
THE DON COSSACKS AND ORTHODOXY RELIGIOUS AND MORAL TRADITIONS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF MODERN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Being a distinctive social group of the Russian population (based on the oath given to Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich in 1671), the Don Cossacks formed a military estate of the Russian Empire between the 18th and the early 20th centuries. Orthodoxy has always been a basic element of the Cossack spiritual life, a significant factor in the integration of the Don Cossacks into the Russian society since they became a part of it at the end of the 17th century, and Orthodoxy as a unified faith was, thus, the factor of integration. Moreover, Orthodoxy has been a powerful means of social regulation, the preservation of life patterns and traditions. This article is concerned with a number of issues that should be clarified to justify the model of religious education in the system of the Cossack education. While studying the influence of religion on the formation of the Cossacks as a social group, the authors have understood historical Cossack traditions, as well as peculiarities of the spiritual and moral education of the Cossack youth. Thus, the article aims to determine the role of Orthodoxy in the spiritual life of the Don Cossacks and the Cossack education.

Keywords: religious, education, spirituality, morality, cadet corps

1. Introduction

The history of the Russian Cossacks (the Cossacks who lived and continue to live in the territory of Russia) greatly contributed to the formation of the independent state.

The term 'Russian Cossacks' is well-established and is widely used in the media [A. Makarkin, *How Russian Cossacks become a political force*, 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2018/05/08/5aeffabf9a794706d371f280>; Tass, *Russian Cossacks united in a single community*, 2018, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/5840000>] and scientific (historical) literature [1]. Moreover, it is enshrined by

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law in the Federal Law dated December 5, 2005 N 154-FZ ‘On the Public Service of the Russian Cossacks’ (Art. 2, P. 1).

The Cossacks represented a unique model of social development with a peculiar socio-political structure, way of life, traditions, ethics, legal norms and institutions, culture and folklore [2].

Throughout Russian history, the Russian Cossacks as an ethno-social group of Russian population attracted the attention of researchers [3-5]. In recent years, the interest of scientists has not weakened despite significant changes in the social life of Russia [6-8], especially in connection with the revival of the Cossack culture and its development in the social structure of Russia.

The Cossacks originated in the territory of modern Russian and Ukraine between the 14th and 17th centuries due to the increased exploitation of peasants in Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the growth of serfdom aggravated by the religious persecution of Orthodoxy on the Ukrainian-Lithuanian lands. These events drove the poor and peasantry away from urban environment (tradespeople) to unoccupied southern and south-eastern lands. Starting from the second half of the 15th century, southern and south-eastern borders of Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, mainly banks of the Dnieper, the Don and the Yaik (the Ural River), had been settled by people calling themselves the Cossacks (free people). The Cossacks were not taxed and worked in various production fields. In the second half of the 17th century, they engaged in farming and military service. At the same time, serving Cossacks were divided into regimental (policemen) defending urban settlements and fortresses, and free (inhabitants of a stanitsa). As a social group, the Cossacks can be equated to streltsy and other military categories since by the 16th century some groups had grown into large free military units that were simultaneously autonomous state-organized communities called Cossack hosts (the Don, Yaik). Between the 18th and the 19th centuries, most Cossacks joined the category of taxpayers as smallholders, others were included into a particular Cossack host (for example, the Orenburg, Siberian, etc.).

Table 1. The total number of the Cossack hosts at the beginning of the 20th century (thousand people).

No.	Name	Number
1	Don host	1,085
2	Kuban host	824
3	Orenburg host	388
4	Trans-Baikal host	201
5	Terek host	177
6	Ural host	123
7	Siberian host	122
8	Astrakhan host	29
9	Semirechensk host	28
10	Amur host	22
11	Ussuriysk host	13
Total		3,012

The Russian state of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century had no opportunity to bend the 'free' Cossacks to submission but used them in every way to protect the state borders by sending them salaries, ammunition and grain. As a result, the Cossacks were gradually forming a special privileged militarized class that fully established in the first half of the 19th century. Later every Cossack host received lands for their state service that were given to the use of Cossack stanitsas.

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were eleven Cossack hosts in the Russian empire: Don, Kuban, Terek, Astrakhan, Ural, Orenburg, Semirechensk, Siberian, Trans-Baikal, Amur and Ussuriysk. Their total number amounted to more than 3 million people (Table 1) [2, p. 5].

2. The Don Cossacks and Orthodoxy - the history of relations

The interaction of the Orthodox Church and the Russian Cossacks has a long and complex history. According to historians [9, 10], the Cossacks deeply and piously adhered to Orthodox Christianity. Most Cossacks saw the meaning of their life in protecting faith and the Church. Devoting their life to God, they often became real 'knights', people of faith and zealous executors of Gospel precepts (moral code).

A distinctive feature of the Cossacks was their religious devoutness. Religious devoutness is understood as "a certain state of individuals and human communities of various sizes characterized by belief in God (supernatural) and worship of God, their commitment to religion and acceptance of its creeds and prescriptions" [11]. The Cossack religiousness was explained as a way of life since wars and daily dangers developed a person's religious feelings.

Lands along the Don River (the territories of modern Kalmykia, the Rostov and Volgograd Regions, Krasnodar Krai) are located at the intersection of two religions – Islam and Orthodoxy. Historically, Muslims (Crimean, Nogai, Azov Tatars) and Christians were enemies; the former attacked Russia, took tribute and brought terrible misfortunes to the Russian population. In the 16th-17th centuries, beginning with the first campaign in 1507 to Belev and Kozelsk, raids occurred almost every summer.

The Tatars inhabited the Crimean Khanate (Crimean Tatars), the Nogai steppe between the Terek and Kuma rivers and the northern Black Sea coast (Nogai Tatars), the vicinity of the Turkish Azov Fortress (Azov Tatars). The campaigns of Crimean, Nogai and Azov Tatars directly to the lands of the Don Cossacks began in 1713 and took place almost every year until the Russian-Turkish war of 1735-1739, which led to the devastation of the Crimea and a significant weakening of the Crimean Khanate. The Don Cossacks, thus, took Islam with hostility.

The variant of Orthodoxy developed in Don lands differed from the dogmatic one. According to A.V. Sopov, "the most important component of each Church is the Holy Scripture and its Canons, especially minor ones that each Church understands in its own way ..." [10, p. 59]. For instance, the

Russian religious behaviour (as a specific type of social behaviour, the subject of which are either higher powers - addressing them, communicating with them - or communication with other people concerning these higher powers) was mainly based on ritualism. Frequent military campaigns forced the Cossacks to simplify religious ceremonies and add military peculiarities to them.

The Cossacks had no traditional Orthodox churches as stationary religious buildings until the 17th century. More likely, there were only chapels or prayer houses where the Cossacks incapable of performing military duties due to age or some other reasons held acts of worship. The first chapel in Don lands was built at the turn of the 16th and the 17th centuries. Chapels had no altar room and were decorated only with icons and lamps. There widowed priests and hieromonks held short divine services.

According to N.E. Shafazhinskaya, there are many facts testifying to the Cossack religious devoutness: the custom to get to work after a prayer, not to punish criminals during the Lent, to wear a cross, to write down the names of those who passed away in the so-called necrologies and, finally, revere people who read the Holy Scripture [12]. The Cossacks also worshiped the icons of their saints. Believing in the redeeming feature of these icons, the Cossacks kept them in their dwellings. One of the externals of religiousness was a pilgrimage to the shrines. Like other Orthodox Christians, the Cossacks tried to visit the holy places for a prayer. These facts testify to the Cossack deep religiousness and their loyalty to their Christian duties [4].

It is possible to say that Orthodoxy for the Don Cossacks played the role of state ideology. Therefore, the spiritual core of Cossack towns and villages was the Church as a religious building and a symbol of faith.

Between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most Don Cossacks were parishioners of the Russian Orthodox Church. The mass construction of churches along the Don River was due to the Cossack religiousness, the elimination of military threats from Turkey, the rapid development of agricultural production and increased economic development. In the early 20th century, more than 750 churches, 4 monasteries and one religious school functioned in the territory of the Don host supporting missionary activity [13].

By the beginning of the 20th century, the Church Canons had firmly rooted in the Cossack lifestyle, become the core of the Cossack spirituality and found expression in their culture. The main components of the Cossack self-identification, according to I.S. Kirichenko, are Orthodoxy, Cossack liberties and military service [14].

Therefore, during the Revolution and the Civil War, the Cossacks, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church, were subjected to repression by the new government. The Council of People's Commissars demanded that repressions be used against Cossacks who took any part in the struggle against the Soviet authorities. For the Cossacks, this meant renouncing religion, traditions, and submitting to the new rules that were established by the Council of People's Commissars. However, the so-called Cossack regions preserved their Orthodox religion in the conditions of the disbelief imposed from above.

Historically, the Don Cossack host, as it has been shown, was the most numerous in the Russian Empire (1,085 thousand people in 1913) [2, p. 3]. It was the only Cossack host that had its own territorial and administrative entity located in the territories of modern Kalmykia, Rostov and Volgograd regions, Krasnodar Territory. Nowadays two-thirds of its former territory is part of Rostov Region.

In the 21st century, the Cossacks and the Russian Orthodox Church regained their lost positions. Nowadays representatives of the Cossacks restore and modernize churches, provide security during mass divine services, organize cultural events in collaboration with the Russian Orthodox Church, include church workers in the education of young people (Cossack cadet corps, Cossack schools, etc.).

3. Historical aspects of the Cossack education

The first private schools in the lands of the Don Cossack Army were organized by parish priests alongside the construction of stanitsa churches. The Cossack children received monastic education, while children of Cossack leaders, like children of another privileged estate of the Russian Empire – the Russian nobility, were taught at home. Cossack schools were formed as part of Ural and Siberian churches and monasteries.

During the reign of Catherine II, the Russian Empire adopted the State Program of Enlightenment. Since 1786, the state had begun to establish small and public schools: the first school on Cossack lands was opened in Cherkassk in 1791 (a small school), and the first public school providing multidisciplinary education was founded in 1793. Later main public schools were established in the centers of other Cossack hosts (Yekaterinodar, Orenburg, Astrakhan), while small schools were opened in the most significant stanitsas [13].

According to the Decree of Alexander I ‘On the establishment of schools’ issued in 1803, educational institutions were divided into four types: parochial schools, county schools, provincial schools and universities. Public parochial schools were run by churches and were financed by the Cossack community; children studied there from 7 to 12 years old. The term of study ranged from three years (single class grouping) to five years (two class grouping). Priests, deacons or clerks worked in parochial schools and taught children the Law of God, reading, writing and arithmetic. In the second half of the 19th century, literacy schools were introduced into the system of education where both clergy and professional teachers worked. District schools were equated with county schools in Cossack districts. Previously, small public schools of district stanitsas had been transformed into district schools (1805). District schools were three-grade and were called ‘superior’ because they provided educational qualifications necessary for obtaining the first officer’s rank (cornet). Back then, main public schools were transformed into provincial schools and gymnasiums [15, 16].

As a rule, the Cossacks first sent their children to the parochial school to receive fundamental Orthodox education and then got them off to the secular educational institution.

The system of education continued to improve in the 19th century. Thus, four-grade gymnasiums became eight-grade and district schools turned into six-grade. In 1839, schools began to teach non-classical disciplines where a special emphasis was laid on the study of technical sciences. The first non-classical secondary schools were established in 1864.

Many young Cossacks found gymnasium education insufficient and enrolled various universities. At the same time, their Cossack host provided students with exemption from military service and paid insolvent young people military scholarships. Therefore, the Cossacks trained officials, teachers and medical personnel for their own needs.

The Cossacks paid special attention to military education. In 1839, the Novocherkassk training regiment was formed that represented a school of junior commanding personnel. Cossack hosts also organized cadet corps and cadet schools.

4. Religious and moral traditions of the Cossacks in the framework of modern education

Nowadays a unified system of the Cossack education is being formed. This system applies innovative methods of civil and patriotic education that are based on Cossack traditions, as well as on the cultural and historical specifics of Don lands [The Federal Law ‘*On education in the Russian Federation*’ of December 29, 2012 No. 273-FZ (the latest edition), Moscow].

The total number of educational organizations of the Cossack education system has reached 232 institutions, and the number of their students has exceeded 30,000. The introduction of the Cossack component into the educational process starts in institutions of pre-school education and continues in the Cossack secondary school.

There are more than 25 municipal ‘Cossack’ pre-school institutions functioning in the territory of the Don Metropolia which develop and implement programs of spiritual-moral and patriotic education.

After completing primary education, children can continue their study in the secondary school or in Cossack cadet corps, each of which is the pride of people living in Don lands. In total, there are eight Cossack cadet corps in the region: six in Rostov region and two in Volgograd region. Cossack cadet corps embrace more than 1,500 students constituting a potential personnel reserve of the army and civil service. By 2020, the state will have further increased the network of Cossack cadet corps.

To improve the efficiency of Cossack cadet corps, the Don Metropolia and the Department of Cossack Affairs of Rostov Region (hereinafter referred to as the Department) annually develop joint plans in the field of spiritual and moral education.

According to the Department's employees, the introduction of the 'Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics' course in the curriculum of the fourth grade is not sufficient for the Cossack education. In this connection, there is an elective course ('Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture') taught from the fifth to the ninth grade in all Cossack cadet corps [17].

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Thus, Cossack cadet corps have all the capabilities to implement full religious education and upbringing due to their legislatively enshrined independence in developing school programs, the corresponding decision of the governing body of educational institutions and the opinion of students' parents [12]. However, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done, which makes it necessary to solve the problem of training qualified teachers.

One of the solutions to this problem was specialized training seminars on the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' course for teachers of the Cossack education system held in Aksay Cossack cadet corps under the patronage of the Rostov Diocese. According to representatives of the Don Metropolia, the training of teachers in the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' course and other dogmatic subjects on the basis of Cossack cadet corps should be addressed purposefully and fully supported by the Department of Cossack Affairs [13].

Concerning the preparation of confessors in the Don Theological Seminary, we should note that they hold a special place in the life of the Cossacks. To effectively serve the Cossacks, priests need to learn and understand the special mentality of the Cossacks, their traditions and customs, to be aware of the problems and affairs of the Cossack community [9].

In 2014, the Don Theological Seminary, East Kazakhstan Province and the Department signed a Cooperation Agreement that provides cadets with joint informational, organizational and methodological support in order to prepare them for seminary studies and further service as Cossack priests.

The Don Seminary and the Department created special training programs for Cossack priests, including a discipline on the history of the Don Cossacks, realized joint projects for the spiritual education of young people and carried out numerous cultural, patriotic and spiritual educational activities.

5. Conclusions

We have concluded that the problem of religious education in the Cossack environment is about to be solved. The achievement of stated objectives requires close cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church, Cossack public organizations and government bodies, including Departments for Cossack Affairs and relevant ministries. However, there are many problems, including the spiritual and moral education of the Cossack youth based on Orthodox traditions.

Despite the introduction of moral and spiritual disciplines into the school curriculum of state general education institutions, the issue of their feasibility, scope, content and methods remains one of the most debated ones in the field of humanitarian education.

In the 21st century, the return to Cossack and religious values containing the positive experience of many generations let individuals and social communities successfully socialize in the conditions of the post-Soviet social transformation. Believers have a more positive emotional attitude towards Russia and the Russian state, greater readiness to protect and defend its interests.

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