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# RATIONALITY AND RELIGIOSITY AMONG GERMANS IN MOSCOW IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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## **Abstract**

The article analyses the ways in which traditional religion and the rational forms of behaviour produced by modernity co-existed and interrelated among Germans in nineteenth-century Russia, leading to the combination of faith with technological developments. The analysis shows the connections between the spiritual and secular lives of Germans in Moscow by applying an approach derived from biographical studies, which is an unusual method in Russian historiography. The article traces the ‘life ways’ of leading representatives of the intellectual elite of the German community in Russia, including Benjamin Heidecke, Johann Rosenstrauch and Friedrich Haas. This experience of cross-cultural interaction and integration remains relevant to today’s world.

*Keywords:* Germans, Moscow, Lutheranism, parochial schools

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## **1. Introduction**

In 2010 Frank Bösch wrote that it was necessary to change our perspectives on the institutional history of the Church and to revise the traditional image, which has tended to be based mainly on its own sources of ‘self-description’ in the context of analysing external factors of social, cultural, economic and political pressure [1]. This article does not study the Church directly as an institution, but analyses the effects of the ‘indirect’ factors that influence the life of the community and the behaviour of its members, especially the social and cultural ones. Here, we will attempt to analyse how coherent the mix of rational thinking and religious consciousness was among the German ethno-social group in Moscow.

One of the characteristic features of modernity is the dominance of rational thinking in social life. The problem of rationality had a specific character in Russia due to processes of westernisation; often, rational thinking and the Enlightenment were approached as Western innovations in Russian society. Bearers of Western culture were commonly treated as adherents of rationality. There are many examples of this; one of the best is the contraposition

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of the rational German Andrey Stoltz to the dreamy Ilya Ilyitch Oblomov in Ivan Goncharov's classic novel *Oblomov* (1859).

However, the problem is not as simple as it might firstly appear. This becomes clear when we analyse the cultural practices of one of the most important social groups at the confluence of Russian and Western cultures, the German community in Moscow, which had been for centuries a centre of cultural transfer. So, in what way did *ratio* and *spiritus* coexist in the lives of the representatives of the German community in Moscow?

The connection between rational thinking and religious consciousness among Germans in Moscow is evident in the variety of their "ways of life" (*Lebenswelten*) [2]. This can be demonstrated in the biographies of leading representatives of the community: pastors, physicians and scientists of Moscow University. The majority of scientists, who were strongly distinguished by their rational frames of mind, studied in the universities of Germany or in Tartu (also known as Dorpat or Derpt) and Riga [3]; along with the pastors, they significantly contributed to life in Moscow's Protestant communities. The German community in Russia had existed for several centuries: it included German- and Russian-speaking individuals, Roman Catholic as well as Orthodox Christians, and the subjects of both European states and the Russian Empire. The process of integration had never been characterised by direct assimilation (Russification) or acculturation.

In general, the lives of Germans in Moscow were organised around parishes. The German community in Moscow was remarkable for its multiconfessional character [4], which manifested itself in the existence of two of the oldest Lutheran churches, Saint Michael's (*Alte Kirche*) and Saint Peter and Paul's (*Neue Kirche*), alongside Reformed and Roman Catholic communities: these institutions were the centres of spiritual and intellectual life for Moscow's Germans, and were particularly important with regards to education [5]. Lutherans made up approximately 90% of the community: the remaining 10% were split among the other confessions [4].

Schools were also of great importance among the intellectuals of the German community. German church schools and private schools owned by Germans contributed to the increasing level of education among the Russian population of the city as well [6]. On the initiative of pastors, church councils, and communities, a whole network of charitable societies was established, providing funds for helping widows and children in the poorest families, and building orphanages, dormitories, and social insurance offices [7].

The landscape of the 'life ways' of the German intellectual community in Moscow can be described as 'Parish-School-University'. Pastors, medical doctors, scientists, and professors at Moscow University were, first and foremost, practitioners, but they were also concerned with the spiritual and physical wellbeing of their communities. By analysing the lives of pastors (like Benjamin Heidecke and Johann Rosenstrauch) and physicians and scientists (like Friedrich Haas and Christian Loder), we will trace the co-existence of two opposed 'life ways': rational thinking and religious consciousness. A specific

characteristic of the nineteenth century that distinguished it from other times was that the critical spirit of Luther's doctrine was strengthened by scientific rationalism and the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [8]. The fact that a disproportionately high number of medical practitioners and other scientists spent the majority of their spare time on church councils and occupying themselves with charitable activities clearly demonstrates, in our opinion, that a rational worldview co-existed with faith in God and a religious consciousness [9].

The historiography on Germans in Moscow is so extensive that it is not possible for us to consider it fully within the confines of the present article: as such, we will refer to the extensive bibliography contained in Victor Donninghaus' monograph, which was the first complex social history of Germans in Moscow [9]. Another work that should be specifically mentioned is V.A. Kovrigina's study devoted to the Foreign Quarter and its inhabitants at the end of the seventeenth and the first quarter of the eighteenth centuries [10]. She has also published a number of articles on the same subject [11-14]. In 1997, on Moscow's 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Y.A. Petrov and A.A. Semin published a collection of articles. In the same year, F.A. Petrov released a book about German professors at Moscow University, while in 1999 two collections of articles edited by L. Dementyeva, Y.A. Petrov and V.A. Auman were published [15-17]. In terms of German-speaking authors before 1917, we should mention works by A. Büsching, J. Grot, T. Jungblut, E. Busch and G. Dalton, all of which were devoted to the history of Protestant religious communities in Russia and Moscow. We should also pay special mention to the two volumes devoted to the history of German communities in Russia by A.W. Fechner, which was released in 1876 [18].

## **2. The intellectual leaders of parish communities**

So, how can we trace the combination of rational thinking with religious consciousness in the biographies of the leaders of German parish communities in Moscow? We will start with the parish of Saint Michael. Michael Richter (1700-1800) was the pastor of this church (also known as the *Alte Kirche*) between 1763 and 1800. His elegant sermons had a considerable influence on parishioners, and he possessed great authority among them. This is not surprising when we consider that Richter had been a professor of Greek literature and poetry before he took the position of pastor. His son, Wilhelm Richter (1767-1822), later became professor of Medicine at Moscow University and the author of a three-volume work on the history of Medicine in Russia [19]. W.M. Richter was related to another remarkable German family in Moscow through his marriage to I.A. von Keresztúri, whose kinsman was the first director of a private evangelical girls' school for the poor and orphans (founded in 1840) [18, vol. 2, p. 391; 20]. This example demonstrates the natural synergy and complementarity of the spiritual and intellectual lives of the outstanding

representatives of German communities in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other cities in the Russian Empire during this period.

If a son from a clerical family became a member of the scientific elite, this does not, in itself, demonstrate the existence of a special relationship between rational and religious thinking among members of the German community: after all, people from the Orthodox Church also frequently built scientific careers. However, the specifically German feature of this phenomenon is that people from clerical families maintained close connections with their parish communities after becoming part of the scientific elite. In 1820, Dr. Justus Christian Loder (1753-1832), privy councillor and court physician to Emperor Alexander I, was elected as the president of the Saint Michael's parish council. Loder was the son of Johann Loder, a pastor who served at Saint Jacob's in Riga and as rector of the Riga Imperial Lyceum [21]. Christian surely saw his father as an example throughout his life. He graduated the lyceum his father managed in 1773, and continued his education in Gottingen, where he received the title of doctor in Medicine in 1777. After 1779, he became professor and vice-rector at the University of Jena, and later he moved to the University of Halle. However, the Napoleonic invasion forced Loder to move to Konigsberg and then Petersburg. In 1812, during Napoleon's Russian campaign, Loder was responsible for establishing military hospitals for the Russian army. In 1818, Alexander I bought a valuable and rich collection of anatomy books from Loder, only to donate them to Moscow University. It was Christian Loder who constructed the first anatomical theatre in Moscow and in 1828 the first clinic with artificial mineral water [22].

Another prominent figure, Johann-Ambrosius Rosenstrauch (1765-1835), served Mercury, Melpomene, and Christ consecutively, being preoccupied first with commerce, then with the theatre, and finally with religion. Rosenstrauch was a successful merchant, who, at the age of 50, suddenly discovered a passion for drama and joined the St. Petersburg German Theatre [23-25]. After a serious illness in the early 1820s, during which he may have suffered a spiritual crisis, he moved to Odessa at the age of 60 [26].

It is difficult to say whether this turning point in his life was related to a conflict of values. It seems more likely that there was no contradiction between his civil profession and entrepreneurial activities on the one hand, and his religious beliefs on the other [27]. Upon passing the necessary exams, he occupied the position of Lutheran pastor in Kharkov, where he remained until his death. The arrival of the energetic and well-educated Rosenstrauch in Kharkov started a new era for the local Lutheran community. Characteristic of his activities was the fact that Rosenstrauch managed to receive permission for the exclusive use of one of the halls at Kharkov University for church services. At that time, the rector's office was held by Johann Christian Kroneberg (Ivan Iakovlevich) (1788-1838), the son of the pastor at Saint Michael in Moscow [28].

It is noteworthy that Kroneberg studied at the universities of Halle and Jena, since these were the *alma mater* for many Russian scientists [*Russische und deutsche Universitäten als Orte der Formierung der intellektuellen und politischen Eliten Russlands im 19. und zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts: Intellektuelle Netzwerke, Migration, Wissenstransfers*, 22.11.2006 – 24.11.2006 Halle/Saale, H-Soz-Kult, 14.11.2006, <http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-6340>]. It was at these institutions where he defended his thesis and became a Doctor of Philosophy. This was rather unusual, as it was more traditional among the Germans of Moscow to become medical doctors: indeed, Kroneberg's older brother had done just that [29].

In 1830, with the active participation of Rosenstrauch, a Lutheran church was constructed in Kharkov, and a church school was established with the financial support of the industrious pastor [26]. Rosenstrauch's *magnum opus*, a book entitled *Erfahrungen eines evangelischen Seelsorges an Sterbebetten*, was tremendously popular among the Russian intelligentsia in the nineteenth century.

Vasily Ivanovich Rosenstrauch (1793-1870), another prominent figure in the German community, was a close relative of Johann Rosenstrauch. He was born in the Netherlands, and studied Pharmacology at the University of Derpt in 1810. In 1828, he, along with C. Loder, participated in establishing the Institution for Artificial Mineral Waters. Vasily Rosenstrauch worked as a commissioner of Moscow University for several years, and later served as Prussian general consul with 'rare diligence' from 1829 to 1866. In addition, Rosenstrauch was elected as the president of Saint Michael's church council [26].

The *Neue Kirche* (that is to say, the parish of Saints Peter and Paul) also provided the community with several prominent figures. For instance, Johann-Philipp Lütke (died in 1772), a teacher of German at the gymnasium of Moscow University and, after 1744, the pastor of the *Neue Kirche* [4, p. 117], played an important role as an educator and preacher. His grandson, Admiral Friedrich Lütke (1797 – 1882), was the president of the Russian Academy of Sciences between 1864 and 1882 [30, 31]. However, beyond all doubt, the most important example is that of Benjamin Christoph Heidecke (1763-1811), a pastor, educator, and journalist, who started to serve at St. Peter and Paul's in the 1790s. Heidecke graduated from the University of Leipzig, where he studied Law. He supervised the church school and established a boarding school for boys [32]. He also actively participated in the literary life of Russia, particularly in the polemics between the 'karamzinists' (supporters of French influence upon the Russian language) and 'shishkovists' (supporters of 'purity' in the Russian language). In 1804, he published an article in his own journal *Russischer Merkur* to support N.M. Karamzin against A.S. Shishkov. However, Heidecke's publishing and journalistic activities led to clashes with officials. In 1808, he even was ordered to leave Russia, but his parishioners were able to defend their beloved pastor [32, p. 339].

These examples from the ‘parish elite’ in the German community (the Richters, the Loders, the Rosenstrauchs, and others) show the close link between the Church and scientific communities within German society in Moscow. Active participation in parish life did not prevent sons from clerical families from occupying leading positions in Russian science; people such as Wilhelm Richter or Christian Loder played very important roles in the development of research in the country. This kind of connection was unique in nineteenth-century Russia. Benjamin Heidecke, a pastor-journalist who combined his interest in secular literature with church service, was certainly not a typical figure in Russian parishes. His example demonstrates the natural synergy, convergence, and complementarity of the spiritual and intellectual lives of outstanding representatives of the German community.

Thus, leading pastors of the *Alte Kirche* were prominently demonstrating an ability to combine rational thinking, which was closely connected with their work as scientists, innovators, entrepreneurs, and, in particular, secular educators, with a religious consciousness that manifested itself in preaching, donations, and, above all, publishing books like Rosenstrauch’s *Erfahrungen eines evangelischen Seelsorges an Sterbebetten*. This combination was also characteristic of the parish leaders of St. Peter and Paul’s.

### 3. The parish schools

As was mentioned in the introduction, German church schools in Moscow had the reputation of being exemplary educational institutions. These schools influenced not only the German community, but also the Russian education system as a whole [4, p. 135-155], which is proved by the popularity of these schools among the Russian population. Besides the church schools, private German boarding schools were, as time went by, replaced by ordinary private schools. Some of these schools received the status of classical and real gymnasia and survived until 1917. Among the most popular were the Kreiman gymnasium and the Masing real school [30, p. 172]. In this respect, the parochial schools of the Russian Orthodox Church, which only started to appear after the school reform of 1804, could not compete with German schools, since these latter institutions had surpassed primary schools in terms of the number of subjects taught and the comprehensiveness of the curriculum. This advanced status of German schools demonstrates the rational drive of German communities to develop their system of education. This was also manifested in the efforts of the aforementioned representatives of the ‘parish elite’ to improve the school system. When Christian Loder became the president of the church council in 1820, the Lutheran community had been greatly damaged by the terrible fire of Moscow in 1812. To increase the quality of education available in the parish school, Loder invited his colleagues from Moscow University to teach [3]. All of them were renowned and popular lecturers among the students [33]. August Dreier, the doctor of Saint Michael’s from 1847 until 1875, treated children and orphans for free [20, p. 428-429].

Loder's high position both in Moscow society and at the imperial court, combined with his relentless efforts to propagate the school, resulted in numerous donations, including some from the Empress Dowager Maria Fyodorovna. (Prior to her marriage into the Russian imperial family, Maria Fyodorovna (1759-1828) had been Sophia Marie Dorothea Augusta Luisa, the princess of the German duchy of Württemberg. She was strongly influenced by the pedagogical and educational ideas of her mentor, J K. Lavater (1741-1801).) The donations helped to increase the school's capacity with the construction of an additional floor. Loder was in charge of school administration, made numerous donations himself, and filled in for teachers when necessary [20, p. 418]. One of these teachers was the famous Ferdinand-Friedrich Reuß (1778-1852), professor of Chemistry at Moscow University: he taught at the parish school from 1804 until 1832 [34].

The boys' school at the *Neue Kirche* prospered as a result of Heidecke's efforts. Soon, the school became popular among the Russian population of Moscow, especially merchants, who praised the practical education necessary for commercial operations [35]. In 1840, only 33 out of 140 pupils at the school (23%) represented families from the Lutheran parish. The ratio was even more favourable to non-Lutherans in the school of Saint Michael: here, only 11% of students were from parish families [8, p. 19]. The pastors of Moscow's German churches were also pioneers in providing support for elderly and sick parishioners. Thus, Bishop Heinrich von Dieckhoff, son of Karl Dieckhoff (1803-?), the pastor of St. Peter and Paul's, established the very first school for the blinds in Moscow. His efforts made the state administration change their approach towards disabled people [4, p. 234-240].

While we might expect that German parish schools would have only been concerned with satisfying the needs of their parishioners, the reality is that the schools were very popular among Moscow merchants, who were certainly not Lutherans. They most probably believed that German schools would provide their children with a good education, useful practical skills, and the rational system of thought necessary for carrying out commercial activities. The children of prominent Russian merchants in Moscow, like Naydenov, Korzinkin, Botkin, Soroumovsky, and Krestovnikov, were among the pupils at German church schools [8, p. 19]. However, this does not necessarily mean that the majority of students at these institutions were Russians. The nineteenth-century German community in Moscow was heterogeneous: many families had arrived in Moscow long ago and had become Russified and Orthodox. The majority of pupils were thus Russified Germans. For instance, Pyotr Einbrodt, the president of Saint Michael's school council, told members of the community in 1837 of the urgent need to preserve the German language, since most of the teaching was done in Russian at the school [4, p. 163]. The same situation happened in the school of St. Peter and Paul's: when Rector Freidrich Petersen (1841-1844) took over the school, he felt that it was necessary to increase the number of courses taught in German. Later, under the guidance of Rector Herschelmann (1844-1849), all programmes were taught in German, although a bilingual educational

system was also introduced [4, p. 164]. However, throughout the nineteenth century, the share of Lutherans among the pupils at these establishments grew steadily, as did the number of courses taught in German [4, p. 147-152, 163]. While it is possible to see such processes as manifestations of nationalism, they were also connected with the tendency to set up ‘language gymnasia’, an initiative successfully continued in the Soviet period.

#### 4. ‘The Holy Doctor’

Known as “the friend of unfortunate and poor” and “the holy doctor of Moscow” (*heiliger Doktor von Moskau*) Friedrich-Joseph, or Fyodor, Haas (1780-1853) was an exception in the long list of prominent and socially active Germans in Moscow [36, 37]. He was a Roman Catholic by confession, a physician by profession, and a philanthropist by conscience. A graduate of the Jena and Göttingen universities, Haas was a member of the Moscow Prison Committee and the chief physician of the city’s prisons [4, p. 240-241]. In his person, Haas organically combined religiosity, ethical behaviour, and a rational approach towards social processes [36].

In 1802, Haas worked in Vienna and treated the Russian prince Repnin, who persuaded the doctor to accompany him to Moscow. In 1807, he was appointed as the chief physician of the Pavlovsk hospital sponsored by the Empress Dowager Maria Fyodorovna. During the Napoleonic invasion, Haas, just like Christian Loder, served in the army as a medic right up until the end of the campaign in Paris in 1814. Ascetic, rational, and well organised, Haas soon acquired a great fortune: he owned a textile factory, an estate, and a house in Moscow (which he later sold, moving to a ‘humble little flat’).

Haas became a member of the Prison Committee in 1828 and zealously set to work. Every Monday, a carriage full of food supplies approached the Rogozhskaya prison in Moscow, and Haas distributed the food among the inmates. He talked to them frequently, encouraging and calming them; occasionally, he even accompanied exiles on their way to Siberia for several kilometres. However, Haas was also a rational actor: he established clothes- and shoe-making workshops in the prison to provide the prisoners with an opportunity to work. In 1836, he opened a school for the children of inmates.

Haas was also concerned about the spiritual life of the Moscow community. He even published a book entitled *The ABC of Christian Virtue* at his own cost. In 1844, Haas opened a ‘police hospital for the homeless’ (the Alexandrine Hospital, which was popularly called the Haasovsky Hospital). Moving around the city in his old carriage, he personally took the homeless and the sick to the hospital. Haas’ popularity among normal Muscovites was colossal. In 1848, during the famous uprising in Moscow triggered by an epidemic, the speech of ‘the holy doctor’ played a key role in pacifying the mob. After his death, his ‘testament’ was published; entitled *Appel aux femmes*, he appealed to women and sought to propagate religious piety. The most famous quote from the book declares: “Hurry in doing good deeds” [36, p. 6; 38].

According to Ivan Kireevsky, one of the leaders of Slavophilism, Haas strongly manifested the “determination to do his duty by any means” [39], a characteristic held to be typical among Germans.

## **5. Conclusions**

Religion, family ties, and upbringing determined the uniqueness of the ethnic and cultural German community in Moscow [2]. Looking at their example allows us to localise ‘*deutsche nous und logos*’ and move beyond the dualism of body and soul, *ratio* and *logos*. The analysis of the lives of intellectual and spiritual leaders of the German community opens the way forward to understanding their ‘*habitus*’ [40-43], which combined two basic components – rational thinking and religious consciousness. The latter served as a foundation for the ethical norms inherent in German Protestantism; namely, critical thinking and the socially active personality [44, 45]. The social practices of the leading members of the German community are characterised by strategic thinking, by ‘long-term investments’ into human development and the rational organisation of community life, with an emphasis on connections with schools and the city’s university. As successful specialists in their respective fields (Medicine in the cases of Loder and Haas or commerce in the case of Rosenstrauch), they were always sensitive to the spiritual needs of their communities and strove to fulfil them. Their specific interest in promoting education was exactly the point where rational thinking and religious consciousness met. The institutions of secular education (schools, real schools, gymnasia, and the university) and the church communities cooperated in a variety of religious, social, cultural, and educational fields.

The history of the Germans in Moscow might be easier to understand if we consider it in the context of German migrant colonisation. The peaceful integration of German migrants into Eastern Europe (*Ostsiedlung*) started in approximately the twelfth century as part of European-wide processes occurring between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. German migrants were, in most cases, invited by the rulers of Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland, influential feudal lords, and, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by Russian monarchs to explore underpopulated lands and develop crafts and agriculture [46-49]. This explains the existence of ethnic German regions in Silesia, Bohemia, and Bessarabia, and the emergence of the Transylvanian Saxons and the Russian Germans.

All these groups were characterised by more or less the same features of social behaviour and religious life. Philanthropic activities, a notion of civic duty, and active participation in community life often combined with high levels of education in the Natural sciences. Due to the specific character of their education and social activities, it was typical to possess rational habits of thought and share the same social and religious behaviour [50, 51]. These facts give us grounds to suppose that there was a close natural link between rational thinking and religious consciousness in the socio-ethnic group under consideration.

Overcoming the absence of this connection in the modern world could, in our opinion, prevent many religious conflicts.

Kant's 1793 work *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason* might be considered an indirect indication of the natural connection between rationality and religiosity among Moscow's Germans. In this work, Kant speaks about religion based on the principles of reason in the context of the age of Enlightenment [52]. The rational origin of religiosity in German culture has a long history. With the Reformation after 1517 and in close connection with the doctrine of Martin Luther, a personal role in the perception of God through study of the Bible assumed great importance. Books and text had a serious impact on the consciousness of Protestants. The importance of literacy for salvation contributed to the mass emergence of schools. Enlightenment ideas strengthened the role of rationality in the religious lives of German Protestants, including those who lived in Moscow, and became an integral part of their culture. One can observe a direct connection between the pastors (the leaders of the parish councils) and the doctors, chemists, and professors of Moscow University. This intellectual elite made significant efforts to develop the education system. These efforts were not limited to solving parish or religious tasks, and they actively interacted with the external environment. No one tried to convert the children of Russian merchants to Lutheranism: they were only beneficiaries of the well-organised educational system of the Evangelical Lutheran parishes.

The positive supposition of moralists, from Seneca to Rousseau, about the development of history from bad to good, from imperfect to perfect, in contrast to the earlier paradigm of the expulsion from Eden and life in unpardonable sin, changed the cultural code of the majority of the representatives of the German expatriate community. It allowed them to believe in progress and the chance to change life for the better if one was personally and socially active.

The main motivations for the representatives of the German community were the 'determination to do their duty' and a professional code of honour (*der Beruf*). To an outside Russian Slavophil observer, it seemed that all of these spiritual German (European) values were also material and rational, and thus had nothing to do with real 'spirituality'. They might feel some unease about Rosenstrauch (who was highly appreciated by N.V. Gogol) or Haas, as well as perplexity about the social services carried out by 'Western' rational and materialistic people. The specific cultural code of the German community created, in its turn, a specific sort of social activism that cannot be explained through social context alone (by this we mean the specialisation of members of the German community in technology, Medicine and Science): rather, it derived its strength from special 'habitus-provoking' institution building, active cooperation, and social services. This is a situation where religious differences did not interfere with social activities. The social 'profile' of the German community in terms of Science, education, and integration in the religious community created conditions for the harmonious coexistence and productive interaction of scientific and religious thought, coupled with ethical values.

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