The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Patriarch Kirill's Apartment Buried in Sand

March 28, 2012



Clarification appended

The devil has sent the Russian Orthodox Church and all Christian believers an even greater trial than the terrible and insidious Pussy Riot performance with their blasphemous demand: “Mother of God, Cast Putin Out!” Namely, Yury Shevchenko, a priest and former health minister, sprinkled nearly 20 million rubles ($691,000) of sand and limestone in Patriarch Kirill's elite apartment at 2 Ulitsa Serafimovicha just south of the Kremlin.

The new test to the church became known after the Zamoskvoretsky District Court ordered Shevchenko to pay damages on Nov. 1 and the Moscow City Court upheld the ruling Feb. 14.

Both rulings read like the life story of a martyr who was sent test after test by enemies of the faith. It would make a good story for an icon titled, "Patriarch Kirill's Apartment Buried in Sand."

According to the Zamoskvoretsky court ruling, one L.M. Leonova, who was living and registered in the patriarch's apartment — and who herself filed the lawsuit —

"discovered that all of the property, including the library, was covered in a thick layer of dust" when Shevchenko renovated the place and apparently broke the ventilation system in the process.

Instead of hiring a maid or simply vacuuming away the offending dust herself, Leonova complained to the local residential services about "the damage that had rendered the property in the apartment unusable."

Next, a commission that included representatives from the local district council, the residential services and the Moscow building inspectorate for the Central Administrative District determined that Shevchenko was to blame for the dust. In fact, the wording of the court decision suggests that Shevchenko did not contest this finding and expressed a willingness to fix everything. But his offer was not accepted.

The plaintiff demanded that the chemical composition of the dust be ascertained. As a result, "an analysis conducted by the N.S. Kurnakov Institute of General and Inorganic Chemistry ... identified compounds that are potentially hazardous to health," in particular "components of mixtures and colors $CaCO_3$ (calcium carbonate, or limestone) $CaSO_4 \cdot 2H_2O$ (gypsum) and SiO_2 (aluminum dioxide [SIC]). ... In addition, the samples ... contained nanoparticles, contact with which could have a negative impact on health and cause illness, including oncological disorders."

Here, a little clarification is needed. Oxygen accounts for half of the weight of the Earth, and silicon for another 25 percent. As a result, pure SiO_2, also known as silicon dioxide (and definitely not aluminum dioxide, as written in the court ruling), constitutes 12 percent of the Earth's crust. It is part of absolutely all volcanic rocks. Accordingly, it is part of almost all sedimentary rock as well. Granite is defined as an intrusive magma rock with more than 20 percent quartz (silicon dioxide), and basalt is defined as an extrusive rock with less than 20 percent quartz. Sand is practically pure silicon dioxide, or more simply, silica. Clay is one-half silicone dioxide by composition. In fact, silicon dioxide is so ubiquitous that it is found in all living things and makes up one one-thousandth of 1 percent of human blood.

Now is Shevchenko's dastardly plan clear? Any fool could use cyanide to kill someone, but the infinitely subtle and devious Shevchenko used something that nobody but the sleuths at the Institute of General and Inorganic Chemistry could have detected: ordinary sand.

The second dangerous substance found in the patriarch's apartment is $CaCO_3$, or limestone. Note that the greater part of the Earth's crust not composed of silicone dioxide is covered by sedimentary rock, also known as limestone.

Next, the local residential services asked the Russian State Library about "the possibility of cleaning dusty books" from Patriarch Kirill's priceless library — books such as the "The Way of Abai" by Mukhtar Auezov (1974, Moscow, 713 pages), "Robinson Crusoe" by Daniel Defore (1974, Moscow, 525 pages) and other similar volumes. The library estimated the cost of repairing the books at 13.9 million rubles ($480,000).

In other words, the books were not irreparably damaged by water, foul-smelling sewage, oil or fire. They were covered in a layer of sand and limestone. Instead of remedying the problem with a vacuum cleaner or by asking Shevchenko to clean up the mess himself, Leonova took

the matter to the authorities. An obedient court soon handed her a ruling for damages totaling 13.9 million rubles.

Shevchenko is stricken with cancer and has bequeathed his own apartment to his daughter. If he does not pay the settlement, the authorities will seize the apartment as payment. I wonder what else can be done to the former health minister and his daughter to punish them for the unspeakable crime of letting dust settle on the patriarch's priceless tomes? I have three suggestions:

- Collect signatures from Orthodox parishioners throughout Russia demanding harsh punishment for the seriously ill Shevchenko;
- Burn Shevchenko and his daughter at the stake;
- Crucify them both.

Do you find those suggestions troubling? In a country where a respected institution of learning concludes that sand and limestone are life-threatening, such actions are a mere trifle.

Clarification: The translation of the name of the song performed by Pussy Riot in Christ the Savior Cathedral on Feb. 21 has been improved. It has been changed to "Mother of God, Cast Putin Out!" in place of "Holy Mother, Throw Putin Out!"

Yulia Latynina hosts a political talk show on Ekho Moskvy radio.

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