

Vladimir S. Kliaus. Traditsionnaia kul'tura starobriadtsev (semeiskikh) Zabaikal'ia. CD-Rom. Required System: Pentium PC 233 MHz, 64 Meg RAM, 48x CD-ROM, Windows 98, Internet Explorer 5.5. Flash Player and Flash Active X are provided on the CD. Images, audio, video, a searchable full-text bibliography of 500 titles. 2001. \$32.00.

Compact disks are capable of holding an enormous amount of information and have the advantage of presenting data in a variety of formats. Thus, the same CD can hold text, sound files, video and still images. Kliaus and his collaborators have utilized the capacity of digital technology to give us a treasure trove of Old Believer data on one CD.

The CD under review has a short introductory essay. It also contains a terrific bibliography that is divided into useful categories such as the history of Old Believer settlements, dialect studies, collections of folklore data, including children's folklore, calendary and life cycle rituals, and collections of prose, song and incantation texts. There are lists of studies that focus on material culture and studies that deal with Old Believer farming techniques. Literary works that mention Old Believers are referenced, as are archives with repositories of Old Believer materials. The bibliography goes beyond published and archival works to include lists of available audio and video recordings, Old Believer web sites and Old Believer organizations. I am not an Old Believer specialist, but the bibliography seems marvelously complete. Furthermore, in addition to giving citations, the bibliography allows the user to click on selected shorter pieces, usually articles, to view the full text. According to the introduction, the provided articles are the ones that are hardest to find. Thus the bibliography of this CD either directs the user to the source of a particular item or, in those cases where location is difficult, provides the item itself. Finally, the CD has a Yandex search engine. With a Russian keyboard installed, words can be typed, or pasted, into the search page where Boolean searches can be performed in any one of thirty different categories. The search engine works beautifully, searching all of the text files, bibliographic citations, folklore texts and article texts on the entire CD. This allows not only location of desired studies or texts; it allows actual research on the CD itself. A scholar can type in a word or a phrase and see in which types of folklore texts it appears, and in which contexts.

The CD goes well beyond providing an excellent bibliography and search engine. There are collections of photographs for twenty-two Old Believer villages and a set of photos of icons. The sets of photographs contain both recent ones made by Kliaus and his colleagues on their expeditions to the Zabaikal region and copies of old photos. There are also fourteen sets of audio files from twelve villages and twenty-three short video clips. The audio files offer a variety of genres. Songs of various types are included and there are examples of prose texts such as tales and legends. Some of these are transcribed; most are not. Again, most are new recordings, but digitized versions of songs collected in the past are also included. The short video clips show several types of healing rituals, baptisms, commemorations of the dead, and private and public prayers. A selection of song and prose texts from published sources is included.

The Old Believer CD may contain a vast quantity of information but it does have problems, both technical and scholarly. For example, some materials are thoroughly documented and others are documented poorly. The problem is most acute with the photographs. We are told in which village they were taken, but often that is all of the information given. Thus, we do not know who the people in the photographs are or what is important about them. Are we supposed to notice their dress? Are they the performers who are the sources of the songs or narratives in the audio files? Are they performing a ritual? I did notice the costumes and the ritual acts, but there may well be other things that I overlooked.

Some of the old photographs that have been digitized for this CD do have captions, but the resolution is often so bad that the captions are virtually illegible. In addition, the resolution of number of the new photographs, the ones taken by Kliaus and his team, is quite poor. It seems that the members of the expedition learned to use their digital camera over time and the quality of some of the photos is good; however, most of the photos have huge pixels and thus are blurry. The reflection off the icons often obscures the icon itself. The copies of black and white photos have not been put through a filter to remove the frequent moiré effect.

Similar problems appear elsewhere. The lighting on a number of videos is bad and this makes it hard to see what is going on. The videos are extremely short and, in addition to the many technical problems, one questions the editing of the clips. Were these really the most important actions? Should not a woman's discussion of her aches and pains be cut so that we could see more of the wax ceremony she is doing? Or is her complaint about her own problems relevant to an understanding of her as a folk healer?

Probably the worst in terms of technical problems is the audio files section, in which one is supposed to click on the village in which the recordings were made. A page then opens with a picture of the medium in which the recording originally appeared: a record, a CD, or a set of earphones, presumably meaning that the recording was on a tape or an audiocassette. The user then has to run the cursor over the record or CD or earphones and a list of song titles should appear. I say "should" because this does not always happen. The cursor has to be dragged in a particular direction and that direction only and, sometimes, before the user has a chance to drag the cursor as far as the desired song title, all titles disappear and the process must begin anew. In the case of one set of sound files, I never managed to get the song titles to come up at all. Once the sound files are opened, they are quite good. The source is always given. If it is an existing recording, there is full bibliographic information. If it is a new recording made by Kliaus and his team, we get the name of the performer or performers and a picture, the date of collection, and the name of the collector. For a number of songs, there is a transcript of the song, story or other audio recording. In short, if you can get the sound files to open, they are excellent and the selection is good, so that there are samples of all basic oral genres.

The next technical issue is one of venue. The cute pictures of phonograph records, CD's and earphones, as well as many of the other features of this disk, are done in Flash, which is a quirky program that makes this CD unusable in the classroom. Having discovered that there were good genre samples on this disk, I wanted to play them for my students. This proved impossible because, while I could use the CD at home, the equipment in classrooms could not handle it and it routinely crashed. The same proved true with the videos: I could watch

them at home, but not show them to my students unless I copied them over to another CD at home and played the videos off my own disk.

Somewhere between the problem of documentation and technical difficulties is the lack of directions on how to use the CD. When the user puts this disk into the computer, it loads automatically. What comes up is a map with some production credits and directions for exiting the CD; there are no directions for opening it. Because I am familiar with a variety of digital conventions, I soon understood that I was to click on the part of the map that showed the region where Old Believers live. I am not so sure that someone with less familiarity with digital technologies would know where to begin. Similar problems appear all the way through. I discovered the library only recently and more or less by accident. There are no directions to guide the user, who must then randomly click on objects to see what, if anything, happens.

With all of the technical difficulties this CD presents, I am still very glad I own it. Even though I do not teach Old Believer folklore, the healing practices of this group are similar enough to mainstream Russian practices for me to use the video clips in class. The same applies to the sound files. As already noted, the various materials are not easy to use and need to be copied to make them run smoothly. But having illustrative material of this sort adds so much to a course that it is worth the effort. I am grateful for the photos, bad quality images included. Even though they are too fuzzy to use in class, they are interesting as comparative material for my own research.

I should also add that, as someone who does fieldwork, I am most sympathetic to Kliaus and his team. In the countryside, lighting is not always good, the electricity may be switched off and batteries impossible to find. Does that mean it is not worth photographing a ritual practice? I would say one does the best one can; data, no matter how marginal, is infinitely preferable to no data at all. I also work with digital technologies and, again, Kliaus and his team have my sympathies. When working with digital formats, one tries to anticipate where users will look, what they will click on, how they will proceed through the assembled data. My team and I are always looking for feedback so that we can improve our work. I hope that this review will help Kliaus and his team produce an even better CD in the near future.

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