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Sophie Hasquenoph, *Les Français de Moscou et la Révolution russe (1900-1920): L'histoire d'une colonie étrangère à travers les sources religieuses*. Paris: Champ Vallon, 2017. 363 pp. Chronology, illustrations, bibliography. €27.00. ISBN 979-1026706137.

Review by Jonathan Beecher, University of California at Santa Cruz.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the French population of Moscow amounted to no more than 2000 people. But they constituted a rich and dynamic community consisting largely of teachers, functionaries and merchants in luxury trades, and dominated by a small group of industrialists and businessmen. They called themselves the “French colony,” and it was sometimes said that this small urban community was actually the richest and most dynamic of all the French colonies. At the heart of this community was its Catholic church—the *église Saint-Louis-des-Français*—a modest (by Russian standards) neoclassical church built under Catherine the Great. It was located not far from the Kremlin and just a few steps from the Lubyanka, the headquarters of the Cheka or secret police during the Soviet period. The church still stands: today it is the home of a French community even smaller than that of 1900. Then it was both the social center of Moscow’s French colony and the hub of a thriving network of schools and charitable institutions.

This book tells the story of the French colony through the history of the church. The author, Sophie Hasquenoph, has published several works on French Catholic religious orders as well as a history of Moscow’s first French colony, which was dispersed in 1812 in the wake of Napoleon’s short-lived occupation of Moscow. For the present work Hasquenoph has drawn on a wide array of French sources. These sources include the parish archives, long held in the basement of the French church, which consist of parish bulletins and registers, and letters. The author explains that because these archives were never classified, they escaped the attention of both Soviet authorities and earlier Catholic historians. She is in fact the first to make use of them. Equally important for this study are the archives of the Sisters of Saint-Joseph de Chambéry. This was a missionary order of nuns who set up hospitals and French schools at both Moscow and Saint Petersburg starting in the 1860s. These archives, now held at the Couvent Saint-Joseph in Chambéry, include not only the correspondence of the nuns who ran the French schools in Moscow but also a history of the girls’ school, the *École des filles Sainte-Catherine*, written by its last Mother Superior, Adèle Dejay. In addition to these sources the author has also drawn on material held in the Roman archives of the Dominican and Assumptionist orders, and on newspapers, travel guides, and the memoirs of French businessmen and journalists. Thus, the author’s research has taken her to Rome and Chambéry as well as Moscow, and virtually all of it has concerned documents in French, emanating for the most part from the French Catholic Church.

The book is divided in two halves. It begins with a richly detailed evocation of the life of Moscow’s French community around 1900, and it concludes with an account of the testing years—“*le temps des épreuves*”—running from the “crisis” of 1905 to World War I and the destruction of the community in the course of the Bolshevik revolution. The picture presented in the first half of the book is of a prosperous enclave centered around the parish church but bound together by ties more social than spiritual. “It seemed natural to frequent the French parish in Moscow even if one was anticlerical and

freemason,” writes Hasquenoph. The parish community was “a means of integration” for the French colony, and if the curé sometimes complained about parishioners who were “not very catholic” in their behavior or very regular in their church attendance, it was understood that the important thing was to remain “united, solidary, and . . . French” (p. 119).

We learn much in this book about the three curés who directed the parish between 1884 and 1920. Their letters to Rome are an important source; and the last of them, the abbé Jean-Marie Vidal, also published a moving account of the life of the parish during the first three years of the Soviet period. But the principal actors in Hasquenoph’s story are women—the nuns who came to Moscow from Chambéry after 1872 to help create French schools and charitable institutions including an *asile* for the sick and elderly. These were the sisters of Saint-Joseph. Their Mother Superiors are the central figures in the story told here, and the girls’ school that they opened in 1889 quickly became the jewel in the crown of the French colony. Within a few years of its founding, it had become a finishing school in which the young women of the French colony perfected their French and Russian and took courses in literature and music and the natural sciences as well as Catholic doctrine. All students, whatever their religious background, were expected to attend mass and to participate in the cults of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Virgin, and Saint Joseph.

By Hasquenoph’s account, the “trials” of the French colony began well before 1917. The French schools created by the church were to a large extent the victims of their own success. The girls’ school, which had 50 students in 1893, enrolled 256 in 1912. During roughly the same period enrollments in the boys’ school increased from 85 to 239. Early on both schools began to take Russian students, and their numbers quickly outpaced those of the French. This meant that the nuns could no longer focus exclusively on what they initially took to be their central mission: providing a high-quality catholic education to the elite of the French colony. It also meant that representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church began to fear that the French Catholics were seeking converts, that they saw Russia as a target for missionary activity. These fears were augmented in 1903 when French religious orders that had been expelled from France by the anticlerical Combes government sought refuge in Russia. In the end, the Tsarist government proved more welcoming than the Orthodox Church. But for a few years just prior to the outbreak of World War I, the nuns from Chambéry feared that by way of reprisal their schools would be shut down and that they would be expelled from Russia.

With the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917, the disputes between French Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy quickly came to seem trivial. The French colony got directly caught up in the struggle because the church and the surrounding school buildings were located at a strategic point near the Moscow telegraph office. For a week, starting on October 25, the French church was under fire. Soldiers defending the telegraph sought refuge in the church; the Bolsheviks broke into the church, seeking the soldiers; meanwhile the curé said mass every morning before an improvised altar in the school recreation room; and, the Mother Superior later recalled, the students sang canticles loudly during the mass in an effort to drown out the sound of gunfire outside (p. 265).

The last five chapters of the book are devoted to an account of the impact of the Bolshevik revolution on Moscow’s French colony and its final dispersion in 1919 and 1920. The main sources are the manuscript history of the *École Sainte-Catherine* by the Mother Superior Adèle Dejay, and published accounts by the abbé Vidal and by the journalist Ludovic Naudeau, the latter entitled *En Prison sous la Terre Russe*. In the immediate aftermath of the Bolshevik takeover, the French of Moscow were uncertain about the future and felt a confusion that was vividly articulated by Vidal who wrote on November 25, 1917 that the French had been betrayed by the Tsar and the Provisional Government, that the elections for a Constituent Assembly would yield only a “Babel of parties,” and that the regime of the Bolshevik “bandits” was likely to fall “in a month or two” (p. 270). The signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 3, 1918), which took Russia out of the war, complicated the situation of the French, who were no longer Russia’s allies. The French Military Mission that had been sent to Russia in 1916 was no longer welcome. French industrialists were facing strikes and nationalization; and in January 1918 when Emile

Germinet, the owner of a Moscow airplane engine factory, attempted to close his factory, he was arrested and imprisoned.

1918 was a grim year, marked by hunger, fear, requisitions, and arrests. Members of the French community attempted to keep their heads high as they celebrated July 14 at the church. But many looked to allied intervention as the only cure for their misfortunes. Then in early August, when news reached Moscow of the landing of French and English troops at Arkhangelsk, the Bolsheviks responded with arrests and intensified surveillance of the French population. On August 30, the socialist revolutionary Fanny Kaplan attempted to assassinate Lenin, and this was followed by the unleashing of what became known as the Red Terror. The Mother Superior Adèle Dejay and four other nuns were arrested and held in prison, as were the journalist Ludovic Naudeau and the retired businessman Pierre Darcy who fell sick and died in prison. His funeral on January 1, 1919 is described by the author as the last significant collective gesture of the French colony of Moscow.

In its last fifty pages this history of Moscow's French community becomes a martyrology, and one's impression of reading a piece of religious writing is reinforced by the fact that the next-to-last chapter on the dispersion of the colony consists largely of a six-page account of the hardships suffered by the nuns who ran the École Sainte-Catherine on their almost month-long trip in March 1919 from Moscow to Chambéry by way of Stockholm, Bergen, Newcastle, London and Paris. Finally, the author concludes by taking the reader to the Foreigners' Cemetery in Moscow and by describing her book as an "homage" to the members of the French colony who lie buried there in foreign soil.

The sufferings described by the author are real, and the ending is very sad. But one would like to have heard something from other perspectives. No Russian primary sources are cited, and there are French sources that would have given relief and some complexity to the final chapters. The first two volumes of the Russian journals of Pierre Pascal, a member of the French Military Mission who stayed on in Soviet Russia after 1917 and regarded himself as a "Christian Bolshevik," describe his relations with Adèle Dejay and his own experience of worshipping at and being for a time billeted in Moscow's French church.[1] Pierre Pascal was at the time a zealous communist, one of several dozen members of the French Communist Group of Moscow which was created in October 1918 and eventually absorbed within the Comintern.[2] (One of the members of the communist group was actually the sacristan of the French church!) Pascal's journals describe his own experience in the fall of 1918 of collaborating with the Cheka and acting briefly as an intermediary between the Bolsheviks and members of Moscow's French colony.

One might have expected to find some discussion of Pierre Pascal and the French Communist Group of Moscow in a book entitled *Les Français de Moscou et la Révolution russe*. Pascal provides a critical perspective on the French colony which is missing here. And while his comments about the colony's leaders are often caustic, his picture of the activity of the nuns is vivid, warm and entirely credible. Thus in describing a day spent filling the woodshed of the École Sainte-Catherine with firewood for the winter, he writes: "The nuns are strong women who work indefatigably, good women who worried that our loads were too heavy, that we were getting tired, and they kept treating us to tea, kvas, and sweet drinks." [3] Comments like this, coming from an outsider not well disposed toward the leadership of the French colony, would have added nuance and warmth to the author's picture of the community and its long-suffering nuns. But Sophie Hasquenoph, who has discovered some extraordinarily rich and hitherto unutilized archival sources, has chosen to limit herself to these sources. The result is a rich and moving, but a somewhat more narrowly focused, book than one would have expected from the first part of the title.

NOTES

[1] Pierre Pascal, *Mon Journal de Russie. A la Mission Militaire Française, 1916-1918* (Lausanne: L'Age

d'Homme, 1975), and *En Communisme. Mon Journal de Russie, 1918-1921* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1977). A superb recent biography of Pierre Pascal is Sophie Coeuré, *Pierre Pascal. La Russie entre christianisme et communisme* (Lausanne: Editions Noir sur Blanc, 2014).

[2] On the French Communist Group of Moscow see Ludmila Zak, "Deiatel'nost' frantsuzkoi gruppy RKP(B) v 1918-1919 godax," *Voprosi istorii* (1960): 2, 152-166, and Coeuré, *Pierre Pascal*, 83-97.

[3] Pascal, *Mon Journal de Russie, 1916-1918*, 320. Entry for August 31, 1918.

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