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## RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE SOUTH OF RUSSIA IN XIX–XX CENTURIES

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### *Abstract*

This article presents the analysis of Russian historiography. Three main approaches are identified: pre-revolutionary (from late XVIII century up to – 1917; Soviet (1921–1991); and modern or post-Soviet (from 1993 up to now). The authors claim that researchers take special interest in the relationships between the Russian Orthodox Church, the state and the Cossacks in late XVI – early XVIII centuries, just before the revolution and the civil war of 1917-1921; the relationships between the Church and the state during the Soviet period, especially in 1921-1939, 1941-1945, 1958-1965. Moreover, some topics have been covered insufficiently, including those concerning the problems of the Russian Orthodox Church in late XVIII – first half of XIX century (the rule of Catherine the Great and Nicholas I), cyclic imperial modernizations of the second half of XIX century, the first Russian revolution of 1905-1907, the analysis of the relationships of the Soviet state and the church in the post-war period from 1945 to 1985. Besides, parish registers of the Lower Don Cossacks 1869–1912 were studied. This information, along with other sources, allows contemporary researchers to get a deeper understanding of the basis the family life and traditions, including those connected to orthodoxy, kinships and class relations among the Cossack and non-Cossack populace.

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**Keywords:** Religion, Russian Orthodox Church, eparchy, parish registers, Cossacks.



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## 1. Introduction

The demand for a more impartial study and reinterpretation of the history of the relations between the church, the state, and the society is due to the spiritual freedom the citizens of Russia received as a result of the latest modernization, the higher social activity of the Russian Orthodox Church (hereinafter ROC), and people's reversion to the orthodox traditions evident in the latest decades. The periods of modernization and revolutionary crises of late XIX – early XX centuries in Russia play a special role in the transformation of these relations, in particular in the Cossack regions of the Southern Russia.

Before October of 1917 when the Soviet period began, Russian Orthodox Church officially had a special place among the various religious denominations of the Russian Empire, including its southern margins. The Cossacks of the border regions of Southern Russia had been seen as a stronghold protecting the orthodoxy since the XVI century, especially so because they were surrounded by the Muslim world (the Kazan, the Astrakhan, and the Crimean Khanates, the Nogai Horde, the Ottoman Empire). Since the late XVII century, the Don region had been one of the centers of the Old Ritual movement following the reforms of patriarch Nikon and the Church dissent. For many centuries, orthodoxy traditionally was the most large-scale and official religion of Russia and it was under the control of the Empire. The prosecution of the schismatical Old Believers and sectarians was a key function of the imperial government and it spanned over the border regions as well. The missionary activities of ROC played an important role in the Russianization of the local peoples and baptizing the nomadic folks including the Kalmyks, especially those belonging to the Cossack class.

## 2. Problem Statement

When studying the role and the activities of ROC and the Don eparchy in the Province of the Don Cossack Host and the Don and Rostov regions, three main historiographic periods can be identified: pre-revolutionary (late XVIII – 1917; Soviet (1921–1991); and modern or post-Soviet (from 1993 up to now). In the first period, a lot of attention is paid to the local history and regional studies, setting up museums and updating archives. In the Soviet period, the relationships between the state and ROC and the clergy had a different direction: preservation and studying, using the documents and showpieces collected. In the third period (late 1980es – early 1990es, the perestroika), the reinterpretation of the history of ROC and its relations with the state and the Cossacks began. The analysis of the contemporary academic publications shows that researchers take special interest in the relationships between the ROC, the state and the Cossacks in late XVI – early XVIII centuries, just before the revolution and the civil war of 1917–1921; the relationships between the Church and the state during the Soviet period, especially in 1921–1939, 1941–1945, 1958–1965. However, there are still not enough works dealing with the problems of ROC in late XVIII – first half of XIX century (the rule of Catherine the Great and Nicholas I), cyclic imperial modernizations of the second half of XIX century, the first Russian revolution of 1905–1907, the analysis of the relationships of the Soviet state and the church in the post-war period from 1945 to 1985.

Contemporary historiographic research of the Don Cossacks and the non-Cossack residents of the Don and the Cis-Azov regions extensively use methods and techniques for the analysis of the parish register books from the Don eparchy. The brighter works include those by Belikova (2003), Biryukova

(2012), Matishov, Vlaskina, Venkov, and Vlaskina (1999), Sen (2013), Tabunshchikova and Shadrina (2015), Chibisova (2003), Firsov (2014), Shadrina (2014) and others.

### **3. Research Questions**

The study-matter of this article is the degree of exploration of the religious policies of the Russian government and the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in the South of Russia from the second half of XIX to the early XX centuries and the increasing importance of parish registers in contemporary research practices.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The goal of the article is studying the relevant problems of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Don and the Cis-Azov regions from the second half of XIX – early XX centuries based on the analysis of pre-revolutionary and Soviet literature and sources, as well as contemporary researches of the same topic.

### **5. Research Methods**

When analyzing the empirical data, we used general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis and generalization. The historiographic method of working with historical sources or, in particular, the study and analysis of parish registers allowed extracting some statistics on the demography of the Cossacks in the period under analysis. The problematic/chronological method helped study the Russian historiography, define key stages of its development and the exploration degree of the problem in question. Besides, we used the theological approach in order to define the special features of the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and other areas of social and political life more accurately.

### **6. Findings**

The data from the First general census of the Russian Empire of 1897 show that the number of those practicing orthodoxy was 87.3 million people or 69.5 % of all the population of the Russian Empire. In the South of Russia, these figures were as follows: the Province of the Don Cossack Host – 90.49 %, in the Kuban region – 91.06 %, in Stavropol Governorate – 91.14 %. This census confirms that despite the polyethnicity and multiple religions present in the Don region and the Cossack provinces of the South, the number of orthodoxy practitioners in them was 20 % higher than the all-Russian average. In the Empire period, the whole of the country's territory was divided into eparchies. In order to improve the influence of the state and the image of the new emperor, Nicholas I, the Don eparchy was established in the Cossack provinces in April of 1829. Later on, in June 1842, it was turned into the Don and Novocherkassk eparchy.

According to the calculations of Belikova (2003), the growth of the number of eparchies in the following period, typical of the entire country, can be confirmed by the following figures: 55 for 1855; 65 for 1900; and 68 by 1917. By 1917, the following eparchies existed in the South-East of Russia: Stavropol, Vladikavkaz, the Don, and Novocherkassk. The residents and the clergy of the Cis-Azov

region (including such cities and Rostov-on-Don, Taganrog, etc.). Belong to the Yekaterinoslav eparchy since 1826 and almost until it was included in the Province of the Don Cossack Host according to the territory reform implemented by decree of Alexander III in 1887–1888. Its own Rostov and Taganrog eparchy was only established later, in 1919. It is worth noting that this complicated and interesting problem shall be covered by experts and researchers using the material from the South of Russia and Ukraine.

The eparchies served as fundamental units of local church administration. A typical feature of the administrative and territorial division of the church and Just before the bourgeois reforms was that the borders of eparchies usually corresponded with the governorate boundaries. It helped control the church and coordinate the actions of the secular and the spiritual authorities during the transformations. The fact that an eparchy head was assigned by the emperor himself who had to select one of the three eparch candidates proposed by the Synod confirms the assumption that the Russian Orthodox Church was heavily controlled by the state.

A key feature of the clergy in the Don region and in the South of Russia was its division into the Cossack and Non-Cossack clergy, which lasted up to the revolution and the establishment of the Soviet authorities. The children of Cossack clergy were listed in the Host and obeyed Host commanders until they enrolled in a religious educational establishment. If they entered a school of theology or a seminary, they were excused from the stanitsa or regional duties and the host service for the time of their training. When they graduated from the schools and got positions in churches upon a request from the eparchial master to the appointed ataman, they were excluded from the list of the Cossacks who had to serve, but their Cossack origin was marked in all official documents. Those who were expelled from the educational establishments for their bad behavior or bad grades or got demoted from the psalm reader position for wrongdoing had to serve like all other Cossacks. The children of non-Cossack clergy remained outside the scope of eparchial authorities on the same basis as the children of orthodox clergy in non-Cossack territories. Contrary to the all-Russian legislation about the orthodox clergy, the traditional origin of a clergyman retained its significance and it influenced people's lives and service. Therefore, special policies were carried out in the Cossack territories with respect to the ROC. It was based on the historical tradition of the relationships between the Cossacks and the church and the Russian monarchy. It served the main idea of uniting the Cossack hosts, including the periods of liberal modernization of 1861–1875 and the revolutions of 1905–1907 and 1917–1918.

Contemporary post-Soviet historiographers are also interested in the problem of the relationships between the new Soviet authorities and ROC, the policies, regulating the life of the Cossacks and the clergy in the former Cossack territories during the revolution and the civil war, and the subsequent socialist modernization of 1917–1939 and their consequences. When studying the role and the activities of ROC and the Don eparchy in the Province of the Don Cossack Host and the Don and Rostov regions, three main historiographic periods can be identified: pre-revolutionary (late XVIII – 1917; Soviet (1921–1991); and modern or post-Soviet (from 1993 up to now). The first period is mostly characterized by acquiring various sources and materials, creating extensive archive and museum reserves, their analysis and generalization, the emergence of fundamental and definitive publications. In its key stage, spanning from 1868 to 1917, Russian historical studies obtained a new quality level due to the creative innovations.

A lot of attention is paid to the local history and regional studies, setting up museums and updating archives. The enthusiasts of the Don eparchy, as well as the newly-opened Don seminary (1868), played a big role in the establishment of so-called “orthodox regional studies” in the Don and the Cis-Azov regions. The experts of the Don Region Statistics Committee provided immense help in this respect. They included M. Katelnikov, M. Kharuzin, N. Nomikosov, et al. Contemporary historians, such as S.P. Chibisova and A.L. Boiko rightfully underline the role and the significance of the organizational and research activities aimed at collecting the orthodox antiquities of the Don region carried out by some outstanding figures including the archbishop of the Don region Ignatius, V. Chasovshchikov (father Abraham), A. Krylov, A. Kirillov, and some others. Their efforts led to the accumulation and description of unique orthodox antiquities of the Don and the Cis-Azov region, as well as the materials on the Old Believers and other religious denominations of the DON. A key step was the creation of the Don Eparchial Church Historical Committee in June 1904 and the Church Museum of Antiquities in May 1905. Based on the research of the materials stored in them, historical documents and materials are published in *Donskiye Eparkhialnye Vedomosti* between 1907 and 1915. At the same time, 4 unique anthology volumes of the Don Church Antiquities are published. They are still immensely important to those studying the history of ROC and other religious denominations in the Don and Cis-Azov regions (Chibisova, 2003).

However, the “orthodox regional studies” movement that began and developed successfully in the Don region was interrupted by the revolution and the civil war. The Soviet state has completely new goals and objectives for the relationships with ROC and the clergy, i.e. preservation and study, making use of the documents and showpieces accumulated. The immense losses of the Don and Novochoerkassk eparchy were due to both the severe devastation and the fires accompanying the civil war in the South of Russia and the subsequent requisitioning of the church values and cult items, church antiquities, the militant atheistic policies and church and temple closure of 1921–1927 and 1934–1939. For example, in 1916, there were 500 churches and temples in the Province of the Don Cossack Host; by 1921, only 402 remained, and in the Rostov region only 22 were left by 1940.

During the perestroika period (late 1980es – early 1990es), the reinterpretation of the history of ROC and its relations with the state and the Cossacks began. In this period, the works of historians and archivists of the late 1990es and early 2000s became the most prominent. A lot of efforts were made to collect and publish documents and materials concerning the history of ROC and other religious denominations, churches, and temples. The contemporary scope of problems for history research was shaped, including those based on the materials from the Cossack territories of southern Russia.

The biggest advances in studying the modernization of the Russian Empire, the transformation of the relations between the church, the state, and the Cossacks and its consequences using the materials from the Don region and the South of Russia were achieved in the works by Rimskiy (1999), Belikova (2003), Chibisova (2003), Shadrina (2014). According to the famous historian Rimskiy (1999), the ROC reforms during the reign of Alexander II had some obvious impact on the relations between the clergy and the state authorities. They were not extremely radical as in other areas of social life. The imperial government strove to achieve at least three goals: 1) fulfill the demand for primary school and Scripture knowledge teachers and delegate the moral education of people to someone reliable; 2) create conditions

to eliminate the closeness of the clergy class and improve the situation of regional parish clergy; 3) overcome the spread of atheism as an ideological signal of revolution and fight it with any means available.

The church reforms were carried out by the imperial government gradually and incrementally from 1863 to 1872. The new law of May 26th, 1869 excluded the children of the clergy from the Cossacks but left them with the corresponding benefits and rights, including the leave from the army service and the study in theological schools. The Regulations on Theological Schools, which had been enacted previously in 1867, states that each eparchy shall have at least one seminary where students would study for six years. For instance, in 1868, there was a Religious Seminary opened in the Province of the Don Cossack Host. For those who expressed their intention to become a priest after graduation, the tuition was free. The clergy children soon began using their rights and, having completed the entire seminary program, often started a secular career. They enrolled in secular higher and special education establishments, especially in the departments of history, philology and law. The reforms carried out during the reign of Alexander II extended the rights of the parish clergy in the local church administration, they also simplified the procedure of releasing a priest from the service and made the consequences of this action milder. The network of parochial schools was enlarged and the level of education in them improved, as well as the academic level of seminaries, which opened access to the universities to their graduates. One of the most important results of the reform was a gradual improvement of the local clergy's welfare, including the Cossack clergy (Tikidzhyan, 2015).

However, during the reign of Emperor Alexander III, a number of “counter-reforms” were carried out, and ROC once again became a serious and effective means of strengthening the monarchy for the state. According to Belikova (2003), this period features a series of recreational changes initiated by the Chief Procurator of the Synod K.P. Pobedonostsev and conservative preservationists. They were aimed at reviewing the existing system of bourgeois legislation and the role of ROC in the society and the state (Belikova, 2003). Using the support of the secular authorities and Alexander III himself, they tried to improve the religious zeal of the people of Russia, spread and ever force the “state” orthodoxy among the non-Russians, especially in the western and southern governorates of Russia, among the Kalmyks of the Steppe and in the North Caucasus. To this end, the churches closed in 1860–1870 were restored and new ones appeared. By the beginning of the XX century, ROC owned 4 ecclesiastical academies, 53 seminaries, 35.000 primary schools, 55.173 parish churches and 25.000 chapels. The orthodox believers were served by 163 bishops and 51.105 priests. There were 33.572 monks and nuns, along with 73.463 acolytes and novices in 1.257 monasteries. Detailed research by Shadrina (2014) shows that the position of the clergy, including the parish clergy. Their status, education, and incomes were in the focus of attention at this stage of social development. However, it is worth noticing that while the state made some efforts to strengthen the position of ROC through a number of reforms, it also gradually subdued the church and destroyed its independence. The Russian Orthodox Church with its connections with and dependence on the state was still an important means of monarchy policies. It influenced the morals of the society, monopolizing the right for the freedom of conscience of orthodox Russians. In the Cossack territories of the Don, Kuban and Terek, the church administration and the clergy had a special position because their activities in the region were under the supervision of both the state and the Host

commanders. It was due to the historical tradition of the Cossacks' interactions with the church and the Russian monarchs, it served the concept of maintaining the "orthodox monarchical spirit" among the Cossacks, including the Kalmyk Cossacks (Shadrina, 2014).

Thus, the relations between the state and the ROC in the period of reforms were complicated and controversial, in the Cossack regions of the South of Russia in particular. This was clearly made evident by the Jewish pogroms of the 1880–1890-es and 1905, demanding the rights for the freedom of conscience and religious belief during the first Russian revolution of 1905–1907. The gradual growth of problems led to complications in the relations between the state, the church and the Cossacks during the two Russian revolutions and the civil war, the spiritual and ideological schism and opposition between the orthodox believers. These topics shall be seriously studied in the future by contemporary historians.

In the last twenty years, archivists and museum workers did a great job of systematizing and publishing a number of sources on the history of ROC and the history of churches and temples in the Don region and in the South of Russia. The State Archive of Rostov Oblast (hereinafter GARO) has one of the largest reserves for the Don Ecclesiastic Consistory (GARO) that contains documents on various aspects of the activities of the department of religious affairs: missionary service, fighting the schism and other "heresies", building and consecrating churches, establishing monasteries, reports on the conditions in parish schools, the establishment and activities of the Don Religious Seminary, etc. This reserve also holds a large number of parish register books and documents certifying that brides and grooms are not related. Since 1985, such sources were in high demand among both professional historians and commoner studying or drawing up their family trees. Parish register books of some towns, especially from Cossack stanitsa or farmstead churches, are kept in a separate collection of Parish Register Books of the Province of the Don Cossack Host (GARO). They are a unique source for both the history of the church and the clergy and the social and cultural history of the residents of the Don and Cis-Azov region from 1870 to 1912.

In contemporary historiography of the Don Cossacks and the non-Cossack residents of the Don and Cis-Azov regions, the academic methods and techniques based on the parish register books were used by such historians as Agafonov (1986) and Korchikov (1987). At the current stage, this work was continued by a group of authors headed by a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Matishov et al. (2012) in their comprehensive research of the Historical Social Portrait of the Don estuary: Donskoy Cossack farmstead.

In 2014–2016, we analyzed the parish register books of the Protection Church of stanitsa Yelizovetovskaya, and St. George's church of Gosudarevskiy (Donskoy) and Obukhovskiy farmsteads to study the local history of modernization reforms and the reform period in the Lower Don and Cis-Azov regions between 1869–1912 (a total of 58 items). These areas were mostly inhabited by the Cossacks of the Cis-Azov region (Rostov district of the Province of the Don Cossack Host since 1888) As a result of the analysis of the records and listings in the parish register books for 1873–1914, we found a number of interesting facts and features. For instance, the gradual assimilation of Little Russian elements in the Cossack environment, especially in stanitsa Yelizovetovskaya and Obukhovskiy farmstead. The study the standards of wedding age, childbirth, disease and death rates appears to be promising. For example, the sources show that the wedding age for the Cossacks was 23–34 for men and 19–27 for women. The

orthodox and Cossack tradition of having obligatory godparents for a child was widely spread in the early XX century: 99 % of all Cossack marriage records have those, including 98 % of the orthodox families and 1.2 % of old believers. The cases of Cossack men marrying orthodox peasant women or soldier widows are rare and interesting, but they are mostly represented by second marriages (at the age of 34–54).

The demographic data show high child mortality (aged 3 and 4–12 years) due to illnesses, including scarlet fever, whooping cough, intestinal diseases, epidemics, and water accidents, that lasted throughout the second half of XIX century and early XX century. The high mortality of the adults was typical of the following age groups: 18–25, 34–52, 62–76 which can be explained by epidemics (mostly cholera and viral infections) in 1888–1889, 1892–1893, 1903, etc.

Thus, the fact that Cossack stanitsas and farmsteads were located in the vicinity of Rostov and Nakhichevan, the Azov settlement did not improve the quality of the healthcare even for the privileged Cossack class due to the poor development of local medicine. The average figures here were maintained due to a relatively high birth rate (3–4 children per couple married for 5–7 years) and a low mortality among the Cossacks aged 21–48 who served in the army because, in the period of 1880–1903, there were no large scale wars and conflicts. The Lower Don also escaped the famine of 1891–1892, but the sources tell that due to the famine new epidemics were introduced in the Cis-Azov region by the starving refugees (Tikidzhyan, 2015).

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the often meager but vital information from the parish register books and listings, along with other sources, allows contemporary researchers to get a deeper understanding of the basis the family life and traditions, including those connected to orthodoxy, kinships and class relations among the Cossack and non-Cossack populace. The problem of studying the role of the church and the system of orthodox parishes in the changing routine and mentality of traditional classes of imperial Russia remains important in this context, as well as the establishment of the Soviet mentality in the reform period including the education and healthcare in late XIX – early XX century. This difficult research work shall be carried out by the new generation of historians and ethnologists. The organization of annual Dmitri Readings (in the memory of hierarch Dm. of Rostov) by the Don and Novochoerkassk eparchy was a key stimulus for further research work in XXI century, along with the establishment and the activity of the Don branch of St. Tikhon's Orthodox University, and the restoration of the Don Religious Seminary of 2010. The authorities and the educational institution of the region and the South Federal District together with the Southern Academic Center of RAS, SFU, and DSTU conducted a number of research and practice conferences on history, role and position of ROC and other religious denominations in the political and social life of the country and the moral education of the new generation of citizens of Russia. The proceedings of these forums represent an important historiographic source and they help identify the advances and the weak spots of this topic. Using them today gives an opportunity to carry out new researches on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Don region and in the South of Russia in the second half of XIX and early XX century.

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