

BEYOND ANTI-SEMITISM:

RITUAL MURDER IN A RUSSIAN BORDER TOWN

An NCEEER Working Paper by

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Executive Summary

On April 22, 1823, in a small white Russian border town by the name of Velizh, a three-year-old boy finished his lunch and went to play outside. Fedor never returned home, and several days later, a neighbor found his body at the very edge of town, punctured in numerous places. Now largely forgotten, the disappearance of little Fedor resulted in the longest and one of the most comprehensive investigations of ritual murder in the modern world. All in all, the Velizh case lasted twelve years (1823-1835) and generated an astonishing number of documents, which are impeccably preserved in twenty-five bound volumes at the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg. Drawing on the newly discovered archival papers, I reconstruct small town life in the Russian Empire, exploring along the way, neighborly encounters, law and daily life, and the complex motivations resulting in the ritual murder charge. While scholars usually attribute the charge to antisemitism and economic rivalries, this study offers an alternative explanation. By recreating the day-to-day world of Velizh, I argue that tales of blood sacrifice proved remarkably contagious in the towns and villages of Eastern Europe because of their role in popular belief systems of the time and their ability to express the fears and preoccupations of a population that left no other records. Using the analytical techniques of microhistory, this study tells the story of a sensational legal case that allows us not only to zero in on the peculiarities of the investigative process itself, but also examine the relations between imperial rule and the everyday, the articulation of local knowledge and popular belief systems, and the habits, designs, and anxieties of government officials.

Introduction

At first, there did not seem to be anything peculiar about the case. The idea that Jews murdered Christian children to mix their blood with matzah for the Passover service had circulated in oral and written traditions since the thirteenth century, and the basic storyline resembled dozens of similar investigations that took place in various parts of the world.¹ From the trial records, we learn that on April 22, 1823, in a small white Russian border town by the name of Velizh, two small children finished their lunch and went to play outside. Fedor Emel'ian, a three-year-old boy with a white face, short blond hair, grey eyes, a middling nose, and his four-year-old cousin, Avdot'ia, left their home and walked down a dusty path in an easterly direction. When the children reached the Konevtse Creek, Avdot'ia invited her cousin to cross a small bridge and continue on their walk to the forest. But Fedor refused and remained alone there, gazing at the construction site of a new home on the embankment.

It was around eleven o'clock in the morning on Easter Sunday when the children went on their walk. Avdot'ia's mother, Kharitina Prokof'eva, did not supervise them. Instead, she used the time to go beg for alms from her neighbor, the Catholic priest Lukevich. Kharitina lived at the very edge of town in a modest wooden home with her sister, Agaf'ia Prokof'eva, and her brother-in-law, Emel'ian Ivanov. After receiving alms, Kharitina gossiped with her neighbor in his courtyard for nearly two hours until Avdotia had come to look for her. To Kharitina's surprise, Avdotia was without her cousin. "Where is Fedor?" Kharitina inquired immediately. Avdot'ia replied that she had left Fedor standing alone on the bridge and had not seen him since. Wasting little time, Kharitina took Avdot'ia to look for the little boy, but try as they did, the search proved unsuccessful. That afternoon, Emel'ian and Agaf'ia searched the town for their son, but they too were unable to locate him.

Two days later, on April 24, Agaf'ia was chatting with her neighbors when a stranger knocked on the door. From the testimony of several witnesses in the case, we know that a thirty-nine-year-old woman by the name of Maria Terenteeva was calling on Agaf'ia. As soon as Agaf'ia opened the door, Terenteeva declared that she would be able to guess the whereabouts of the missing boy. She asked for a burning candle and, after placing the candle flame in a cold pot of water, revealed that Fedor was still alive, locked in Mirka Aronson's cold cellar. Terenteeva went on to say that she intended to rescue the boy that night, but was afraid that evil may have struck already and that he would die the moment she would come to get him. Frightened and unsure of what to make of the stranger's revelations, Agaf'ia decided to go with her sister to the neighboring village Sentiury, to talk with Anna Eremeeva, a twelve-year-old girl who, rumor had it, possessed psychic powers. On the way, the sisters passed by Mirka Aronson's home, which was located in the marketplace, in the very center of town. Agaf'ia walked inside the courtyard to look for her son, but left shortly thereafter, fearing that someone might mistake her for a thief. When the sisters finally reached Sentiury late in the evening, Agaf'ia begged the young girl to tell her about her son. And only after much prodding, Anna relented: "I've been inside the house where they're keeping your son; he's extremely weak. If you want to see him, then beware, he will die this very night."

By the time Agafia had come home and shared the news with her husband, three police officers were busy conducting a formal criminal investigation. Earlier that day, Emel'ian informed the Velizh police that his son had disappeared without a trace. Numerous witnesses were questioned in the case while the officers searched for little Fedor. But long before they completed the investigation rumors began to circulate all over town that the Jews had killed the missing boy.ⁱⁱ

The drama in Velizh was one of more than a dozen ritual murder cases that took place in the first half of the nineteenth century in the northwest provinces of the Russian Empire.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time the Russian government acquired the largest Jewish population in the world as a consequence of the three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793, 1795), it also inherited an established cultural tradition of ritual murder.^{iv} By the end of the eighteenth century, the myth began to wane for many of the same reasons that saw the decline of witchcraft prosecution in western and central Europe: the elimination of torture techniques in criminal investigations; the promulgation of laws restricting the prosecution of ritual murder to those accusations where conclusive evidence was found; and a new mental outlook based on the power of reason that questioned the reality of its very existence.^v But as was the case with witchcraft allegations, individual cases of ritual murder did not decline entirely in the nineteenth century, and the popular belief in Jews' sacrifice of young Christian children for religious ritual practices continued to persist long after Russia had acquired its Jews.^{vi}

Almost eighteen years to the day that little Fedor had disappeared, the body of a twelve-year-old boy was found in Velizh, along the Western Dvina, severely mutilated and punctured in multiple places. In that particular instance, three Jews were blamed for killing the boy, but the police eventually dismissed the case because they were unable to amass enough physical evidence to prosecute them. Similar accusations surfaced from time to time in nearby provincial towns. In 1816, several Jews in Grodno were blamed for the death of a young peasant girl, whose arm was cut off at the shoulder blade and the body punctured in several places. In 1821, rumors began to circulate that Jews were responsible for another death after a body of a young woman was found in the Western Dvina. And that same year, in Mogilev province, yet another young boy was found ritually murdered. In all these instances, the imperial government eventually

dropped the charges, even going so far as forbidding (in response to the Grodno case) the prosecution of Jews for ritual murder without empirical proof.^{vii}

Unlike these and other similar allegations, the disappearance of little Fedor was a long and drawn-out affair that ended officially in 1835, only after the most powerful court in the Russian Empire intervened and acquitted all the Jews of the ritual murder charge. Focusing on the events of the case as they unfolded between April 22, 1823, when Fedor first disappeared, and November 22, 1824, when the first act of the drama came to a close, I explore in microscopic detail the social dynamics of a ritual murder case in a small town setting. By way of conclusion, I consider why almost the entire Christian community of Velizh had come to accept the charge that Jews were capable of committing ritual murder. All in all, the proceedings lasted twelve years (1823-1835) and generated an astonishing number of documents – nearly 50,000 in total. The Velizh archive includes hundreds of depositions from all segments of the population, petitions penned by and about Jews, official correspondence (from provincial administrators to some of the most powerful politicians in the empire), an extensive summary of the case, as well as memos, reports, denunciations, and scores of perlustrated letters.^{viii} In their scope and attention to detail, the archival records offer the historian a rare opportunity to penetrate the mental universe of a small town and reconstruct realms of human experience that have been written out of the historical record.^{ix} The “imperial turn” in Russian historical studies has done much to illuminate the multi-ethnic dimensions of the empire as well as the complex encounters between the state and the population.^x Yet in spite of all the scholarly production over the past fifteen years, we know very little about the day-to-day relations between neighbors and even less about how people of diverse ethnic and religious origins made sense of the world around them.^{xi} The Velizh case opens a window onto a time, place, and people that seldom appear in studies of

either the Russian Empire or East European Jewry. While a truly exceptional event (even in comparison to other scandalous cases of the time), the drama occurred in a town like any other town in the empire where people's lives were intimately connected, where neighbors were forced to interact with one another in a variety of social settings, and where tensions, rivalries, and confrontations were part of daily life.

For four straight days, the police conducted an exhaustive search of the town and its environs. Finally, on April 28, unable to uncover a single lead, they suspended the investigation and declared the boy missing. All across the empire, child desertion, infanticide, and infant mortality were common occurrences, and in Vitebsk province in particular, hundreds of young children died each year. The most common explanations for infant mortality were neglect, pregnancy complications, and lack of proper medical attention. Other reasons were more traumatic and violent: infants were suffocated, drowned, and strangled by mothers or (on more than an infrequent occasion) were eaten alive by pigs and other wild animals. Each year, the corpses of small children were found routinely in animal sheds, barnyards, warehouses, woods, swamps, cemeteries, fields, courtyards, forests, homes, creeks, and rivers. The disappearance of a little boy, in other words, was not an unusual event.^{xii}

Even if the news did not come as a complete shock, the sudden loss of Fedor must have dealt a severe emotional blow to his parents. Although the judicial records offer no hint of Agaf'ia Prokof'eva's state of mind, emotions must have been running high when Maria Terenteeva appeared once again on the doorstep. "Why did [the police officers] stop the search?" Terenteeva asked abruptly. Then, to Agaf'ia's amazement, Terenteeva related just how little

Fedor had disappeared. Terenteeva claimed that a Jewish woman walked up to the little boy while he stood on the bridge. After giving the boy a piece of sugar, the woman escorted him directly to Evzik Tsetlin's courtyard, where he remained until someone transferred him to Mirka Aronson's home under the cover of darkness. Terenteeva was confident that she would be able to locate the boy's body, but made no other promises to Agaf'ia Prokof'eva. For an unknown reason, Terenteeva invited Agaf'ia to accompany her to the cemetery. But no sooner had she uttered those fateful words, Terenteeva ran out the door, not to be seen again that night. When her husband returned home, Agaf'ia recounted the day's events, but Emel'ian refused to believe that the Jews had abducted his son.^{xiii}

Just as the rumors were gathering steam, the mystery was solved in a most unexpected manner. On May 2, the day after Terenteeva invited Agaf'ia to the cemetery, Vasili Kokhanskii's horse broke free. Kokhanskii took his dog to search for the missing horse. They walked around 500 meters to the very edge of town, and when they reached the forest, the dog ran inside the thick marsh, barking loudly and uncontrollably. Initially, Kokhanskii thought that they had found the horse, but then quickly realized that the dog was barking at a dead boy who was lying on his back, with the "body punctured in numerous places." At that precise moment, Kokhanskii remembered that Emel'ian Ivanov's son had been missing for several days and went to share the unfortunate news with his neighbor.^{xiv}

Early the next morning, a delegation of four officials inspected the scene of the crime and produced a detailed report. First, they observed, the body was found in overgrown shrubby grass in a swampy forest – less than one kilometer from the center of town and no more than one kilometer from the parents' home. Second, the body lay around sixty-four meters from Shchetinskaia Road, a dirt road that could be taken to the center of town by way of three cross

streets. Finally, and most importantly, they detected fresh footprints on the right side of the dirt road. The footprints led inside the forest and directly to the boy's body. The officials then hypothesized that as many as five people had transported the boy in a spring britzka with forged metal wheels. In fact, they were certain that the perpetrators had parked the carriage on the side of the road and then dumped the body in the shrubby grass. Furthermore, none of the people who lived nearby had witnessed suspicious persons (i.e. Jews) leaving the forest in a spring britzka. Even if the officials were not able to determine the exact route – for the carriage tracks had been smeared by the traffic traveling back and forth on the dirt road over the course of several days – they concluded that the perpetrators had returned to town. Unable to uncover any other evidence, they set themselves the task of questioning two of the most important witnesses in the case, Maria Terenteeva and Anna Eremeeva, and inspecting Mirka Aronson's home for clues that might help them solve the murder.^{xv}

When Inspector Lukashevich began the investigation, the autopsy report had already revealed that little Fedor was stabbed numerous times with blunt nails. The entire body was punctured with little round holes that were no more than one centimeter in depth: five were on the right hand, positioned evenly from the elbow to the tip of the hand; three were on the left hand; four were on the very tip of the head and around the left ear; one was directly above the right knee; and another one was on the back. The skin on Fedor's feet, arms, stomach, and head had hardened and turned a burnt yellow or red color, as though someone had vigorously scrubbed the boy's body with a coarse cloth or brush. A piece of cloth of no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of an arshin in width (an old Russian measurement equivalent to slightly more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of a meter) was

used to restrict the circulation of the blood to the feet and knees, both of which had turned dark blue, perhaps even black, from the trauma. The lips were pressed firmly against the teeth, while the nose appeared to have been smashed in violently. The dark crimson mark on the back of the neck made from congealed blood signified that cloth or rope was used to tie the boy's mouth. The internal organs, both the stomach and the intestines, were completely empty, filled only with air. Otherwise, the boy's body appeared perfectly healthy and did not show even the slightest hint of decay.^{xvi}

Based on the report, the inspectors reasoned that all the fat underneath the skin indicated that Emel'ian Ivanov and Agaf'ia Prokof'eva fed their son quite well. Furthermore, whoever punctured the boy fourteen times did so to draw blood that was hidden within the very recesses of the skin. The vigorous scrubbing of the coarse cloth or brush helped direct the flow of the blood to the upper part of the body. As a result, the boy died a slow and painful death. His mouth was bound up seamlessly, and it appeared highly unlikely that anyone had heard him scream for help. All of these "evil deeds," the inspectors surmised, were performed on a naked child, for there was no sign of blood on his clothing. Finally, the inspectors concluded that the "barbaric crime" was committed no more than two or three days before the body was discovered, that is, either eight or nine days after the boy had disappeared.^{xvii}

On May 5, Inspector Lukashevich made a thorough search of Mirka Aronson's house, paying particular attention to the kitchen, tool shed, and coach house, and was not able to uncover any evidence that linked Mirka or any of the other members of the household (her daughter Slavka, son-in-law Shmerka Berlin, grandson Hirsh, and granddaughter-in-law Shifra) with the murder. He then requested to take a look at the cellar, but Shmerka Berlin replied that the house had none. As it turned out, Lukashevich later learned that the house was equipped with

two cellars – the first one was located in the foyer, the other one in the *lavka* (trade shop) where goods and spirits were sold. When asked why he concealed the truth, Berlin replied that he did not see the point of showing them to the inspector: “both cellars are in the most decrepit shape, and there is absolutely nothing in them.” As we will soon see, this would not be the first time that Berlin embellished the truth. Clearly, Berlin felt that he had much to lose if authorities would uncover anything remotely suspicious.^{xviii}

Registered officially as a merchant of the third guild, Shmerka Berlin occupied a respected place in the social hierarchy of the town. Not only did Berlin make quite a bit of money selling lumber and spirits while managing a glass factory, but he also married into an affluent family that lived in the most magnificent two-story brick house in Velizh. At the time of the investigation, Velizh was divided along economic, geographic, and confessional lines. Jews comprised slightly less than one third of the population (somewhere around 2,000 souls out of 6,700 people), but owned almost all the homes in the center of town, managed the most lucrative estates in the provincial district, enjoyed a monopoly on the marketplace, and controlled lumber sales, small-scale trade, and the liquor industry.^{xix} As a result of their economic success, Jews clustered on the right side of the Western Dvina, in the most prosperous part of town, while the Belorussian population, comprised mostly of Uniates (a confessional group that was Eastern Orthodox in rite and Roman Catholic in doctrine) and of a small minority of Catholics, lived on the left side, in what was considered to be the poorest section.^{xx}

Thanks to Mikhail Ryvkin’s recollections, it is possible to get a glimpse of the social geography of the neighborhood – of details that are strikingly absent from the official judicial records. Centrally located, the southern side of the large two-story house overlooked the marketplace and town hall, while the northwestern side faced Il’inskaia Street – one of the

town's main thoroughfares, populated mostly by Jews. On any given day of the week, this imposing structure was the site of much activity and commotion. A tavern and grocery store were located on the first floor. Customers from various parts of the town and the surrounding villages came to drink beer or vodka there or purchase foodstuffs from what was considered to be the town's best-stocked grocery store. The poor and needy showed up from time-to-time on the doorsteps, as well – Mirka Aronson, it seems, was well known for her exceptional generosity. Aronson's two sons, Noson and Moisei, lived quite comfortably only a few doors away on Il'inskaia Street, while Shmerka Berlin's brother, who too was called Noson, lived right around the corner on Petersburg Street, next to one of the most prominent personalities, the town councilor Evzik Tsetlin. On Saturdays and on holidays, the entire extended family – around forty people in total – would gather for a meal on the second level of the home.^{xxi}

Under the Polish-Lithuanian regime, Jews faced numerous restrictions on their residence. Some cities such as Warsaw and Lublin did not tolerate Jewish residence altogether within their city limits, while others such as Vil'na and Kovno excluded Jews from specific urban spaces. Partly as a result of the extensive restrictions outlined in the town charters, Jews in pre-partition Poland were forced to congregate in easily identifiable neighborhoods, districts, or streets.^{xxii} At the turn of the nineteenth century, tsarist authorities dropped most of the burdensome restrictions from the law books, and permitted Jews to live, engage in trade, and build synagogues and schools wherever they wished in the Pale of Settlement, provided they observed the general laws on movement and residence.^{xxiii} But long after the partitions of Poland-Lithuania, Jews continued to live in certain streets or neighborhoods, most of which were centrally located. In the eastern borderlands, a large territory that extended from the Baltic regions to the Black Sea, ethnic groups usually chose to live among their own types. Segregation did not, however, mean

that populations lived in isolation from everyone else. Since early modern times, residents routinely met and socialized in courtyards, streets, homes, taverns, and grocery stores, and the cultural boundaries between ethnic groups were highly permeable. While neighbors did not always exhibit esteem or affection towards one another, people's lives intersected on a daily basis.^{xxiv}

Without the support of their Catholic and Uniate neighbors, neither Shmerka Berlin nor Khanna Tsetlina would have been able to operate successful taverns. According to Ryvkin, all the respected residents of the town – from the wealthiest Polish landowners to the most powerful bureaucrats – could be spotted, from time to time, at either Berlin's or Tsetlina's tavern.^{xxv} We should, however, be careful not to paint Velizh as a multicultural idyll. Above all, the day-to-day exchange of goods and services not only brought people together, but also produced many of the conflicts between neighbors – over issues such as the management of land and homes, contractual obligations, taxes, inheritance rights, and property – which were tried and settled in courts of law.^{xxvi} This was a world that was consumed, in other words, by petty conflicts, disputes, jealousy, and gossip.

Given the intimacy of small town relations, it is tempting to make the argument, as so many scholars do, that ritual murder accusations were the product of intense economic rivalries and antisemitism.^{xxvii} No doubt, these reasons help explain why certain individuals denounced Jews for engaging in blood sacrifice. Yet they do not offer a satisfactory explanation for the vitality of the blood libel tale in the popular psyche—for why almost the entire Christian community in Velizh asserted that Jews were capable of committing ritual murder. Was this some sort of conspiracy? Did the townspeople harbor resentment that was brought out in the open at the time of the investigation? Or were other forces at work? To answer these questions,

we must first return to the case itself, and reconstruct the events as they transpired that spring.

If Mirka Aronson and Shmerka Berlin were regarded as two upstanding members of the community, then Anna Eremeeva and Maria Terenteeva were considered to be some of the town's most marginal characters. Anna had lived a hand-to-mouth existence in Velizh for over a year when the scandal broke out. On March 25, around a month before little Fedor disappeared, Anna found herself in the neighboring village Sentiury, when she suddenly felt weak and fell asleep in the bathhouse of the townsman Larion Pestun. That night Anna dreamt of Archangel Mikhail, who took her by the arm and told her that the Jews would murder a Christian soul on Easter Day. After waking up, Anna immediately described the dream to Pestun. As she testified in an official statement, this was not the only time that she had dreamt of Mikhail. On the night before Easter, Mikhail appeared to her yet another time. In this instance, the archangel told her that the Jews would seize a Christian soul and then bring him to Mirka Aronson's home. When Agaf'ia Prokof'eva came to Sentiury on the third day of Easter week, inquiring about little Fedor, Anna retorted: "On the way here, you walked into the very home where they're keeping your son. If you have the strength to rescue the boy, then do so. But if you don't make it on time, then stay vigilant and watch over the [the house]."xxviii

Like Anna, Maria Terenteeva survived on whatever food and money she could find. Several residents even testified that Terenteeva had led a "debauched" lifestyle ever since she came to town – giving birth to a son out of wedlock, stealing food every chance she could, walking at all hours of the night screaming, "God help me, they're trying to suffocate me." Terenteeva testified that on Easter Day she spent the time begging for alms in front of a church

while chatting briefly with a woman who was passing by. Afterwards, Terenteeva made her way to the very outskirts of town, seeking charitable handouts along the way. It was already nightfall when she made her way to the Konevtse Creek, at which time she saw two little children standing on the bridge. One of the children was a boy with white hair, wearing a cap and dressed in a coat and boots. At that precise moment, Terenteeva recalled, Khanna Tsetlina walked up to the boy and took him away by the arm. Terenteeva did not say anything about the whereabouts of the other child, but she did claim that Tsetlina took the boy back to her own home, where four Jewish women were waiting for her. Although Terenteeva was not certain if the four women had come from Shmerka Berlin's home, she was confident that she would be able to identify at least two of them. Terenteeva then recounted her encounters with Emel'ian Ivanov and Agaf'ia Prokof'eva, and concluded the deposition by saying that Emel'ian had refused to believe a word she had said.^{xxix}

Maria Terenteeva's testimony proved devastating, for it linked the Jews with the murder of the boy—without which the authorities most likely would not have begun to investigate the case as thoroughly as they did. Over the course of several weeks, they proceeded to question dozens of residents (both Jews and Christians), focusing their attention on the following suspects: Evzik and Khanna Tsetlin, Mirka Aronson and Shmerka Berlin, as well as the unresolved fate of the spring britzka. Emel'ian Ivanov's sister-in-law, Kharitina Prokof'eva, was convinced by all the talk that “the Jews had murdered her nephew.” Another town resident, Efim'ia Fedorova, overheard from one of her neighbors that the Jews took the little boy inside their school, where they proceeded to torture and kill him. Avdot'ia Maksimova, who worked as a housekeeper for Khanna Tsetlina and would play a central role in the case at a later date, testified that she had not seen a Christian boy at the house or had seen Tsetlina walk outside that

day. Eleven other witnesses – representing a broad cross-section of the population – declared that they, too, had not seen the Jews with the young boy and had any knowledge of who had committed the crime. They acknowledged, however, that, if there was any truth to the rumors spreading around town, it must have been the Jews who led the boy astray. The investigators then proceeded to question twelve more people. Two claimed that Shmerka Berlin’s and Khanna Tsetlina’s behavior had always been excellent; eight did not suspect either Berlin or Tsetlina of doing anything malicious; but all twelve were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Jews had killed the little boy.^{xxx}

The court records demonstrate how pervasive tales of blood sacrifice had become in the mindset of the town residents. In small market towns, where houses were clustered together, where residents knew each other on intimate terms, and where people gossiped in taverns, courtyards, and streets, the most trivial bits of news spread like wildfire. And it did not take long before everyone in Velizh had heard about Fedor’s tragic death. In less than a week after Fedor first disappeared, rumors began to spread around town that the Jews had ritually murdered the little boy. Where did the rumors originate? And why were they able to crystallize into such a compelling narrative so quickly? Ritual murder accusations – which were often accompanied by fantastical stories of Jewish religious rituals, occult practices, and sorcery – proved remarkably contagious as they traveled eastward. From the 1540s to the 1780s, Polish authorities investigated between 80 and 100 ritual murder accusations, with around forty percent of all the cases occurring in the eighteenth century.^{xxxⁱ} Written mostly by Polish Catholic preachers, a powerful anti-Jewish literature accompanied the criminal investigations, accusing Jews of using blood for religious practice and of stealing or trading in Church ritual objects.^{xxxⁱⁱ} Just how the blood libel made its way to the eastern parts of Europe is difficult to document with any

precision. What remains certain is that, at a time when the vast majority of people were illiterate, the tale had spread across Europe not only by the printed word, but also as a result of a powerful oral culture.^{xxxiii}

Witness after witness confirmed that the Jews had ritually murdered the boy, even though no one had actually seen them with him. The only person other than Maria Terenteeva who claimed to have observed Khanna Tsetlina with a Christian boy was Daria Kasachevskaiia. On Easter Day, Kasachevskaiia testified that she went to Shmerka Berlin's store to purchase beer. On the way, at either one or two o'clock in the afternoon, Kasachevskaiia reported that she saw Khanna Tsetlina with a white-haired boy who was dressed in either a blue or green caftan. Kasachevskaiia surmised that Tsetlina and the little boy were walking to town from either the embankment or the creek, but she had no idea where exactly they were going. After purchasing the beer, Kasachevskaiia returned home immediately and did not see either Tsetlina or the boy again that afternoon. Most likely, Kasachevskaiia based her narrative on the many tales that were circulating around town, for when authorities pressed her to provide additional testimony, she could not remember any other details.^{xxxiv}

Over the course of the investigation, tsarist officials attempted to obey the letter of the law by not casting blame on any suspects until they interviewed all possible witnesses, exhausted all possible lines of inquiry, and reviewed all the forensic evidence. And as they questioned more and more people, gathered more and more evidence, communal tensions began to rise. How could they not? The Jews, it seems, thought that it was just a matter of time before the most respected and wealthiest members of their community would be formally charged with murder. When, on May 17, Inspector Lukashevich interviewed Father Kazimir Serafinovich, who had come to town to visit his friend the land surveyor Kottov, over 100 Jews encircled Kottov's

house, climbed on the fence, and began to shout to the inspector, “You don’t have the right to treat the town councilor Tsetlin in this manner; he’s our leader!” The unexpected turn of events put the authorities on high alert. Fearing that the heated emotions could easily escalate into unrestrained hostility, the magistrate issued an immediate injunction: none of the suspects or witnesses were allowed to travel beyond the town’s boundaries and everyone would be kept under strict surveillance until all the sordid details of the case were sorted out. The last thing that the magistrate needed on his hands was to deal with a full-blown riot.^{xxxv}

The Jews of Velizh, meanwhile, vehemently denied their role in the murder. Khanna Tsetlina testified that she was at home Easter Day taking care of her ill son. Furthermore, Tsetlina claimed that she never brought a Christian boy inside the house nor did she have any knowledge of who had committed the crime. Several days after the deposition, Tsetlina submitted a formal appeal to the town council proclaiming her innocence. She added that most likely Maria Terenteeva invented the “awful slander” to settle an old score -- for each time Terenteeva had come around looking for charity, Tsetlina would immediately “run her out of the house.” Tsetlina’s husband, Evzik, did not deny the possibility of his wife venturing out on Easter Day, but he was convinced that a Christian boy had not stepped foot inside their home. Some of the other suspects made similar comments. Mirka Aronson had no idea who had killed the little boy, but she maintained that her son-in-law Shmerka and her grandson Hirsh were not involved in the murder because she knew for a fact that they did not venture out that day. Shmerka Berlin even made the outlandish conjecture that someone had “run over the boy accidentally and then proceeded to puncture the body” to mask the death as a ritual murder.^{xxxvi}

As far as the fate of the spring britzka, several witnesses saw two mysterious Jews riding around town in a spring britzka on Friday April 27. Together with his fifteen-year-old son, a

middle-aged man by the name of Iosel' Glikman had come to Velizh from the mestechka Uly to purchase hay. No one in Velizh had ever seen the two Jews before, but as it turned out, they were Shmerka Berlin's distant relatives who had come to town for the very first time on business that day. For an unknown reason, Glikman and his son parked the britzka in a neighboring courtyard and then walked around the fence to Berlin's home, where they stayed until May 1. Authorities immediately suspected that Shmerka and Hirsh Berlin had used Glikman's spring britzka to transfer the boy's body to the forest. So they proceeded to question Iosel' Glikman, Berlin's neighbor Itska Nakhimovskii, and numerous other town residents for clues that would help them solve the murder. But Glikman refuted his connection with the murder beyond reasonable doubt, testifying that he had borrowed the horses from the nobleman he was working for at the time and traveled to Velizh on a modest spring britzka that did not have forged metal wheels. None of the other witnesses' testimony did anything to cast doubt on Glikman's self-proclaimed innocence.^{xxxvii}

From the late medieval ages to early modern times, religious and civic authorities began to discredit the intellectual and popular foundations of the ritual murder charge. At first, these ideas, rooted in new theological and legal discourses, did not acquire immediate currency. But by the end of the seventeenth century, official attitudes, especially in the German-speaking territories of Europe, had changed to such an extent that it became extremely difficult to convict Jews of blood sacrifice in a court of law.^{xxxviii} In 1247, in one of the earliest pronouncements against the charge, Pope Innocent IV pleaded for popular restraint "if the body of a dead man is by chance found anywhere." "Duly redress all that has been wrought against the Jews in the

aforesaid matter by the said prelates, nobles, and potentates,” the pope concluded the encyclical, “and do not allow them in the future to be unjustly molested by anybody on this or any other similar charge.”^{xxxix} Over five hundred years later, in a widely circulated memorandum on the subject, the Russian poet and senator, Gavriil Derzhavin, did not go so far as to refute the veracity of ritual murder. Instead, without implicating the entire Jewish community in the crime, he accused the fanatical sects (i.e. the Hasidim) of engaging in blood sacrifice.^{xl} Some of Derzhavin’s ideas were eventually codified into law. In 1817, shortly after the blood libel charge in Grodno, Count Aleksandr Golitsyn instructed provincial governors not to indict Jews of blood sacrifice without incriminating evidence. And in the event of such a case, Jews had the same right to a fair trial as all other subjects of the Russian Empire who had committed murder.^{xli} At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Russian government may not have discredited the blood libel, but it did institute a series of measures that made conviction difficult.

The investigation of Fedor’s death lasted for over a year, and on June 22, 1824, the Velizh appellate court acquitted all the suspects. This was not an extraordinarily long judicial process or a particularly startling verdict. After deliberating over all the evidence, the appellate court did not discount the possibility that Daria Kasachevskaia and especially Maria Terenteeva had invented the sensational tale to mask their own role in the murder, but it did not dismiss their testimony either. As a result, although Khanna Tsetlina was formally acquitted, the court instructed the police to closely supervise her actions and behavior. A thorough search of Shmerka Berlin’s home failed to uncover anything remotely suspicious, and all the members of the household were absolved from the crime. For his attempt to conceal the truth, Berlin was nonetheless reprimanded for “spreading false rumors about the boy’s death.” The court also did not find enough evidence to sentence either Iosel’ Glikman or Father Kazimir Serafinovich. In

fact, the only person severely punished in the case was Maria Terenteeva. To atone for her licentious ways of life, Terenteeva was instructed to appear before the Catholico-Uniate Spiritual Consistory.^{xlii}

In the final analysis, we will never know what exactly happened to Fedor, whether he had drowned accidentally, was ruthlessly murdered, or had died from some other cause. On November 22, 1824, the most powerful court in Vitebsk province reviewed all the materials in the case and wrote off Fedor's tragic death as "God's will."^{xliii} Whatever the reason may have been, the documentary evidence suggests that a small town quarrel ultimately led to the ritual murder accusation. Most likely, the beggar-woman Maria Terenteeva had taken advantage of the boy's death (or even had killed him herself) to get back at Khanna Tsetlina for refusing her charity. In the early modern world, where mutual aid provided a safety net to the misfortunate and needy, the refusal of charity signified a breach of neighborly duty. In the typical witchcraft case, the act of refusing food, drink, money, and other charitable items caused the victim to feel angry and resentful. When this occurred and a personal misfortune happened to the person who acted selfishly, that individual would often times suspect that the victim had cast a magic spell against them for their callous behavior. To put it in slightly different terms, the very people who failed to perform a social duty would accuse their victims of witchcraft. Across most of western and central Europe, the overwhelming majority of documented witch cases conformed to the simple pattern that took place in Velizh – when one neighbor failed to give a handout to another neighbor – although in our case the internal logic was turned on its head and the end result was a charge of ritual murder against a neighbor who refused to offer charity and not of witchcraft against a victim who was turned away. In contrast to the typical witch case scenario, then, Terenteeva represents the "victim" who took matters into her own hands to get back at her well-

to-do neighbor Tsetlina for failing to fulfill a social obligation.^{xliv}

If an ordinary neighborhood dispute does indeed explain why one neighbor accused another neighbor of murdering a little boy, we are still left with a puzzle. Why did so many other people support the charge that Jews had killed little Fedor? The answer has less to do with what is often referred to as “antisemitism” in the scholarly literature or economic rivalries (although we should be careful not to dismiss the twin factors altogether) than with popular cosmologies of the time. Much like early modern witchcraft charges, ritual murder accusations proved profoundly durable because of their capacity to mobilize fears and express popular worldviews. In the Russian Empire, ritual murder allegations never materialized in a full-blown panic along the lines of the early modern witch-hunts in France or Germany.^{xlv} But their appearance and reappearance in the small towns of Minsk, Vil’na, Vitebsk, and Mogilev provinces, where Jews constituted a highly visible part of the population, suggests that a well-established oral culture – fueled by the circulation of stories, rumors, and gossip – helped legitimize the narrative. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the imperial Russian state attempted to reshape “superstition” – the belief in the supernatural, magical powers, and miracle-working icons and relics – without much success.^{xlvi} Well into the twentieth century, the supernatural continued to offer convenient explanations for the basic needs of the community, while at the same time offering protection against numerous worldly dangers, and the boundaries between religious and magical beliefs were difficult to distinguish with any certainty. That folk medicine and the supernatural played an important role in Jewish daily life (especially among Hasidic groups known for their internalization of mysticism) only heightened the fantastical charge made during Holy Week. Thus, at a time when spoken spells brought illnesses to enemies or warded off evil spirits, when gathering ceremonies enhanced the healing properties of herbs, and when churches,

cemeteries, barns, and bathhouses were associated with popular magic and divination, there was nothing strikingly peculiar about the idea (at least, to the Christian psyche) that Jews required Christian blood for religious ritual service. If, according to popular white Russian folk traditions, witches aroused fears and suspicions because they preyed on unsuspecting children, why could not Jews kill little children for their blood?^{xlvii}

The provincial court's decision concluded the first act of the ritual murder drama. In only a few months' time authorities reopened the case, this time at the request of Tsar Alexander I himself. Shortly before his death, while passing through Velizh on a tour of the western borderlands, Tsar Alexander received a sensational petition from Maria Terenteeva. In the petition, Terenteeva revealed that a terrible tragedy had occurred to her (sic!) son Fedor in the town of Velizh: Khanna Tsetlina, with the help of her husband, had pierced Fedor to death, and they committed the crime for the boy's blood.^{xlviii} Tsar Alexander immediately instructed Governor-General Nikolai Nikolaevich Khovanskii to begin a full-blown investigation of the case. Khovanskii sent his most trusted and experienced man, Inspector-Councilor Strakhov, to direct the inquiry. For the next five years, Strakhov interrogated dozens of residents and produced hundreds of detailed depositions, reports, and memos. The result of all this work was the longest and one of the most comprehensive investigations of ritual murder in the modern world.

ⁱ The earliest documented case of ritual murder took place in Norwich, England in 1144, but none of the accounts of the case mention that Jews tortured the victim for the ritual use of blood. As Gavin Langmuir points out, the first blood libel case occurred on Christmas in Fulda, Germany in 1235, when Jews were accused of sacrificing five boys for their blood. See Langmuir's Toward a Definition of Antisemitism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 240-41. For the best overview of the ritual murder charge in historical perspective, see Helmut Walser Smith, The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 91-133. See also the articles collected in Alan Dundes, ed., The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); R. Po-chia Hsia, The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Jonathan Frankel, The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics, and the Jews in 1840 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Pierre Birnbaum, Un récit de meurtre rituel au grand siècle: L'affaire Raphaël Lévy, Metz, 1669 (Paris: Fayard, 2008); and Joshua Trachtenberg, The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983 [1944]).

ⁱⁱ Russkii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA), f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, ll. 3-5.

ⁱⁱⁱ For the most authoritative study of the Velizh affair, based mostly on the official summary of the case compiled by the Senate, see Iulii Gessen, Velizhskaia drama: Iz istorii obvineniia evreev v ritual'nykh prestupleniakh (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. G. Rozena, 1904). See also M. D. Ryvkin, "Velizhskoe delo v osveshchenii mestnykh predanii i pamiatnikov," Perezhitoe 3 (1911): 60-102; Robert Lippert, Anklagen der Juden in Russland wegen Kindermords, Gebrauchs von Christenblut und Gotteslaesterung: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Juden in Russland im letzten Jahrzehend und fruherer Zeit (Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1846). For a recent treatment that relies heavily on Gessen's original research, see I. M. Shkliazh, Velizhskoe delo: Iz istorii antisemitizma v Rossii (Odessa: [n.p.], 1998).

^{iv} John D. Klier, "The Origins of the 'Blood Libel' in Russia," Newsletter of the Study Group on Eighteenth Century Russia 14 (1986): 12-22.

^v Brian P. Levack, The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1995), 233-50.

^{vi} Ritual murder cases should not be used to gauge the popularity of belief in blood sacrifice. As with the witch case, the ritual murder case reflects the preoccupations of the educated classes rather than of those people who left no written records. For witchcraft, see Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 538-39.

Most likely, the belief in ritual murder did not enjoy a modern “revival,” as David Biale has argued. Although print (and to a lesser extent visual) culture played an important role in the dissemination of the discourse, in the small towns and villages of Central and Eastern Europe, the tale continued to enjoy popular appeal since early modern times, largely as a result of popular oral culture. On the modern revival argument, see Biale’s Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol Between Jews and Christians (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 126-9. According to R. Po-chia Hsia, even after the suppression of ritual murder trials, the tale “retained much of its cohesion and force of persuasion” in popular culture. See Hsia’s The Myth of Ritual Murder, 228.

^{vii} Rozyskanie o ubienii evreiami khristianskikh mladentsev i upotreblenii krovi ikh. Napechatano po prikazaniu g. ministra vnutrennikh del, V. A. Perovskii [sic] (St. Petersburg: Ministerstva vnutrennikh del, 1844), 48-54.

^{viii} The Velizh affair archive is preserved at the RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 1-25; and at the Natsional’nyi arkhiv respubliky Belarus (NARB), f. 1297, op. 1.

^{ix} For a good introduction to crime and the microhistorical genre, see Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., History from Crime (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

^x See, for example, Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, Anatoly Remnev, eds., Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Robert D. Crews, For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Eugene M. Avrutin, Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); and Willard Sunderland, Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

^{xi} For some of the most innovative work on inter-ethnic relations, see, for example, David Frick, "Jews and Others in Seventeenth-Century Wilno: Life in the Neighborhood," Jewish Studies Quarterly 12 (2005): 8-42; and the essays collected in Polin 22 (2010), on the problem of crossing and maintaining social and cultural boundaries in pre-modern Poland. Less sophisticated are the essays on the theme of “neighbor” in Ab Imperio, no. 3 (2010).

^{xii} On Vitebsk province for a slightly later period, see Viktor Lindenberg, “Materialy k voprosu detoubiistve i plodoizgnanii v Vitebskoi gubernii,” Ph.D. diss., Iur’ev University, 1910. See also ChaeRan Y. Freeze, “Lilith’s Midwives: Jewish Newborn Child Murder in Nineteenth-Century Vilna,” Jewish Social Studies, n. s. 16, no. 2 (2010): 1-27. For a

richly documented study of abandonment and peasant life, see David L. Ransel, Mothers of Misery: Child Abandonment in Russia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

^{xiii} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, l. 4.

^{xiv} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, l. 5.

^{xv} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, l. 6.

^{xvi} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, l. 7.

^{xvii} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, l. 8.

^{xviii} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, l. 8.

^{xix} Until the second half of the nineteenth century, population statistics in the Russian Empire were notoriously inexact. For Velizh and the province of Vitebsk, see RGIA, f. 1290, op. 1, d. 16, l. 4ob (1828). On Velizh, see Ryvkin, “Velizhskoe delo,” 77-81; Iz istorii Velizha i raiona (Smolensk: Smolenskaia gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 2000); and S. M. Kiselev, comp., Velizh (Vitebsk: Gubernskaia tipografiia, 1895).

^{xx} During the reign of Nicholas I, the Uniate Church came under attack for, among other things, destabilizing the boundaries of religious identity. Nicholas I and Alexander II succeeded in their efforts to thoroughly suppress the Uniate church, to forcibly convert the Uniates to Russian Orthodoxy. For a thorough and penetrating analysis of the Uniate problem, see Mikhail Dolbilov, Russkii krai, chuzhaia vera: Etnokonfessional’naia politika imperii v Litve i Belorussii pri Aleksandre II (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010), 68-108; and Barbara Skinner, The Western Front of the Eastern Church: Uniate and Orthodox Conflict in 18th Century Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).

^{xxi} Ryvkin, “Velizhskoe delo,” 69-81

^{xxii} Antony Polonsky, The Jews in Poland and Russia, vol. 1 (Oxford and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 68-90; and Gershon David Hundert, The Jews in a Polish Private Town: The Case of Opatów in the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 3-10.

^{xxiii} In the second half of the nineteenth century, Jews continued to face restrictions on their residence in cities such as Vil’na, Kovno, and Zhitomir. See Nathans, Beyond the Pale, 113-14.

^{xxiv} See, for example, Adam Teller and Magda Teter, “Introduction: Borders and Boundaries in the Historiography of the Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” and David Frick, “Jews in Public Places: Further Chapters in the

Jewish-Christian Encounter in Seventeenth-Century Vilna,” Polin 22 (2010): 3-46, 215-48. See also Glenn Dynner, “Legal Fictions: The Survival of Rural Jewish Tavernkeeping in the Kingdom of Poland,” Jewish Social Studies, n. s. 16, no. 2 (2010): 28-66.

^{xxv} Ryvkin, “Velizhskoe delo,” 79.

^{xxvi} Eugene M. Avrutin, “Jewish Neighbourly Relations and Imperial Russian Legal Culture,” Journal of Modern Jewish Studies 9, no. 1 (2010): 1-16.

^{xxvii} See, for example, Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from Antiquity to the Present (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 43-72; Biale, Blood and Belief, 126-38; and most recently, Robert S. Wistrich, A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad (New York: Random House, 2010), 79, 88-90.

^{xxviii} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, ll. 6-7, 9.

^{xxix} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, l. 12.

^{xxx} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, ll. 5, 11, 13, 18, 23.

^{xxxi} Zenon Guldon and Jacek Wijacka, “The Accusation of Ritual Murder in Poland, 1500-1800,” Polin 10 (1997): 139-40; Jacek Wijacka, “Ritual Murder Accusations in Poland throughout the 16th to 18th Centuries,” Ritual Murder: Legend in European History, ed. Susanna Buttaroni and Stanislaw Musial (Krakow: Association for Cultural Initiatives, 2003), 195-210; and Hillel J. Kieval, “Blood Libels and Host Desecration Accusations,” in The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1: 195-200. See also Jurgita Šiaučiunaitė-Verbickienė, “Blood Libel in a Multi-Confessional Society: The Case of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania,” East European Jewish Affairs 38, no. 2 (2008): 201-9.

^{xxxii} Magda Teter, Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 113-21.

^{xxxiii} For studies that stress the significance of print culture for the dissemination of ritual murder discourse in the nineteenth century, see John Doyle Klier, Imperial Russia’s Jewish Question, 1855-1881 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 418-36; and Hillel J. Kieval, “Death and the Nation: Ritual Murder as Political Discourse in the Czech Lands,” in Kieval’s Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 181-97. In small towns such as Velizh, where there were no provincial newspapers and where the

vast majority of people were illiterate, it seems highly unlikely that print played a leading role in the dissemination of the blood libel tale. For an influential statement on the importance of oral culture, see Robert Darton, The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History (New York: Basic Books, 1984), esp. 75-106.

xxxiv RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, l. 20.

xxxv RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, ll 15-16.

xxxvi RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, l. 21.

xxxvii RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 25, ll. 17, 19.

xxxviii Hsia, The Myth of Ritual Murder, 227-28.

xxxix As quoted in Cecil Roth, ed., The Ritual Murder Libel and the Jew: The report by Cardinal Lorenzo Ganganelli (Pope Clement XIV) (London: Woburn Press, 1934), 97-8. Pope Innocent IV issued the pronouncement to the Archbishops and Bishops of Germany and France on July 5, 1247.

xl For a good explanation of the connection between the Hasidim and blood sacrifice, see Marcin Wodzinski, "Blood and Hasidim: On the History of Ritual Murder Accusations in Nineteenth-Century Poland," Polin 22 (2010): 273-90. See also John D. Klier, Russia Gathers her Jews: The Origins of the "Jewish Question" in Russia, 1772-1825 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 104.

xli Iulii Gessen, "Obviniia evreev v ritual'nykh prestupleniakh v Rossii," Evreiskaia entsiklopediia: Svod znanii o evreistve i ego kul'ture v proshlom i nastoiashchem, 16 vols. (Moscow: Terra, 1991), 11: 871.

xlii RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ll. 24-26.

xliii RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, l. 27.

xliv Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 660-69; and Robin Briggs, Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 137-46.

xlv On popular cosmologies and witchcraft, see Briggs, Witches and Neighbors, 99-133. On the witch-hunt in early modern Europe, see Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds., Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of the Witch Trials (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

xlvi Historians working on a wide range of geographic regions and across vast chronological timeframes have had heated debates ascertaining the popular beliefs of populations who left few written records of their everyday prejudices, fears,

and preoccupations. For the Russian Empire, see, for example, Simon Dixon, "Superstition in Imperial Russia," Past & Present, supplement 3 (2008): 207-28. See also Christine D. Worobec, Possessed: Women, Witches, and Demons in Imperial Russia (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 20-63; and Robert H. Greene, Bodies Like Bright Stars: Saints and Relics in Orthodox Russia (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 17-102.

^{xlvii} W. F. Ryan, The Bathhouse at Midnight: Magic in Russia (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1999), 79.

^{xlviii} RGIA, f. 1345, op. 235, d. 65, ch. 1, ll. 5-5ob (Maria Terenteeva's petition to Tsar Alexander I, July 25, 1825).