

Valerie A. Kivelson and Robert H. Greene (eds). Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars. University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. 2003. ix + 291 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. ISBN 0-271-02349-X, \$49.95 (cloth); 0-271-02350-3, \$22.95 (paper).

Orthodox Russia is a collection of essays by leading US specialists in the history of Russian Orthodoxy in the pre-Revolutionary period. The volume grew out of two workshops held at the University of Michigan, but escapes the diffuseness of some collected volumes by linking the papers through approach as much as by subject matter. This approach can be summed up as a refusal to be pigeonholed by conventional ways of thinking about Orthodoxy. What, it might be asked, does this have to do with the study of folklore? The answer is a great deal in fact, and if not always in the specifics, then certainly conceptually. This is a volume about “lived” religion, that is, what religion meant in the experience of various groups at various periods. As such, it comes close to the study of what is variously called popular, vernacular or folk religion (depending on focus and conception) and at times to the study of folk belief more widely. It has a particular interest in the spirituality of women. By focussing on lived religion it aims to tackle common assumptions/prejudices about Russian Orthodoxy and more broadly russianness as a whole. Is Orthodoxy is the key to the supposedly mournful Russian soul? How distinctive a brand of Christianity is Russian Orthodoxy?

Underlying the approach is the current position in Anglo-American scholarship that the concept of binaries is intellectually restricting, whether these are between elite and popular religion, sacred and profane, or official Church and laity. These are problems faced also by folklorists interested in Russian folk Orthodoxy and folk belief more generally. An essay that tackles the division of Orthodoxy into official and popular religion is Vera Shevzov’s discussion of her preferred term *tserkovnost’* (lit. “churchness”) in relation to the nineteenth century (pp. 59-77). The term avoids the dichotomy inherent in popular/official because it envelops ordinary believers of all kinds and hints at the diversity of Orthodoxy as well as the ongoing dynamics of the relationship between Church and laity.

A number of the essays concern the Muscovite period. Since sources are written and visual rather than oral, these might appear less relevant for folklorists than those on imperial Russia, but in fact the type of problems discussed are quite similar to those surrounding *narodnoe pravoslavie* (folk Orthodoxy) in later periods. Daniel Rowland (pp. 33-57) considers the content of the (now lost) frescoes of the sixteenth century in the Golden Hall of the Kremlin, seeing them as reflecting political concerns of the time. The fusion of Orthodox and secular messages in them must have been “read” by the boiars who thronged the halls (how exactly we cannot know). Scrutiny of the frescoes undermines the suggestion (made by Keenan) that there was little knowledge of Orthodoxy outside the Church hierarchy. Rowland’s argumentation can assist folklorists considering the difficult questions of how nineteenth-century peasants read icons and frescoes and how Orthodox the *narod* was. Michael Flier (pp. 127-58) tackles apocalypticism in early Russia. Distinguishing a general sense of living at the end of time (psychological imminence) from predictive imminence featuring belief in a specific date for the End, he dates the birth of apocalypticism in Russia to the late fifteenth century. He suggests that at this time folk views of the resurrection of ancestors in the context of cyclical time fused with

Christian concepts of the Resurrection. There seems to have been no general millennial panic in 1492, the year 7000, but instead an optimistic millenarian view developed about the role of Orthodox Muscovy in the last millennium. Flier's discussion is useful for folklorists considering the features of folk apocalypticism in Russia in more recent times. Many of the specific beliefs are similar (coming as they do mainly from Revelation), but Flier's work shows how they can be distinguished and located in their period. Dan Kaiser's essay on quotidian Orthodoxy in Muscovy (pp. 179-92) carefully shows how by the sixteenth century Orthodoxy had penetrated the calendar, naming and rites of passage. For example, it can be deduced from birth dates that Muscovites observed the bans on sexual activity during fast times, just as in Catholic Western Europe. As he remarks: "Orthodox Christianity provided the primary lens through which to make sense of life, no matter how badly Muscovites may have understood what they saw through that lens" (p. 188). The same questions occur about the relative balance between Orthodox and non-Christian beliefs among the peasants in more modern times.

Isolde Thyret uses Muscovite *vitae* and other sources to argue cogently for a specific women's spirituality (pp. 159-75). Though some of the aspects of that spirituality obviously stem from the specifics of the period and women's social situation, others demonstrate striking parallels with folk Orthodoxy at a later period. One objection can, however, be made to her specific argument that, since women were more inclined than men to seek out the help of miracle-working saints, it is wrong to assume that "medieval Russian females were the major perpetuators of pagan Russian practices" (p. 167). Though it is impossible to prove either way, given the relative dearth of information about non-Christian practices, the fact of Muscovite women seeking miracles from saints could be said to demonstrate the opposite: these were the pious few, exceptions to the rule that women still consulted magic practitioners. Alternatively, and in my view more likely, the information reveals nothing about women and non-Christian practices in Muscovite times, but is simply expressive of women's general spiritual concerns and needs. In following this argument, we must assume that women also visited magic practitioners of various kinds for much the same purposes, just as they did and still do in the Russian countryside. Whether these were ever the same women is impossible to say.

Eve Levin's essay (pp. 81-104) considers aspects of the popular cults of saints and the interrelationship with the official Church during the Muscovite period, but it too focuses on women's spirituality, examining the role of women in the creation of saints out of anonymous corpses disinterred and deemed to work miracles. Her essay forms a pair with Nadiezsda Kizenko's on the construction of sainthood in post-Petrine Russia (pp. 105-24), specifically the holy fool Kseniia of Petersburg and Father Ioann of Kronshtadt. In her discussion of Kseniia's cult Kizenko demonstrates the importance of lay testimony and how it was predominantly lower-class women who appropriated her in the nineteenth century. They helped place the emphasis on the saint's healing skills and her help with finding work. Both of these remain to this day features of her cult and that of as well as of other more recent female saints.

The studies of specific aspects of lived Orthodoxy conclude with essays from Gary Marker on female upper-class religiosity in late eighteenth-century Russia (pp. 193-209), William G. Wagner on the Nizhegorod Convent of the Exaltation of the Cross (pp. 211-38), and Paul W. Werth on Orthodoxy among non-Russian Christian groups (pp. 239-51). The volume is rounded off by comments from Thomas A. Tentler, writing as a

historian of west European religion in the medieval and early modern periods (pp. 253-75). Though interesting in their own right, these are all of less direct relevance for folklorists. The same cannot be said of the introduction and the essay that opens the volume, which pose the basic problems of preconceptions about Russian Orthodoxy and the limitations of using binaries. Laura Engelstein (pp. 23-32) notes that the conceptual split between official and folk in relation to Orthodoxy stems from nineteenth-century self-conscious exponents of tradition, of whom the best known (on the side of idealization of the peasants and their religiosity) are the Slavophiles. She concurs that “the common folk may have favored a more ritualised style of worship than educated believers” (pp. 16), but emphasizes the variety of ways Orthodoxy was absorbed and worshipped by different social groups.

The stimulating essays in this book should give folklorists food for thought. Slavic folklore study often privileges the peasants and preservers of tradition and tends to ignore the differences within that social group or the less colourful beliefs of other social groups. Folklorists too must juggle with views about innate peasant piety or pagan superstitiousness/ignorance. They also need to question the usefulness of the divisions made between official Orthodoxy and folk Orthodoxy. Such divisions can obscure the differences within the peasant version of Russian Orthodoxy, privilege peasant over townsfolk as well as minimize the similarities between priest and laity. Of course it is hard to avoid making comparisons when seeking to bring out the distinctive features of any religious phenomenon, but as the book indicates, working round the binaries produces a more nuanced reading. This is not to suggest that the priorities of folklorists and historians are the same. Folklorists wish to position themselves between the a-historical approach of anthropologists and the emphasis on change and period specificity among historians. Nonetheless they can draw on the approaches taken in this excellent volume, whether to binary oppositions, women’s spirituality or even the role of “lived” Orthodoxy in the creation of national identity.

Faith Wigzell

School of Slavonic and East European Studies

University College London