Maksim Gavrilovich Rudomyotkin, Molokan Messianic King

William John Samarin / Василий Иванич Самарин

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The beginning

He was born about two hundred years ago. This would be in 1817; others say in 1823 (or about 1832). Agreed is that this was in the village of Algasovo (existing today about 100 km north of the city of Tambov), the district of Morshansk, in the Russian province (\textit{oblast'}) of Tambov that borders on the Volga River. He was given the name Maksim, his patronymic was Gavrilovich (the son of Gavril), and his family name was Rudomyotkin (transliterated Rudomëtkin from the Cyrillic). The family may already have been dissident from the Orthodox Church, the adults members of the Khlysty sect or the Molokan one (accounts vary). Attracted

* It is a pleasure to acknowledge with gratitude the hospitality of Andrei J. and Tatiana Conovaloff and of Michael P. and Stella Lediaev and for the unlimited time that was given to discussing the Molokan religion in its derivative forms and in particular Maksim Gavrilovich Rudomyotkin. Mr Conovaloff, the administrator of www.molokane.org, is the most accomplished researcher on anything that might be relevant to the topic ‘Molokan.’ Mr Lediaev provided me with copies of several documents he had prepared about Rudomyotkin and on other matters that had relevance to the two-hundredth anniversary in 2005 of the origin of the Molokan faith. He also generously answered questions I put to him while writing this work. Other individuals prefer to remain anonymous. — The author of this essay was born and reared in the Los Angeles community less than twenty years after it was created and participated voluntarily in all religious and para-religious events. He welcomes contributions from others with comments about this work.

1 MGR is labelled a Molokan because he considered himself one. It should be sufficient to cite only the following as evidence: Book 2. Article 19. Verse 6; henceforth abbreviated as follows: 4.1.14; 5.3.1; 5.4.5, 37. His writings are cited in the English translation edited as Shubin 1983, for which see footnote 22. — The justification for and significance of this assumed identity are matters that require more discussion than can be undertaken here. By the time Rudomyotkin was writing there were certainly two major groups, those who had begun to emphasize the “spiritual” or charismatic aspect of religion (the Jumpers) and those who did not (\textit{Postoyannie}, the Steadfast or Conservative). Therefore if one maintains that contemporary Pryguns (Jumpers) “highjack” the name Molokan as their own, one must acknowledge that Rudomyotkin was among the first to do so. For more on the typology and taxonomy of ‘Molokans’ see www.molokane.org. (For Prygun see below.)

2 Originally a nick-name or a derogatory one, \textit{molokan} (not capitalized in Russian), based on the word for milk, alluded to the fact that the members of this sect violated the Orthodox proscriptions against the consumption of dairy products on certain days of the week. The sect arose in the late 18th century in European Russia. Although frequently cited along with Doukhobors, another dissident sect, the two are quite different. By the middle of the 19th century both of these sects were thriving, many of their members quite successful economically, the Molokans possibly more so.
probably by the spiritual movement of leapers and jumpers among Molokans in Nikitino (now named Fioletovo in Armenia). The family moved there when he was about eight years old. He most likely had not gone to school, but he did learn to read and write. Photographs of his original manuscripts in Spirit and Life—Book of the Sun (henceforth S&L, from Russian transliterated Dukh i Zhizn’—Kniga Solntsa, abbreviated DZh) reveal familiarity with the Church Slavonic variety of Russian. But since publications of Scripture in contemporary Russian had appeared since 1819 (the four Gospels in diglot form, Slavonic and Russian), he might have obtained one of these. In the 1850s he established his own meetings in the home of one of his followers.

In 1839 (or earlier) Molokans arrived in the region of the Molochnaya River in the Melitopol district of what we know today as Ukraine, either having been sent there from central European Russia by Tsar Nicholas Pavlovich or having come voluntarily. In this region and about this time (“in the first decade of the second half of the 19th century” or even 1833) the “sect of spiritual Molokan Jumpers” (in Russian Prygun) arose in “Akkerman Bessarabia” and Tavria in 1883. (Akkerman was its Ottoman Turkish name, replaced in Russian with Belgorod-Dnestrovskii because of its location on the Dnester River.) Bessarabia, part of which is now in Moldova, had been occupied in the war with Turkey (1806 and 1812) under Alexander I. In 1813 he invited Germans to settle, promising freedom of religion and exemption from military service among other benefits. Among those who responded were some of Lutheran faith who established twenty-four villages in the Akkerman District (Kreis), where they eventually represented more than 16 percent of the population. “[S]imultaneously in all the villages of the Transcaucasus,” writes I. G. Samarin in the introduction to S&L, a spiritual renewal broke out, advocating that “For the attainment of purity of soul and eternal life, a man must be born again from above; and must renew himself with total repentance in order to receive the manifest gift of the Holy Spirit.” The “believers in the Spirit,” as they were considered, were challenged by the “non-believers,” resulting in strife that aroused the state to intervene. Prophets were appearing like mushrooms after a rain.

Terentij (Terenty) Belobzorov (Belogurov), a Molokan from Melitopol according to one source, proclaimed himself to be the prophet Elijah. He arrived in the Molochna (as Mennonites refer to this region of settlement) in 1836, preaching to Molokans there about the imminent establishment of a thousand-year kingdom, urging them to do nothing else but pray and sing.

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3 The qualification ‘spiritual’ might as well be capitalized because it is based on the Holy Spirit of the Trinity. It occurs in all full names of varieties of Molokans but also in names of other Russian sects.

4 Or the Molokans of Algasovo were forcibly established in Armenia, where they created the settlement of Nikitino in 1842 (Clay 2011). The Molokan settlement would have been associated with tsarist intentions to establish an ethnically Russian presence in this region recently conquered from the Ottoman Empire.

5 References to sources are in endnotes indicated with italicized numerals in red font, for which see page 17.

6 Samarin also uses the phrase “gifts of the Holy Spirit,” probably referring to jumping and speaking in tongues (I. G. Samarin 1983:47). Because of this language one can call the Prygun sect a charismatic one, relating it to a similar movement that took place in 20th century.

7 The Molochna, as it is referred to in Mennonite literature, is a region in Southern Russia, now Ukraine, where Mennonites began to settle formally in 1809. It lies between the rivers Tokmak in the north, Molochnaya to the west, and Iushanlee to the south. For a map see Dyck et al. 2015.
Molokans, along with Dukhobors, had arrived in this district after having been banished from Tambov and Vladimir guberniyas (provinces) in 1823. Their three villages were Novo-Vasilievka, Astrakhanka, and Novo-Spask. After Terenty’s death, his followers still assembled day and night, singing and praying. From a well-informed Mennonite contemporary of this very region, Johann Cornies, we learn more: “Several of these became inspired and expressed themselves in their assemblies by means of strange and unusual behavior. They stamped their feet, stretched their limbs out in a stiff and cramped manner, and snorted through their noses expelling a mass of filth, especially when someone who did not belong among them appeared in their assembly.”

Another such prophet was Lukian Petrovich Sokolov (1753-1858), born with the name Anikei Ignatievich Borisov, in the province of Tambov. He went to the south (New Russia at that time), where settlers speaking German dialects had settled—Lutherans in Bessarabia and Mennonites in near-by Tavria. He and several other families went eastward in 1850 to join fellow believers in Elizabethpol Province. This must be the resettlement about which Johann Cornies wrote on March 11, 1833, apparently from the Mennonite village of Ohrloff: The Molokans “would like to move to Georgia and sent deputies there … last year.” Land beyond Shushi [sic] had been set aside by the government for settlement of Molokans from various guberniyas. They settled in Novo-Delizhan, District of Kazakh, Elizavetpol’skaya guberniya, formerly an outlying settlement of Delizhan now incorporated within the city (9.14.10). This must be Dilijan in what is Armenia, now a resort town, the “Armenian Switzerland,” a short distance from Fioletovo to the west through which passes Highway M8. Another major Molokan town now in Turkey, Kars, is directly west about 150 km away. Dilijan Highway M4 goes to Tbilisi (tsarist Tiflis), yet another Molokan center. It was Petrovich who introduced jumping. Two of his personal letters to fellow believers, dated 1845 and 1851, are included in S&L.

As one of Lukian Petrovich’s “disciples,” Maksim Gavrilovich (to use a relaxed but deferential form of his name in the Russian manner) followed his “hero” to Delizhan. This is where, when he was about twenty-seven years old, he received “the gift of the Holy Spirit” and began to “speak in tongues,” as one says today, while active in the local brotherhood of spiritual (“charismatic”) Molokans. He then began to preach his version of millennial religion, which made his followers members of New Israel, confessing his fight against the Russian Empire (7.27.3), whose tsar was doomed with unexpected judgment (9.2.1). The event in which he was crowned “king” seems to be implied in a letter addressed to “all my people” in which he reminds them of “an assembly of all the people” when a banner with “outstretched prophetic hands” was held over his head signifying “me as a king over all the world.” And he was to remain “king of spirits” or “King of Spirits” (9.15.7) to “govern and reign with this Spirit while under the

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8 See Dyck et al. 2015. The chapter on Molokans (IV. The Molokan Sect in the Molochaia. SAOR 39-1-548. Undated [after 1833]) is in Part Two, ‘Reports and Studies by Johann Cornies.’ It has an Editors’ Introduction, pp 449-454. There are also reports about Molokans dated June 25, 1830 (p. 193), February 24, 1831 (p. 216) and March 11, 1833 (p. 318).
9 The sequence “a king” in S&L is an artifact of translation since Russian does not have an equivalent for the English word a; the lower case for king must be deliberate on the part of the editor.
confinement of Solovetski castle” (4.5.12). But his people were not all of the Molokans, whether Steadfast or Jumpers. Only the latter who converted to his religion were “the true worshippers” (5.4.5; 6.21.11). When MGR writes of “two factions” in Nikitino having been created because of the intervention of a state official (2.19.6), he seems to imply that all of the Jumpers followed him: “we, in the Spirit the New Israel, the leapers and jumpers” (6.1.2). We should reflect on the sociological makeup of these groups. His dear followers, the Leapers and Jumpers, he addressed as “simple people” (6.7.4), members of the lower class in various villages and towns. He contrasts them with the army of “the dark evil antichrist” and people like them, “all the rich men, city residents, the merchants, and the noblemen” with their “elegant attire” (10.14.9) and their followers among commoners and laymen (6.10.7-8). But there were also Molokans, even Pryguns, who belonged to the merchant class or its equivalent because they had their own businesses or were well-paid artisans. They may not have been as wealthy and educated as the Steadfast were elsewhere in Russia, but they could consider themselves better off than the ‘simple people.’ The parents of I. G. Samarin, for example, owned a flour mill, and he considered himself educated enough to have corresponded with Count Leo Tolstoy. We have almost census-like information for the population of the villages Novo-Vasilievka, Astrakhanka, and Novo-Spask cited above. The total in the 1830s was 2,797, 1,350 of whom were male and 1,447 female, without any mention of children. The population was divided into eight categories. Here I combine the genders, in the order of the original. Except for “Crown peasants” the names are not capitalized in the original.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nobles</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharged soldiers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchants</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens and craftsmen</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown peasants</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odnodvortsy (peasant)</td>
<td>1,673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and other peasants</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The translation of S&L in English does not support the idea that Rudomyotkin was an elegant author, but the Molokan translator John K. Berokoff is of the opinion that “The lofty and eloquent language of the prayers and songs in the Church Services is a testimonial of the Divine nature of the inspiration” (1944). Here is a sample.

O, King of kings, and Lord of lords!
Thou hast set Thyself astride me

10 “[T]his Spirit,” he writes, “is in person God Himself and the King of all the New Israel” (8.15.2).
11 MGR (Rudomyotkin) appropriates the category “Molokan generation” for his New Israel (5.3.1). See note 1. — The Steadfast are called Obshikh in N. B. 1896. — Although MGR includes Matvei Semeonovich Dalmatov as one of the heroes (Book 9, Article 6), as does I. G. Samarin in his introductory chapter, Dalmatov’s followers were not Jumpers.
12 ‘Nobles,’ of course, were not all what we might imagine them to be. This was simply a status established by Peter the Great. At the lowest rank would be persons who were very poor.
As upon Thy heavenly white horse, all clothed in gold.
And Thou art riding upon me at a full gallop.
From the rising of the sun towards the setting of it. …
And Thou shalt then place me, Thy anointed one, in Thy stead,
As King upon the earth for the whole millennium.  

While active in the religious community, Maksim Gavrilovich was married with four
children (three sons and one daughter), making his living as a wheelwright or carpenter but also
as “a worker of the soil.” He is presumed to have been a presbyter among these Spiritual
Christians, but this is unlikely, given that an organized religion may not yet have been created.
He had, however, authorized some individuals for certain roles. One of them was the right to
bless marriages (10.14.8). A presvīter, the Russian word, in contemporary Prygun congregations
is an ‘elder’ (not necessarily because of age) who is endowed with certain religious duties and
privileges. Maksim Gavrilovich, Petrovich, and others who are cited in S&L are considered
preceptors, a translation of Russian nastávnik. Today a preceptor is considered “the headmaster
or principal of a school,” but in the 19th century it also meant teacher. (In the practice of
Prygun filiopietism they are revered for having been “martyrs” for the faith, memorialized on the
title page of S&L.) We cannot even be certain that before his arrest and confinement
Rudomyotkin had declared himself tsar. In fact, we are informed, his followers were still
“learning the basic order of the church services” when he was sent into exile from Nikitino. 

In prison

Rudomyotkin’s beliefs as well as religious and public behavior were viewed unfavorably
by the general public and more so by persons in the Molokan community. Some of the latter
appear to have been involved in arousing representatives of the State and the Church to take
action against him. He was, after all, making declarations that made him an enemy of the Tsar.
The last straw was a public provocation that led to his arrest in 1858 and confinement far away at
the Monastery of St Solvetski on an island in the White Sea north of St Petersburg. Then he was
moved in 1869 to the Savior Monastery of St Euthymius at Suzdal, north-east of Moscow—
allegedly a more tolerable incarceration, thanks to the intervention of a count with the surname
Tolstoy (of no kinship with the already famous author). He died there around 1877, the year after
his charismatic predecessor David Yesseyevich did (see footnote 23). It is safe to assume, being
informed about the way secular and religious authority was exercised during the tsarist regimes,
that there may not even have been a legal condemnation since he informed one of his
 correspondents that he did not know how long he was to be there (3.2.4-5). He was simply sent
 away for the rest of his life or until he had returned to the folds of Mother Russia by recanting his
pernicious beliefs. He notified his correspondents about being brain-washed by the priests, as we
would say. “You should join us, Rudometkin,” said the Abbot, “Kneel down to me at my feet
and I will give you authority throughout all the Russian Empire” (4.1.11). On his death, being an
enemy of the Church, he would have been buried disgracefully, so his burial place is not known.
There is no eye-witness testimony of his long imprisonment even though he may have been
visited by fellow believers from time to time. To have survived imprisonment for about nineteen

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13 Rudometkin [sic] 1944, Song 10, formatted anew by me according to the English translation
but capitalization in the translation.
years he must have been given some comfort and assistance; several times he mentions having received roubles (14.30.6). He also corresponded with family and followers, on one occasion writing, “I have written you many letters,” apparently because he was concerned about their having abandoned him (13.1.1; 13.2.1; 11.7.3). Indeed, he denounces and damns those who “disobeyed” his testament and “deserted” his path, and “blasphemed” his prophetic activity (Book 14, Article 1; 9.15.2), some of them named (4.1.14; 11.8.6). “Sinistral” is the translation chosen by the editor for the frequently-used word in Russian that means ‘mislit, mistaken, errant,’ not ‘left-handed.’ ‘Errant’ would have been a dynamic, not opaque, rendering.

MGR used various ways to avoid censorship, a fact revealed in his literature. Secrecy is suggested in the words, “you can write of all matters that are needful for me, word by word separately throughout a letter so as not to be noticeable” (3.3.15). In another place he writes, “Give me news of it [the reading of his ‘secret letter’] in your letter to me, in this context, ‘Our estuary and yours is filling up due to this.’ Then I will truly know that it has reached your hands” (1.37.9-10). Letters were censored before being given to him or were not given to him at all for having information about religious experiences (4.1.8).

The history that has just been construed reveals Rudomyotkin’s prophetic ministry, as it must be called, for he declared himself to be a divinely inspired prophet and has been considered one ever since. It arose as a result of an evolution toward radical apocalypticism and millennialism in ideology and in the demonstration of piety. But these cultural features did not appear in a vacuum. Russia’s naród had experimented with exotic religion for centuries, and there had been an explosion of it among Mennonites, who had become dissatisfied with the torpid religion Russo-Prussian Anabaptism had become in Russia. One can argue that Maksimism was just another species of virulent sectarianism. But the argument cannot be developed here because of the constraints of brevity—except for the following.

Just consider the Great Trek in 1880-1884 of Mennonites, motivated by eschatological ideas, moving from European Russia to the region of Bukhara in Turkestan, the “land of the rising sun.” It must be related in ways that we do not yet fully understand to what Rudomyotkin’s followers call pokhód, a journey to a better and safer place, and to other specific features. Although most of the 600 Mennonite emigrants were from Am Trakt on the Volga River in Samara Province (about 1,400 miles from their destination), a group came from the Molochna under the leadership of Abraham Peters. Molokans were settled in both of these places. The group that was being led to “the land of refuge” by Claas Epp, Jr. especially interests us because of the similarities of his movement with Rudomyotkin’s. Mennonites and Molokans were both reading and talking about Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling’s novel Heimweh about a land of refuge and peace, translated into Russian. Proof for this assertion is found again in one of Mennonite Cornies’ documents from the 1830s: Molokans “read about and investigate with the greatest eagerness, all reports that appear to indicate this [visible thousand-year kingdom] or

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14 Bukhara is just east of the Amudarja River, north of Aghanistan. Russian Turkestan was established officially in 1867 as a Governor-Generalship with Tashkent as its capital. For the “complete story” see Belk 1976 cited by Dueck 1985.

15 A chapter of twelve pages in S&L “Composed and supplemented by the Second SPIRIT AND LIFE Editors (1928)” is entitled “The journey into refuge. From the Transcaucuses and Transcaspia to America.” Its abstract is the following: “Of the sectarians of the Molokan Spiritual Jumpers Religion, according to prophetic revelation. The beginning of the journey, 1904, the end, 1911.”
relate to it. They expect an Antichrist. The Molokans possess the writings of Stilling, read them industriously, and especially look for those references describing a thousand-year kingdom of peace.”

Epp considered himself the prophet Elijah and Melchizedek. For him white vestments had religious significance, as they did for Rudomyotkin (5.21.2). He dressed in white ascension robes, for example, on the very day in 1889 when he expected Jesus to return. Epp’s preachments were so eccentric that even others in the trek, like Abraham Peters, considered him a “false prophet.”

With these claims, and more, during his imprisonment, Maksim Gavrilovich kept reminding his followers who he was and what he was going to do for them. But did he demonstrate his special relationship with the Triune God with some deed that they might consider miraculous? None, it would seem. None, unless it was his ability to communicate with God in what he called “a holy, celestial language” and the “language of Zion” (2.18.16; 14.10.1; 14.16.9). It was in this language that he was given his names, and in this language (in “new, fiery tongues”) he prayed and the Holy Spirit dictated messages to him: God “gave to me the wisdom and understanding to write this holy booklet in a new holy celestial tongue [language]” (5.23.3). More frequently the work is referred to as a book and specifically as a “memoir” (Book 6, Prologue). The baptism with the Holy Spirit that the Israelites experienced was also in “the fire of the Word of new tongues” (2.16.1; 2.15, 16). In other words, speaking in tongues—the phenomenon we know as glossolalia—was a sign of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, just as it was for Pentecostalists at the beginning of the 20th century and then again in the Charismatic Renewal of the 1960s and 1970s.

It turns out that Maksimist glossolalia is not the same as what I recorded and analyzed in America, for which see Tongues of men and angels (1972). (The word glossolalia is used by others in different ways.) And I was wrong in that book to write that I had heard glossolalia in Molokan churches in Los Angeles. That was before I had studied S&L and found the very sequence of words in MGR’s writings, which I had years ago heard in a church service: Párginal Asírginal. In church people were reciting ‘celestial’ words that they had learned. They were not creating discourse extemporaneously. Most of Maksim’s words are personal names, place names, titles, and so forth, like the following (italics added).

- the city Oblitan, the new Jerusalem (4.14.14)
- new Adam named Rusmeldon, and his wife Rusmeldaka (12.2.4)
- Fayil Sagdan Vag, which is the Word of God (13.11.3)
- the heavenly name Enfayil Savakhan (10.20.4)

16 Melchizedek is the mysterious priest-king of Salem, who blessed Abraham and is the spiritual progenitor of Jesus as High Priest (Hebrews, Chapter 7).
17 The insistence on translating the Russian as “tongues” is unfortunate, since language or speech is the phenomenon that is named and since the Russian word also means language. — The translation “booklet” is also misleading. The Russian word can also mean ‘small book.’
18 The reference is to the following: “Then they saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there. The Holy Spirit took control of everyone, and they began speaking whatever languages the Spirit let them speak” (Acts of the Apostles 2:3-4. The contemporary English version. 1995. Thomas Nelson). The word “fiery” alludes to a flame arising from wood or charcoal on fire. The translator could have chosen “flaming” or “ardent,” etc.
These are exotic words (“secret phrases”), some of whose phonetic sequences are found in languages Rudomyotkin could have heard, and some syllables appear in different pseudo-words, like fayil and ginal (Book 9, Prologue to Article 1). (One notes repetition in pär-ginal a-sür-ginal.) This pseudo-grammatical device appears in contemporary charismatic glossolalia as well.) At least one word, Akhmet—what he considered his divine name—is a common Arabic first name for males in Near Eastern Islamic cultures. His full name was Akhmet Gelgel Enfayil Savakhan Ulia, translated by MGR as “the conqueror over the number of the beast 666” (5.23.4).

Prophetic Plans in Imprisonment

Maksim Gavrilovich’s version of Spiritual Molokan religion probably evolved into something much more extreme while he was in prison. About its early form, presented orally, we have no information; of the latter, we have its fulsome description in what we can call his Prison Letters, dated 1858-1877 in I. G. Samarin 1983. They are expository in that they expound his views, but in a random and repetitious manner. It is in that sense that he is a teacher (“preceptor”). As Paul presented his view of the Hebraic law in Christological terms, Rudomyotkin explained that “the Passover” was to be understood in spiritual ones (Book 1, Articles 32-34). The “Passover of leavened bread” of “Catholic, Coptic, Armenian, Luteran [and] sinistral Molokans” is “pseudo-Christian” prepared by satan (without capitalization in S&L).19 They are also apologetic in the theological sense of defending his views and denigrating all other misled ones. He was not a teacher, however, about ethics and morality. Neither the Gospels nor the letters of Paul are used in a pastoral way.

It should be noted, however, that we are without evidence that the manuscripts were in fact dated originally, except for Article 30 of Book 14 dated “January 23, 1873, city of Suzdal”—although the prologue reads “A Letter. A good day near Summer.” The manuscripts were secreted out, as tradition has it, in the form of what he called ‘books’ (Book 7, Article 28, p. 415), collections of pages of manuscript resembling what Ivan Petrovich Belkin finds when he returns to the family estate after many years of absence: “old yearbooks” bound in green and blue paper.20 The writing is lettered resembling a printed page, giving the impression of being

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19 A footnote might have cited John 6:51 for Rudomyotkin’s claim, ‘And he who eats of Me will live for ages” although capitalization is added to make the passage refer to divinity (1.28.5). In the Gospel Jesus says, “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he shall live forever” (KJV). The verse is misplaced with 1.28.5. — Even though Passover (Paskha) remains the most important holiday for Prygun Molokans in California, there is no common (ecumenical) doctrine and practice. I have been informed dogmatically that bread was once shared in one church at least as part of the Paskha ceremony.

20 There are thirteen “Books” of Rudomyotkin’s documents in S&L, each divided into “Articles” and verses, similar to what is found in the Bible, with each divided into “articles” (chapters) and verses, an organization for which some unknown editor must be responsible. In the English translation punctuation, capitalization (sometimes making a significant hermeneutic difference), and quotation marks seem to be those of its editor. Many of the articles are introduced with an unnamed prologue. Some of the latter seem to have been written by others. Photographs of the manuscript pages reveal that they were small, one of them 8.5 x 7.5 cm and another 8.2 x 7 cm,
copied from a printed text. Lines and borders are even without a fault, although the last lines are almost illegible for being squeezed into a small space. In S&L the texts are presented as “Divinely-inspired discourses by Maxim Gavrilovich Rudometkin, King of Spirits and leader of the people of Zion, the Spiritual Christian Molokan Jumpers” (capitals added here). Consisting of 503 pages, they represent 65.5 percent of the S&L’s total pages. Whatever their original number may have been, some of them survived and were taken to America by grandchildren of MGR’s sister, who married Arkhip Sukhovitsin (Sukoveetzen).

The publication in 1928 of Dukh i Zhizn’ as a work endorsed by the brotherhood was arguably the result of responding to Rudomyotkin’s request when he wrote, “I only ask that you rewrite all of these booklets of mine together into one large book” (14:28). In that same article he instructs his followers to read “this book to everyone in assembly,” but he goes on to admonish them that this should not be done in the presence of “unbelievers” (presumably even Molokans who were not his followers) who, like the present author, must be considered “swine.” These writings are explicitly “secret.” No wonder, then, that S&L has become an arcane and occult sacred volume (“knowable only to the initiate”). Devout followers of MGR use Dukh i Zhizn’ to sacralize a place or event, somewhat as a cross or icon would for the Orthodox. For the same purpose one could use the molitvinik (prayer-book), translated into English by John K. Berokoff (1944), or his Songs of Zion. An event as common as the family meal might bring the work (but probably only in Russian) to the table.

Rudomyotkin’s writings are not all discourses in the usual sense—“formal and orderly and usually extended expression[s] of thought on a subject” (Webster’s Collegiate). Some of the chapters do describe what was to be expected in the near future. But there are also prayers, the lyrics for songs, the rituals for special occasions like weddings and funerals, and didactic “readings” on various topics. Only because of constant surveillance was he not able to write all of what was dictated by the Spirit “in new, fiery tongues” (Book 10, p. 490; 2.18.16). Whether or not this literature was shared by the New Israelites during his imprisonment and later in Russia we still have no reliable information. It does appear, however, that the publication of “the Book of the Sun” was envisioned. When he was writing, it was “not yet to be found in written form in our country, but resides only within me, the spiritual king: not bodily, but verbally” (prologue to 9.22). A sample of this glossographia (written pseudo-language) is found in S&L (p. 768), and is attributed to another one of the Prygun prophets, Efim Gerasimovich Klubnikin. Like the one in W. J. Samarín 1972, it can be described as nothing more than a child’s scribble. (Klubnikin claimed that heavenly inspirations came to him when in 1855 he was twelve years old.)

Nothing less than a new religion was what Rudomyotkin set about to create, claiming divine authority. In the prologue to Book 1, written while he was incarcerated at the Suzdal monastery (as we learn in its first article), he declares it to be a revelation from the Holy Spirit. The experience of inspiration is described as follows (1.4.1):

This [revelation] I myself clearly saw in the rapture of my true Spirit, and heard concerning it discourses from the God of gods, on an occasion during some
unknown time when I was unexpectedly transported to a vast and immeasurable airy field, or in other words, to a foggy sea, not yet inhabited by anyone.

This transportation, while abstaining from food and drink for eight days and nights, to somewhere “above all the seven heavens” (whether in soul or body he says he does not know) is described at length in Book 6.

No one has submitted to systematic analysis Rudomyotkin’s visions of New Israel and his instructions to its spiritual citizens as they await for its establishment. That would be a monumental task if undertaken seriously with expertise in exegesis and hermeneutics of the originals and translations of them in English. Printed portions began to appear only in the “colonies” in Arizona and Los Angeles. We can only dip into the corpus to understand the writer and his obsessions, beginning with claims he made about himself. Care was taken in the selection of assertions that they be literal ones, not metaphorical, recognizing that without a rigorous and systematic analysis of the whole corpus it is sometimes uncertain what the author really means. The words ‘spirit’ and spiritual are perhaps the most ambiguous ones in some contexts. In fact, so frequently do these words occur that one is led to believe that in many instances they have no real meaning, as when a person exclaims about her progenitors, “I feel like they’re with me spiritually.”

One must continually discern whether Rudomyotkin implies the existential, we might call it, or the spiritual, two contrastive phenomenologies. Frequently he seems to decode or hedge his claims with a specification, as “in the Spirit I am king and prophet” (10.12.1) (capitalization that of the editor).

● He is “the concluding principal hero and conqueror from among all of my brethren and the fearless arbiter of all evil” (9.15.1-2). This is declared immediately after praising his Molokan predecessors Matvei Semyonovich Dalmatov, Semyon Matveivich Uklein, and Lukyan Petrovich Sokolov.
● He was pre-existent: “Even before Adam, Abraham and the holy prophets, I was. (4.5.2, 12).
● He, as “this Spirit” is “in person God Himself (8.15.2; 9.22.7; 4.5.2, 12), “God of the faithful” (9.15.7), “the God of the earth” (10.14.4); “my Spirit is God” (10.24).

Although the one who “Edited and supplemented” the Divine discourses 1983 (here S&L) is identified as Daniel H. Shubin 1983 (back of title page), “editors” are mentioned on the page for Table of Contents (bottom) and implied in “our gratitude” (back of title page). Shubin is given responsibility for having “supplemented” the work, but the ‘Preface to the translation’ does not explain what these supplements are, and other kinds of editing are not explained.

Ignored is David Yesseyevich (born Feodor [Fyodor] Osipovich Bulgakov) who took part in the charismatic revival in Tavria province in 1833, when people spoke in tongues. (The circumstances of his deliberate name-change are not known, but the allusion is certainly to David the son of Jesse, who became King of Israel.) His Book of Zion and Mirror of the Soul are included in S&L (90 pages in all), in which one finds several ideas and images that were later adopted by MGR with some modification, like “the woman clothed in the sun” (Book of Zion 6.4). Whereas I. G. Samarin says the Yesseyevich wrote his two books while imprisoned in a dungeon in Tavria in 1833, the editor of S&L says that it was during his confinement in Tavria and Georgia “in the period 1833-1876,” that is, until the year before his death (p. 77).
He is King: “king over all the world” (4.4.2; 8.1.13), “the principal worldwide king” (9.25.4), “the King personified” (9.25.5), chosen and anointed to be “the chief and leader of the new Israel” (4.1.13; 12.7.3); the king and prophet of the new Russian people (12.4.4). He was chosen to establish the Kingdom of Christ for a thousand years (1.29.6).

In the 19th century “God will complete His judgment upon the beast of the abyss and his harlot who rides him” (6.14.1; 6.7.4). This will happen “before our eyes” (10.5.6), “during my days” (8.4.9); “In the nineteenth century I descended personally to you from the heavens onto the earth, And Christ has set me as His anointed, in His place as a king upon earth for the whole one thousand years, I lie not.” See also 6.12.12; Reasons for the delay are given in 14.9.

At this time “every holy person can soon await the foundation of the beginning of the new, coming age, the millennial earthly Kingdom of Christ,” gathered in one place “at the foot of the summit of the holy mount called Ugvagir [Ararat] (12.11.5-6).

His new name is Enfayil Savakhan Ulia [Юлія], that is King Ulia, the shepherd “anointed of God” (12.7.1, 3; 8.1.14).

He is the “Book of Life, the seal of the living God” (8.2.7).

He is “a true son of God” and “a new heir of all the world,” “the progenitor [forefather] of all the new Israel” (9.15.4); his “Spirit is God” although he is equal with his friends in the flesh (10.24.1).

He is “the King Ures, the new Jewish Messiah” (10.8.7; 13.1.1), before whom “the Jew and all the tribes of the nations shall bow down” (10.8.7), bringing gifts to him (9.25.6).

His suffering in prisons is “for the sins of my chosen people as a sacrificial lamb offering” (14.13.20); this is his “cross” (3.3.9).

He has been conferred the power to forgive “all sins” (8.1.14; 8.18.9).

He is the “Lord and the eternal Guarantor” of the souls of his faithful; his contemporary friends, male and female, with whom he is “equal in the flesh,” should not treat him as a friend, because he is the Guarantor of their souls” (10.24.1; 13.6.1-2).

He always prays personally for the believers so that God would write their names in the book of life “in my presence, the King of Spirits” (8.2.1-2).

He is “the seven-storied, heavenly ladder, by only which the songs and prayers of the saints eternally ascend and descend!” (14.8.32, exclamation mark in S&L).

He curses for “this age and in the future one” those who blaspheme or forsake “this Spirit” (8.15.3); “he who opposes me will die by death today, whoever he may be” (9.15.1-2); those who curse him will be cursed for eternity by God, and those who bless him will be blessed, so speaks God himself (a paraphrase, Book 7, ‘The beginning’).

“He will manifestly resurrect the dead and will translate all the living who are worthy of it” (9.20.6).

He wrote his book for the people of New Zion “at the dictate of the Holy Spirit in new, fiery tongues” (2.18.16).25

24 But in the prologue to a song (9.22) he says that it “resides only within me, the spiritual king: not bodily, but verbally.” — A thorough analysis of MGR’s texts would include an interpretation of the concept person. In this passage, for example, does he refer to himself while in the body? Another one is new: “new Spirit,” “new Israel,” “new name” (10.5.4; 4.1.13; 13.6.1).
He is “the memory of God Almighty!” and “life eternal!” (9.22.1).

By means of “new revelations,” he writes, God “glorifies me” (2.2.1); when God will judge satan and the devil it will be “for my sake” (2.2.3).

“I shall never die. I shall only be renewed manifestly in this body of mine every hundred years” (14.10.4).

If the collection of prophetic writings by Maksim Gavrilovich Rudomyotkin and his contemporaries had not been published in America their millennial version of a new religion might have disappeared as just another schismatic variety that challenged the authority of the Church and the State. Although they were able to gain followers over a wide area of Transcaucasia, inciting discord among Molokans, some of whom had already adopted a spiritual emphasis in belief and practice (the so-called Jumpers), there was no literature to guide these new schismatics who were violently persecuted for their revolutionary ideology.

Maksimism in America

Rudomyotkin presumes to lay out in “Answers” a “foundation of the confession of faith of the Molokan sect, that is, the new spiritual Israel,” which is “the end of all our work” (5.14.37). It obviously owes a great deal to the Bible, presumably the Orthodox version, because he cites the apocryphal books. Although he is familiar with the Bible, his understanding of Scripture is occasionally inaccurate. For example, in the past, he writes, God guided Hebrews “in the form of an image of a man named Jehovah” (1.29.1), whereas Jehovah, of course, is one of the names by which God is known in Hebrew Scripture. He does believe in the Triune God, the Spirit seemingly pre-eminent in divine activity, but the role of Jesus Christ is far from clear. Christ is indeed “the sacrificial Lamb” who “established redemption for all alike” and the “Redeemer and Savior of all who believe upon Him”—words that might be used by even an evangelical Protestant. However, he adds that this salvation is “for the dead as well as their living descendants,” the former needing forever the prayers of the living (1.32.2; 5.9.3) and that the new Israelites are “by faith” the “eternal heirs to the promise of God” (5.4.5). We must add that one can find inconsistencies and contradictions.

Rudomyotkin believes that God had entrusted to him all Molokan sectarians, “the people of God, the new Israel” (5.2.9; 4.5; 5.14.37). After all, he was called to establish the Kingdom of Christ for a thousand years and live eternally with this community as a special population (1.29.6). Therefore, he denounced the division that had arisen because of unfaithfulness and disobedience among his followers in Zion and because of persecution by outsiders (2.19.2, 6; 20.5). The details of his esoteric beliefs are too numerous and complex to treat summarily. (And they were not original either. Russia had been and was still being preached a variety of utopian options.) Likewise ignored is speculation about what extra-biblical ideas may have influenced him. Some have already been cited. Coincidental, one must suppose, is the existence of the (presumably secret) society of “New Israel” or the “People of God” founded by the nobleman

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25 The name Zion had appeared among other sects, even in some Molokan ones, before Rudomyotkin (N. B. 1896).
26 In the footnotes are references to Scripture “added by the translator and the various editors of this and previous Russian editions” (p. 8).
Tadeusz Leszczyc-Grabianka that existed among the aristocracy, many who had been Rosicrucians, at the end of the 18th century in St Petersburg.

Even if Rudomyotkin’s religion was established as a new sect among other Molokans in Russia, it does not seem to have been transported as such to America. To claim that this happened would require evidence that there was at least one group of New Israelites, self-consciously abiding by Maksim Gavrilovich’s precepts that had managed to survive his death. They might very well have deserved the name ‘Maksimisti.’ It appears, nonetheless, that there were individuals who were Maksimist in a covert manner, probably those who possessed copies of MGR’s manuscripts, some of whom settled in Arizona where a few others had preceded them. Tradition has it that Aleksei Sergeevich Tolmachev (1861-1937) from Nikitino somehow became caretaker of MGR’s manuscripts and that, when he took his family to settle in Arizona in late May 1912, he had his wife bake them into two loaves of bread to smuggle them out of Russia.27

Perhaps even before the publication of S&L American Prygun Molokans had adopted some of Rudomyotkin’s dogmas, but even those who are today considered ‘Maksimist’ by other Molokans, Prygun or not, have dismissed many of his ideas, like the acceptance of Muslims in the same Paradise destined for New Israelites.28 In any case, S&L established what was to be believed and practiced in the brotherhood considered spiritual and ‘prygun.’ Certain prayers and songs, for example, are part of general or special prayer services and other rituals, such as weddings. They were ‘Maksimistically,’ one might say, covert in Prygun religion. What made these and other features overt was S&L’s appearance in 1928. From then on serious Molokans literate in Russian, especially the ministers and other elders, began to select other features that would characterize their communities. Since Prygun religion is confessedly spiritual in its ethos (involving the spontaneous intervention of the Holy Spirit in religious and para-religious contexts), we cannot be certain about how much of this continues to be influenced by Maksim Gavrilovich’s literature. There can be no doubt, on the other hand, about apocalypticism and millennialism, which still simmers in the brotherhood, as well as other folk-religious tendencies that are taken seriously, omens being one of them.

27 If this date is correct, it must be acknowledged that already in Los Angeles some portion of his writings (and, according to one of my sources, the only authentic manuscripts) were already published in 1910 (Rudometkin 1910). For the history about the publications in 1915 see Clay 2011.
28 During the millennium Mohammedan kings, having subjected themselves “gladly,” will be the “servitors and providers” of the Israelites, and “their wives will be maidservants and nurses to our children,” before whom they will “bow to the ground” (6.21.15; 6.22.1; 9.3.3). When Rudomyotkin announces himself as being “the concluding principal hero” (9.15.1) in his ten-article eulogy of his predecessors, one wonders if he was thinking about ‘the last prophet,’ who is the one claimed by Islam. Also, his interpretation of the image of “the woman clothed in the sun” (5.13.40; 5.17.4; 6.6.8 and many other places) is “the gathering of holy people of all nations—in the Spirit, which one must certainly relate to Revelation 12:1-2. We should also note that “Genghis Khan is supposed to have been conceived by the sun in a young girl” (Dyck, et al. 2015:458).
The first sign of Maksimism was probably installing the S&L on the altar along with the Bible. This happened when a pronouncement was made by a prophet. Since then, to the consternation and defiance of some of the brethren, it began to be used instead of the Bible when blessing petitioners “na krukh” (na krug) in a prayer service, holding it over their heads. Like the original ‘Molokans,’ who undoubtedly did not acknowledge this nickname at first, today persons who can reasonably be referred to as Maksimist do not appear to refer to themselves as such. For others it is opprobrious. However, there may be more protest than the facts justify, as so frequently happens when human beings become contentious, in this case when Pryguns are alarmed on learning of teachings that had always been there—in Russian. The editor of S&L recognizes that although many members of the brotherhood disagree with the “premises” of Maxim Gavrilo~vich, one finds in his work the basic theology of the Molokan Brotherhood. Indeed, “Molokan theology remains much the same as founded by our forefathers, and [as founded] in the main by Maxim Gavrilovich.”

Conclusion

The value of having an acquaintance with Maksim Gavrilovich Rudomyotkin lies in the fact that his life and labors are a distillation of spiritual folk religion in Russia. Right on the shelf, aged for more than a century, one has a rich sample of what was turning the heads of thousands of the empire’s people. Rumors of many other varieties are cited in different kinds of works about the tsarist era, but few are the written works by religious leaders themselves. In Spirit and Life alone, dominated by Rudomyotkin’s panoply of writings, we have not merely the creation of one person’s imaginative mind but the essence of the visions of his own era and of centuries of similar religiosity. Equally remarkable is that this spirit persists to this day in an entirely different kind of culture: urban, educated, consumerist. This is a movement kept alive without the person of a living cult leader but with a literary monument, the secrets of which are incomprehensible to most people, written in a language only a few can understand, but which is nonetheless a symbol of a community’s defiance of an imperial culture.

This approach is taken, as must surely have been obvious in all of the above, by accepting Rudomyotkin’s written work “in good faith” in the legal sense and as one did in reading Mein Kampf before its author launched his conquest of Europe to establish a ‘new’ Germany. Maksim

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29 I. G. Samarin was one of those who disapproved of this consecration of the volume, at least according to the witness of his grandson Ivan Alexeich Samarin. The latter never had a copy of it in his home on the dining-room table along with an opened version of the Bible. — In recent years divine intervention has come to the support of the Dukh i Zhizn’, being understood as such by prophetic declaration. From a signed report of a prophetic event, I give this summary: After the Sunday evening service was concluding a man rose from his place among the singers and came to the altar-table (place and names are omitted out of discretion). Taking the volume in his hands, he raised it over his head in silence. The minister immediately explained that this book was the “wall” that protected believers, and he was followed by the prophet who added that those who “removed” the book would lose the blessing that came with it, whereupon he made utterances in an “unknown” language.

30 When the Bible is used, it is referred to as the evangelium. In the Russian Orthodox mass the object is a volume of nothing but the four Gospels. For a blessing the Dukh i Zhizn’ is opened, and it is occasionally taken from the altar and held while a person is jumping.
Gavrilovich really meant everything he was writing down even though we may have difficulty understanding what some of it meant. But another view can be taken. One might say instead that he was very misguided and perhaps even delusional. In this way one dismisses him as not being a phenomenon serious enough to be concerned about. But this is a mistake, given the argument presented in the immediately preceding paragraph. Another view is at least arguable: Maksim Gavrilovich was a hoax. He may have become a personally ambitious activist like so many others in a fervent religious environment before being imprisoned, but he manipulated his self-declared martyrdom for his own pleasure and comfort in the monasteries. Not having the freedom to create self-serving mass rallies, not having radio and television, he turned to distributing his “fiery” leaflets, continuously developing his ideas over the years in a free-wheeling manner. Only a profound analysis of the texts can lead us to a better understanding of what kind of man was Maksim.

A sort of litmus test for arriving at Maksim’s intention, but not the only one, might be in deciding what was happening when he wrote his version of the creation of the world at the very opening of Book 1. A summary of it would not do it justice, but one can confess to pleasure in being entertained by such imagination. One is transported to John Milton’s 17th century Paradise lost and Dante Alighieri’s 14th century Inferno. With those works, however, there has never been any question about their being in the class of creative literature. But Rudomyotkin tells his followers that ever since being a “sorrowful young orphaned child” he had wondered about great questions, like “how and from where the God of gods Himself first emanated” (1.2.2). Finally, everything had been revealed to him. That his account of creation is different from the one in the first chapter of Genesis is not explained. Are his believers to accept his story or the Bible’s?

This line of thought is based, we must make clear, on the assumption that Maksim was solely responsible for what is found in S&L. As noted above, a few articles might arguably be attributed to others. Rumored among some who consider themselves Molokans of one kind or another is that most of it was not written by him. Not enough is known about this view, however, to comment on it. But we must recognize as mysterious that so little is known about the origin, preservation and existence of the manuscripts and everything that was involved in the publications of the different versions. (We don’t even know who, besides Paul Ivanovich Samarin (Ivan Gureivich’s son), the printer, actually worked at the press with which I became familiar just ten years after S&L came out of the shop in my great-grandfather’s backyard.) There’s some kind of cover-up, some persons still believe.

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exists. It publishes *Brockhaus Encyclopedia* originally *Brockhaus Conversations-Lexikon*.


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**Endnoted Citations**

1 Clay 2011.
3 N. B. 1896; Zhuk 2004:114.
4 Dyck et al. 2015:525.
5 Dyck et al. 2015:528.
6 Dyck et al. 2015:527.
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9 http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/maps_villages/ https://www.ualberta.ca/~german/AlbertaHistory/Bessarabians.htm (with map).
11 Dyck et al. 2015:541.
12 I. G. Samarin 1983:62
14 I. G. Samarin 1983:45, 50.
15 Dyck et al. 2015:527.