be at least one third of their total length, logs about 3 m long were used for the palisade. According to the data obtained from archaeological excavations at Fort Umrevinsky, the diameter of the logs varied from 15 to 25 cm, and their parts surviving in the palisade ditch were 70–80 cm long (Borodovsky, Gorokhov, 2008: 75; Borodovsky, 2021b: 96) (Fig. 2). Trees (pines) of this thickness usually grew in the forest thicket, where they strove for light and had fairly long trunks (up to 15–20 m) with more or less uniform diameter. At least three palisade logs could be prepared from this raw material (Fig. 3). For setting up the palisade, a ditch had to be dug (Fig. 4). Archaeological studies at Fort Umrevinsky have allowed for the identification of such an earthen structure filled with decay from palisade logs. The depth of the ditch was 0.87 m, the width was 0.5 m (Borodovsky, Gorokhov, 2009: 74; Borodovsky, 2021b: 94).

The known parameters of the palisade make it possible to calculate the total labor costs and volume of raw materials. For some forts, written sources indicate the exact number of palisade logs that had to be set up during construction or repair of palisade walls. For example, at least 1500 logs were procured in 1753 to repair the palisade at Fort Ilimsk (Russkiye, 2003: 19). The total length and configuration of the palisade wall of the skete near Maltsevo is unknown. However, taking into account the fact that the palisade protected the interior solid *zaplot* fence and nine densely set log houses, the area of this object was relatively large. During the excavations at Fort Umrevinsky, a well-

preserved 1.5 m section of palisade wall was discovered, which consisted of seven logs up to 20 cm wide (Borodovsky, Gorokhov, 2009: 34). These were made of logs split in half, well hewn, and very tightly fitted to each other. It is quite possible that J.G. Gmelin observed precisely such a palisade when he visited that fort in 1741 (Borodovsky, 2021b: 99). Experimental restoration of the palisade at Fort Umrevinsky from logs with a diameter of 15–20 cm has shown that there were five or six logs per meter (Borodovsky, Gorokhov, 2020: 61–63) (Fig. 5). According to the written sources, 648 palisade logs were set up between two towers covering a span of 61 sazhen (131 m 76 cm) in 1703 at Fort Ilimsk (Russkiye, 2003: 19). Therefore, their diameter was 20 cm or slightly more. Such parameters are quite comparable with the size of small and medium Siberian forts.



Fig. 2. Surviving parts of palisade logs of Fort Umrevinsky.



Fig. 3. Experimental production of logs for Fort Umrevinsky.



Fig. 4. Palisade ditch of Fort Umrevinsky.

As far as the *zaplot* fence is concerned, structures of this type in the 18th century were typical not only of residential and utility buildings, but also of some forts (Forts Selenginsk, Yenisei, and Irkutsk) (Kradin, 1988: 63, 73, 123). Such a fence was discovered during the excavations at Fort Sayansk on the Middle Yenisei River (Skobelev, 2012: 190; 2013, 2018; Mainicheva, Skobelev, Berezhenko, 2018). In the north of the Upper Ob region, Fort Berdsk (Minenko, 1989: 90; Rezun, Vasilyevsky, 1989: 107; Russkiye ostrogi..., 2003: 13), and the Suzun copper smelter had such a fence. Archaeological studies of the Suzun copper smelter have revealed that a “stronghold” up to 3 sazhen (about 4.5 m) high, mentioned in written sources when describing fortifications of this object, was actually of the solid post and rail (*zaplot*) type (Shapovalov, Roslyakov, 2013: 178–179). During the excavations, it was possible to trace the length between posts, reaching up to 5 m. The *zaplot* fence of the skete in the vicinity of Maltsevo could have had a domestic purpose. It was already mentioned above that during self-immolation, one living person was removed from this fence (Belikov, 1905: 38). This means that the height of the *zaplot* fence was not too large (no more than 1.5 m), if a person could climb it.

It might have been conceived of not only as one of the lines of fortification, but also as an enclosure for the future “cemetery” of Old Believer new martyrs after their self-immolation. It should be added that support posts of a *zaplot* fence were observed in the course of archaeological research studying the inner space of Fort Umrevinsky, which was later used as a cemetery in the late 18th–19th centuries (Borodovsky, Gorokhov, 2009: 80; 2020: 86–89; figs. 50, 52, 59, 60, 63, 68).

The skete in the vicinity of the village of Maltsevo consisted of nine log houses with cellars, two of which were “placed close to one other” (Belikov, 1905: 38). The size of these log buildings is unknown. However, using ethnographic data it is possible to calculate several variants for the total area of the living space in them. It is known that the average size of a Russian peasant log house ranged from 4×4 to 5.5×6.5 m; among wealthy peasants, it reached 8×9 or 9×10 m (Russkiye, 2003: 280). Seven out of nine buildings in the skete were residential. Since the double log house served as a prayer house (Belikov, 1905: 38), its size will be considered separately. With log houses measuring 4×4 m, the area of seven buildings would have been 112 m^2 , and with a size of 5.5×6.5 m the area would have been 250.25 m^2 . With a size of 8×9 m the area would have been 504 m^2 , and with a size of 9×10 m it would have been 630 m^2 . However, it should be taken into account that approximately a fourth or fifth part of a Russian log house was taken up by the stove (Russkiye, 2003: 280). The description of another skete of Old Believers in the vicinity of the village of Filippovo on the Chumysh River from 1759 mentioned that “a new adobe stove was built in the hut” (Belikov, 1905: 38). In this case, the total living space of seven log houses 4×4 m would have been $84.0\text{--}89.6 \text{ m}^2$, while that of seven 5.5×6.5 m houses would have been $187.6\text{--}200.2 \text{ m}^2$. The total living space of seven log houses



Fig. 5. Restored palisade wall of Fort Umrevinsky.

8 × 9 m would have been 378.0–403.2 m², while that of seven 9 × 10 m houses would have been 472.5–504.0 m². However, sizes of stoves in the mid-18th century, judging by the stove foundation measuring 3.4 × 3.0 m (Borodovsky, Gorokhov, 2009: 59), which was discovered at Fort Umrevinsky, were somewhat different. If we take into account the stove area (10.2 m²), the variants for seven log houses of the above sizes would have been 40.6 m²; 178.85 m²; 432.5 m²; and 558.6 m². Then we should calculate the area of the religious building, which consisted of a double log cabin. If each part was 4 × 4 m, the total space of the joint room would have been 32 m², and with each part being 5.5 × 6.5 m it would have been 71.5 m². If each part was 8 × 9 m, the total space of the joint room would have been 144 m², and with a size of 9 × 10 m it would have been 180 m². In fact, sizes of the log cabins could have been different, and this building could have had a stove. However, in general, this structure can still be described as a two-row residential building (Etnografiya..., 1981: 122, fig. 3, e).

Thus, the total area of log houses of the skete in the vicinity of Maltsevo could have ranged from 184.6 to 738.6 m². Calculations of the living space are necessary for assessing the capacities for accommodating people in the skete. If the total number of those who took refuge there initially reached 200, with a total area of 184.6 m², each person would have had up to 0.9 m², and with 738.6 m² – up to 3.6 m² of living space.

The prayer house (double log house) was a building for mass occupancy of people. With an area of 144 m², each person would have had 0.72 m², and with 180 m², 0.9 m². Assessing this area to determine the density of people can be calculated using Herbert Jacobs' method of crowd size estimation. The calculation is carried out by adding the length and width of the area occupied by the crowd of people, and multiplying it by the density factor: 10 for a dense crowd and 7 for a sparse crowd. In accordance with such calculations, people standing at arm's length occupy 1 m² each; the density when it is still possible to pass between people is 2 persons/m², and if they stand shoulder to shoulder, the density is 4 persons/m². This method of calculation, which has many times been verified empirically, makes it possible to give an estimate with an accuracy of up to 20 %. Application of such a computational technique to the situation in the skete seems to be quite correct, since in the Old Believer practice, when preparing and carrying out self-immolation, "crowds repeatedly gathered to be burned" (Pulkin, 2013: 211).

It would be important to discuss specific features of the residential log buildings in the skete in some detail. Since "guards with guns in their hands stood on the roofs of the houses day and night" (Belikov, 1905: 38), it may be assumed that the roofs were flat. Judging by ethnographic data, in Siberia, the upper layer of logs in

some log houses could have served both as a ceiling and a roof. A thick layer of earth was placed on top of such a roof for heat- and waterproofing (Etnografiya..., 1981: 112). However, if the roofs were used as watchmen posts, the log houses should have been clearly higher than the outer palisade wall (2.45 m). Taking into account the distance from the palisade wall, a height of 3 m would have been quite sufficient for the roof to serve as a fighting platform. The logwork of the house could have served as a battle tower. For example, when describing Fort Kashtak created in 1697, it is indicated that "four log houses were built at the corners, and three towers were built on three log houses" (Kashtakskiy serebroplavilnyi promysel, 2016: 98).

The buildings of the skete in the vicinity of the village of Maltsevo under the administration of Fort Chaus described above reveal that the Old Believers' "teachers of self-destructive death" clearly possessed the necessary technical knowledge (Pulkin, 2013: 241). In this regard, the figure of the preacher Fyodor Nemchinov, the son of a Cossack chief, who had the rank of "head", is noteworthy (Belikov, 1905: 38). In addition to a family connection with a fairly high ranking officer of the Cossacks, who were engaged not only in military service, but also in fort construction, his originating from the city of Tara is important. Since the 1720s, many immigrants from this town and its vicinity fled from persecution for refusing to swear allegiance to Empress Catherine I, after Peter's decree on succession to the throne of 1722, and lived in the administration of Fort Chaus (Minenko, 1984: 9). They included Old Believers, some of whom suffered during the anti-government unrest in the town of Tara (Pulkin, 2013: 213). Notably, quite a few peasants either living in forts (the native of Fort Berdsk, who led self-immolations on the Chumysh and Losikha rivers in 1739) (Ibid.: 264), or working for a long time in their immediate vicinity (peasants from the skete in the vicinity of Maltsevo) (Ibid.: 40, 41), were involved in building Old Believers' sketes in the Upper Ob region. In addition, peasant estates were also sometimes surrounded by walls of the fort type (Etnografiya..., 1981: 116).

Conclusions

Detailed analysis of information from written sources about the Old Believer skete in the vicinity of the village of Maltsevo under the administration of Fort Chaus, which burned down in 1756, confirms the long-term preservation of fortification traditions of the Tsardom of Muscovy, which received their final shape in the 17th century. This was a result not only of the ideological commitment of the Siberian Old Believers to the "rules of antiquity", but also of the practice of building Russian forts in the Upper Ob region in the 18th century

following the “standards” of the pre-Petrine period. One illustrative example is the result of archaeological research at Fort Umrevinsky, where defensive structures (towers) of the *basteya* type, protruding at the corners of the fortification wall, rather than bastion-type fortifications, continued to be built until the first third of the 18th century (Borodovsky, 2021b: 100).

During construction of the skete in the vicinity of Maltsevo, a large amount of earth work was carried out. In addition to the outer palisade ditch and pits for the posts of the inner solid post and rail (*zaplot*) fence, cellars were dug under the huts, where straw and pitch wood were stored for self-immolation (Belikov, 1905: 38). There might have been nine or eight cellars, if the prayer house (double log house) had a joint cellar. Specific features of the earth work are extremely important in the case of the possible future discovery of this skete as an object of archaeological heritage. At the level of the conventional natural layer, its remains should be surrounded by the palisade ditch, behind which there should be individual pits remaining from the posts of the interior *zaplot* fence. In the central part of this site, there should be several foundation pits (from cellars), one of which may be larger than the others. The cultural layer should contain numerous traces of burning. This is typical not only for compact complexes of wooden structures that burned simultaneously, but also for objects such as forts that constantly suffered from fires (Borodovsky, 2021a).

Wooden fortifications and protective structures of the Old Believers' skete in the vicinity of Maltsevo were distinguished by a combination of the *zaplot* technique, with horizontal placement of logs between the posts, and the palisade wall-building technique. According to the written sources and archaeological research, this was typical of wooden fortifications at a number of Siberian forts (Forts Selenginsk, Yeniseisk, Irkutsk, and Sayansk). In the Upper Ob region, the Suzun copper smelter and mint also had walls of this type. However, such fences may theoretically be correlated with cemetery enclosures, as was archaeologically established at the necropolis that emerged at the turn of the 18th–19th centuries in Fort Umrevinsky. Identification of the place where a short-lived, burned skete near the village of Maltsevo was located would be very important, since it would make it possible to study archaeologically one of the representative complexes of the Old Believer culture at the beginning of the second half of the 18th century in the Upper Ob region.

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