

Православие в Прибалтике: религия, политика, образование 1840-е – 1930-е гг., под ред. И. Пярт. Тарту: Изд-во Тартусского университета, 2018, 527 p. ISBN 978-9949-776-79-5

This book is a collection of 13 research articles that were prepared based on papers presented at an international conference at Tartu University in 2015. It consists of an introduction, 13 articles in Russian by well-known and less well-known authors, information about the authors, article summaries in English, an alphabetical index, and two maps (appendices to two articles).

The authors of these articles represent six countries: four are from Estonia, two each from Germany and Russia, and one each from Lithuania and the Czech Republic. As the book's editor, the Estonian cultural historian Irina Paert, writes in the introduction, the necessity to objectively assess the role of Orthodoxy in life in the Russian Empire and its national peripheries in the course of the 'long 19th century' was long overdue (p. 18).

The title of the collection *Православие в Прибалтике: религия, политика, образование 1840-е–1930-е гг* (Orthodoxy in the Baltics: Religion, Politics and Education, 1840s–1930s) shows that the object of discussion here is the various social forces and political institutions that formed the 'Baltic region's religious landscape in the modern period'. The Orthodox Church's approach to local social and cultural conflicts, national movements and secular ideologies is analysed, as is the influence of the First World War and the '1917 revolution' on religious life. The 'role of Orthodoxy on the development of education of the people' is also revealed (p. 12).

The chronological framework begins from the 1840s, when Orthodoxy spread among some of the Estonian and Latvian peasantry, and later became the basis for the autocephaly of local Orthodox churches. The other chronological boundary is 1940, when the three Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian republics became part of the USSR.

In terms of the issues covered, and the theoretical approaches taken, this collection, in the opinion of Paert, is oriented towards the 'new imperial history' paradigm, which has become entrenched in the last

decades in research on the Russian Empire and the USSR (p. 19), primarily in the historiography of East and Central European countries. This theoretical approach highlights the contradictions in the aims and actions of the Russian government's internal, religious and national policy, and the misalignment between the desired and the existing. This is why one of the main questions raised in this book is formulated in the introduction as follows: was the tsarist government's confessional policy merely a functional equivalent of its national policy? To what extent did the activities of the Orthodox Church serve to strengthen the imperial government in the national peripheries (p. 16)?

The pioneers of the new imperial history in Russia suggest analysing not only imperial structures, but practices and discourses that merge into an open 'imperial situation' system. The 'imperial situation' itself is described as existence within parallel, misaligned social hierarchies and value systems, which also foresee the unequal and changing statuses and rights of different groups in the imperial space, that is, in its various centres, regions and peripheries. The problem does not lie in inequality itself, but in the fact that there is no one value-oriented dimension in the imperial situation. Therefore, not only are separate regions of the 'imperial society' analysed or the policy on specific issues within them (the 'Polish', 'Lithuanian', 'Jewish' or 'Ostsee' questions), but attempts are made to describe the historical reality of an essentially heterogeneous, multi-religious and multinational society. We are gradually understanding that this demands new research strategies, which the 'new imperial history' is starting to reflect and develop at this point in time.¹

In this regard, the book is a study of the case of the 'Baltics' (the three states in the east Baltic region). The word 'Baltic' in the title of the collection expresses the present eastern 'Baltic region' (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), and is also a conscious allusion to Aksakov's term 'Baltic fringe', which is evident from the introductory article (p. 9). The latter term meant something quite different in the 19th century: the three 'Baltic provinces'. These were the provinces of Estland, Lifland and Courland, which made up most of present-day Estonia and Latvia (without Latgala, which was part of the former Vitebsk province). Present-day Lithuania (without Užnemunė) eventually became mostly part of the Vilnius and Kaunas provinces, generally known as the Northwest Krai.

¹Что такое новая имперская история, откуда она взялась и к чему она идет? Беседа с редакторами журнала *Ab Imperio* Илей Герасимовым и Мариной Могильнер, *Логос*, 1 (58) (2007), с. 224; 'Исторический курс' 'Новая имперская история Северной Евразии', http://new.abimperio.net/?page_id=30 [accessed: 08-04-2019].

Thus, the 'Baltic' category used in the book has many meanings. Retrospectively, from today's perspective, it appears as a doubling-up on historical imperial 'ethnocentrism' and present-day Russo-centrism, even though the authors of the book widely and synonymously use the Balto-centric category 'Baltic region', the Baltic States, that is Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, in their work. We know that this historical category also correlates with the term '*pribaltiskaya*' that was entrenched in the Soviet years, and is still often used in Russia, being applied to the Sovietised and later independent Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian republics.

We could say that the 'Baltic' or 'Baltic region' category is a symbolic geographical area, or a mental (imagined) construction, whereas the category itself is dynamic and amorphous. This problematic aspect is recognised in the book, primarily in the introduction (pp. 13–15), but is not analysed much in greater detail, or presented as an issue in itself. There is only a very brief description of the ethnocultural and political development of the 'Baltic region' from the 14th until the end of the 18th century, mentioning important differences in the political and ethnocultural evolution of the three Baltic societies, rather than the usual historiographical statements about their typological similarities.

Another key word in the book's title is 'Orthodoxy'. It is also a dynamic and multilateral category, which is the main object and theme of the collection of articles in the book. We see that 'Orthodoxy' is understood here first of all as a category of practice not analysis. The authors ask who Orthodox believers in the East European context were, rather than relying on how they were described by the Russian Orthodox Church, which was dominant until 1915. This historiographical (methodological) and problematic innovation is explored in the book, developing the Orthodoxy discourse and being oriented towards the 'new imperial history'.

In line with the intentions of the book's editor, the 'Orthodoxy' category discourse spans more than just the Russian Orthodox Church's faithful during the Synod period, and later the autonomous members of the Estonian (from 1923) and Latvian (from 1934) Orthodox churches, which belonged to the patriarchate of Constantinople. And not only ethnic Russians, and Estonians and Latvians from our region, but also the Setos in Estonia, and Belarusians, and to an extent Lithuanians in Lithuania. The Orthodoxy discourse can also encompass Old Believers.

The article by the Lithuanian historian R. Laukaitytė '*Štačiatikybės "etninė riba" Lietuvoje XIX–XX a.*' (The 'Ethnic Boundary' of Orthodoxy in Lithuania in the 19th–20th Centuries) concerns the specific question of why Orthodoxy did not step over the 'ethnic boundary' in Lithuania

(why it did not spread among the titular Lithuanian nation). This is the only article in the collection on the Lithuanian region. Laukaitytė claims that in the last two centuries, Orthodox institutions in Lithuania remained 'exclusively Russian', while conversions among Lithuanians were 'very rare'. She presents convincing arguments as to why Orthodoxy did not appear to spread among ethnic Lithuanians in modern Lithuania. The main factors, according to her, were the formation of Orthodoxy in the land 'from nothing' in the 19th century, the emergence of the Lithuanian national movement that strengthened the image of Orthodoxy as the government's political instrument of Russification, and the conflict between Catholics and Orthodox about who should have greater influence over the faithful. A polemic claim by the author, or perhaps one that simply needs further clarification, would be that in the Lithuanian Orthodox dioceses, 'social capital is related to the history of the Russian community' (p. 202). An important question here is why and how did Orthodoxy step over the ethnic boundary in the case of Belarusians in Lithuania in the 19th century, remembering the enormous pressure demonstrated by the tsarist government and the forcible 'return' of Uniates to official Orthodoxy from 1839?

Another question is, to what degree did Orthodoxy become 'their own' religion among the former Uniate Belarusians during those 66 years of 'returning', that is, until the manifesto on religious freedom of 1905 in the Russian Empire? Many, but not all (and not even a majority?), Belarusians reconverted to the Uniate Church, or more precisely, primarily to Catholicism. Orthodoxy in Lithuania remained ethnically varied in the 20th century as well (from 1918, it was again under the jurisdiction of the Moscow patriarchate), in terms of the composition of its believers, if that ethnic boundary is drawn along only one local population group, the Lithuanians. According to the 2011 census, Russians make up around 75 per cent of Orthodox believers in Lithuania, Belarusians (almost a third are Orthodox) make up close to 10 per cent, Ukrainians (almost 60 per cent of whom are Orthodox) make up over 8 per cent, and Lithuanians over 6 per cent (it is not conversion to Orthodoxy that dominates, but the baptism of children in this confession, often in Lithuanian-speaking families).

Another thing is that the multi-ethnic character of Orthodoxy in Lithuania became entrenched in a different way to what happened with Lithuanians in Lithuania in the 19th century (it hardly spread among them at all), compared to Latvians and Estonians in the 19th century in Estonia (Orthodoxy did spread among them, while the Seto group were already nominally Orthodox believers). Another Baltic country

meant different models for the spread of Orthodoxy, along with different practices and discourses. Different models for the entrenchment of Orthodoxy dominated in Lithuania: 1) the cases of the Uniates and a small part of the Old Believers, where in the 19th century, local Lithuanians (primarily local Belarusians and Russians of Old Believer background) changed their religious identity, and forcibly and/or spurred on by circumstances, would convert to official Orthodoxy; 2) ethnically unequal migratory waves of Russian-speaking Orthodox believers to Lithuania from other regions of the Russian Empire, and later regions of the USSR, determined the internal ethnic variety of Orthodox believers, and the fundamental changes in their composition in Lithuania in the 19th century, and later in the 20th century.

Let us return to the advice given in the book's introduction. 'Orthodoxy' in this book covers both the Old Believers who did not obey the jurisdictions (or the varying streams in the east Baltic region), who saw themselves and ideologically defined themselves as 'real' Orthodox believers (or old Orthodox believers), unlike the Nikonians and the Edinoverie, or Old Ritualists, who obeyed them. However, this aspect is not developed further or questioned in the book, while only one article, by N. Pazukhina, about the development of Latvian Old Believer educational institutions in the interwar period, is devoted to the Old Believer theme.

Paert's introduction to the book 'Russian Faith in the "Baltic Lands"', with its wide scope and discussion of 'themes and subjects that transfuse the collection', aims to be the article that seeks to present the conceptual guidelines of the collection, oriented to the 'new imperial history'. She also presents certain historiographical approaches in her original interpretation, reflecting the 'current condition of research into the role of Orthodoxy in the Baltic region' (p. 18). Most probably polemicising with the ethnocentric historiography of the Baltic countries and its 'traditional' approaches, Paert states that 'a significant number of historians present an unambiguous answer', and says that Orthodoxy was an instrument in the hands of the government, that it served the purpose of pushing through assimilation of the national regions, and the 'formation of a unified Russian nation'. One object of the collection is also related to this fact: 'to show that the actual situation was much more complicated and not unambiguous' (p. 16). What is referred to here is, first of all, the 'sudden conversion' of Estonian and Latvian peasants to Orthodoxy from the 1840s to the 1880s. In her opinion, this contradicted the established principle of 'multi-confessional order', the ruling system that outlined collective religious rights for various confessions, and ensured social stability, where the local elites controlled the faithful.

The article collection is valuable in that it is the first consistent, fact-based, thematic and also sometimes problematic discourse analysis of the secular education system in the Baltic region between 1840 and 1940, which is rather rare in historiography in terms of Orthodox religious education and its relationship with the intelligentsia, first of all in present-day Estonia and Latvia. The book consists of six articles by researchers from Estonia and other countries: Tatyana Shor, Lyudmila Dubyeva, Irina Paert, Toomas Schvak and N. Pazukhina. They take a deeper look at various aspects of the religious education of Orthodox believers in Estonia and Latvia amid the modernising society and new challenges, both under the patronage of the tsarist government and the special tolerance of Orthodox education in the period 1840 to 1905, and the situation in 1905–1915, when the support of the Russian state and attention to Orthodoxy in the region declined, but did not disappear altogether. We can also attribute to these the article by the Russian historian Konstantin Obozny which discusses the Russian student Christian movement in the Baltic countries in the interwar years, from Church and socio-cultural points of view.

The collection is also valuable in that seven articles discuss, for the first time ever, other specific Orthodox problems in the Baltic region. The Orthodox priest and art researcher Aleksandr Bertash discusses the construction of Orthodox churches in present-day Latvia and Estonia in the 1860s and 1870s. The Czech historian Kristine Ante looks at the spread of Orthodoxy among Lutherans in the province of Courland in the second half of the 19th century. The Latvian historian Aleksandr Gavrilin, who is well known and very productive, explores the place and the role of the Riga Orthodox Diocese during the First World War. The Lithuanian historian Regina Laukaitytė tries to explain why a group such as Lithuanian Orthodox believers did not emerge in Lithuania in the 19th and 20th centuries, unlike in Estonia and Latvia, with their more expressive identity and religious and cultural cores.

The article by the Estonian researcher Andreas Kalkun is also useful, because it takes a critical look at different representations of the Orthodoxy of the Seto group in Estonia in the 20th century. The German researcher of religion Sebastian Rimstad examines the specific historical circumstances in Estonia in the first quarter of the 20th century which determined different historical narratives about the development of the Orthodox Church's development here and its assessments. He notes that contemporary interpretations of Orthodox history in the Baltic countries rarely reflect the complexity of the historical process, and depend on the internal polemics between Orthodox believers in Estonia who

belonged to the Moscow or the Constantinople patriarchate (p. 337). The Russian historian Aleksandr Polunov comes back to the issue of religious reform and the details of imperial policy in the Baltic provinces from the 1880s to the 1890s.

The articles echo and approach the 'new imperial history' direction defined by the editor in the introduction. Traditional 'facts' and phenomena are used to create a different way of speaking, and a narrative relating these facts into a 'new' explanation scheme, which is different to the dominant (and rarely reflective) narrative about the history of Orthodoxy in the Baltic countries between 1840 and 1940. At the same time, some of the articles in the collection can be attributed to the more 'fact-based', 'traditional' historiographical direction, or the 'old' narrative.

However, the book is not only useful and informative. It can also be regarded as one of the first steps in applying and developing the 'new imperial history' theoretical approach in research into the government's religious policy and the evolution of Orthodox and Old Believers' religious education in the Baltic region in this period. The development of Orthodoxy in the Baltic countries, and to a lesser extent, the Old Believer faith, from 1840 until 1940, is described more in terms of the changing historical situation being affected by numerous factors, which was actually much more complex and also multi-dimensional. In any case, the history of Orthodoxy in our region does not fit the standard image of being a tool in the tsarist government's policy of Russification, remembering that up until 1905, the Old Believer faith was still a target of this unfavourable tsarist policy. These communities obeyed, implemented or searched for alternatives, or disagreed to various degrees, and opposed the government's political orders, and yet also managed to thrive, religiously and culturally. The Orthodox and Old Believer communities became an inseparable part of the history of the entire, and at the same time differing, modern, multi-ethnic and culturally varied Baltic countries. Now, thanks also to the efforts of this collection of articles and their authors, they are becoming increasingly less standard, multi-faceted and living participants in forming the 'new' historical narrative on the Baltic countries. In this narrative, alongside the ethnocentric approaches (imperial and national), an orientation towards practices and discourses, case studies, and a reflection of perspectives and narratives is also becoming more apparent.

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