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Dmitrii N. Antonov, Irina A. Antonova. *Metricheskie knigi Rossii XVIII–nachala XX veka.* Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2006. 385 pp. $31.95 (paper), ISBN 978-5-7281-0321-9.

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Parish Registers in Russia–Almost Everything You Wanted to Know

Much of the credit for discovering the historical usefulness of parish registers belongs to Louis Henry who, together with a group of collaborators, in the 1950s began to exploit parish registers to document French population history. In the decades that followed, historians generated a raft of works that used local parish data to document the history of marriage, fertility, and mortality. These works, in turn, helped stimulate English historians who sought in parish-level data recovery of, as Peter Laslett put it, *The World We Have Lost* (1965). By the mid-1960s all over England, local historians were hard at work copying out entries from parish registers, enabling Tony Wrigley and R. S. Schofield to publish the massive *Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (1981). In between, Laslett, Wrigley, and others published detailed histories of local population change on the basis of parish registers, and in 1970 the journal *Local Population Studies* came to life. Elsewhere, scholars who were inspired by the precedent of French and English historians set to work on parish registers, applying their data not only to demographic history but also to family reconstitution and family history.

In Russia, there was scant echo of this enthusiasm. For example, no Russian case appeared in the breakthrough 1972 Cambridge volume *Household and Family in Past Time*. Only in the 1978 collection, *The Family in Imperial Russia: New Lines of Historical Research*, did Peter Czap Jr. use Riazan's parish registers to study the peasantry of a landlord's estate. Czap built on that work in a much longer piece that he contributed to *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, edited by Richard Wall, Jean Robin, and Peter Laslett (1983). But within the Soviet Union itself, parish registers remained for the most part off limits, largely because of their clerical provenance. A few historians, especially those working away from the capital, did employ parish registers to write local history, often very effectively. But well-known specialists continued to write the history of family and population in prerevolutionary Russia without any attention to parish-level data.[1] Only hard on the heels of the fall of the U.S.S.R. did a group of American and Russian historians under the leadership of Steven L. Hoch and Iurii Aleksandrovich Mizis devote systematic and sustained attention to parish registers. Since that time, historians have expanded their use of parish registers, and archivists report that regional archive reading rooms are filled with private citizens using parish registers to trace their ancestry.[2] Nevertheless, the myriad extant Russian registers remain relatively unknown, largely uncared for, and underutilized. In the book under review, *Metricheskie knigi Rossii XVIII–nachala XX veka* (Parish registers of Russia–Eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century), Dmitrii N. Antonov and Irina A. Antonova (both of whom were part of the group that Hoch and Mizis organized in the 1990s) tell the history of Russia's parish registers and illustrate their importance to historians, along the way showing their usefulness not only to historians of population, but also to students of many other subfields within history.

Chapter 1 surveys the history of parish registration in Russia, initiated by churchmen already in the seventeenth century but formalized in its surviving form by Peter the Great in 1722. Although demanded and used by the state from the beginning and extended to much of Russia in the 1740s, parish registration attained legal status only in 1775. Nineteenth-century legislation standardized the formulae of entries for births (christenings), marriages, and deaths. In addition to requiring that priests retain the original books in their parish churches, legislation also obliged priests each year to send to the consistory a clean copy, complete with numeric totals. Consequently, in effect, the priests compiled two parish registers, each in some sense original: the parish copy, which might reveal corrections and changes, and an end-of-year register that was usually written in a clearer hand and rarely betrayed any evidence of change or correc-

tion. As a result, despite their inevitable similarities, the two books were never duplicates of one another. With the overthrow of the monarchy in 1917 and the secularization of vital events, parish registers entered what the Antonovs call a "transitional period" when, despite legal abolition, some priests continued to compile registers. Gradually, however, the great bulk of the surviving records found their way to the newly created office of Registration of Acts of Civil Status (ZAGS) where they served as evidence for questions of age, marriage, and death.

Chapter 2 deviates from the empirical, practical orientation of much of the book and examines instead a theoretical issue, proposing a new way of looking at parish registers according to an "Information-seeking model" (p. 111). The idea is to combine analysis of the information contained by a source with analysis of "the dynamics of demand for that information" (p. 111). With French registers as a base of comparison, the Antonovs produce an impressive list of information points that one might find in parish registers, illustrating how scholars of many different disciplines (genealogists, historical demographers, historians of medicine, economists, linguists, and social historians, among others) might exploit this source. Subdivisions of data oriented around a trio of themes–chronology, geography, and the person–allow the authors to wax somewhat philosophical and to argue that by so effectively situating an individual in space and time "the parish books contain the answer to the question, who [what] is man" (p. 148). People will differ in their reaction to this assertion, but this chapter is the most theoretical, invoking theories about the definition and analysis of sources.

Initially, of course, parish registers reflected churchmen's efforts to keep track of parishioners and their sacramental lives. Chapter 3 examines the conditions under which parish priests (and their deacons) operated, especially in rural communities where surnames became stable only in the last years of the empire. With computerized data for some fifty years from one rural parish in the Tula area, the authors examine the quality of registration data. The often imposing dimensions of parishes, increasing rates of migration, and the fact that "the rural priest of the eighteenth century was little distinguished from a peasant in his mode of life" hindered priests in their efforts to maintain accurate records (p. 161). The authors speculate that information about births might be most eligible for omissions, since priests had to travel to deliveries, presumably without dragging along the registers. Therefore, they might jot down a name on a scrap of paper, put it down somewhere for later attention, and perhaps lose track of the paper, later substituting recall when entering the date or name in the register. Weddings proved more securely recorded, inasmuch as the weddings came to the priest, who, if he fulfilled all the requirements, had several weeks before the wedding to prepare. A premarital investigation was required to prevent brides and grooms who were too young, too old, or too closely related from marrying one another, and also to determine whether either partner had been widowed, and if so, how many times. The Antonovs point out that these records, when they survive, provide useful personal information on brides and grooms, including their ranks, places of residence, ages, absence of any blood or marital connection close enough to rule out marriage, and proof of consent by the parents and the prospective bride and groom.

How then did marriage function in the prerevolutionary Russian countryside? The Antonovs learn from the village of Trasna (Tula Province) that, in the last half of the nineteenth century, brides most often married before reaching their twentieth birthdays and grooms on average were twenty-two or twenty-three years old. Rarely did a woman over thirty or a man over forty marry for the first time, and rarer still did weddings join the very young with the very old; only one or two years separated most spouses. The Antonovs also point out, as have many others before them, that weddings in imperial Russia observed a definite seasonality, at least partially the consequence of the several fasts during which the church prohibited marriage (Lent, Christmas fast, Assumption fast, etc.). Therefore, the majority of weddings in Trasna, as in much of the Russian Empire, took place in October, November, January, and February. Finally, in what amounts to little more than a postscript, the authors observe that priests were also charged with recording deaths, but that "in popular opinion death was less significant than marriage and birth" and that death ritual was correspondingly less developed (p. 186). Certainly, parish registers provide a more skeletal body of information on death, but the short shrift that the Antonovs give death here is unwarranted. As several studies have shown, burial registers provide vital data on the seasonality of death and age of the deceased, as well as putative causes of death. This type of information has helped reconstruct the impact of aging, disease, and nutrition.

Chapter 4, "The Heuristics of Parish Registers," details the fate of these materials in the postrevolutionary period, a destiny that has deeply affected both the proportion saved as well as the archive designations of those that survived. The authors assert that "it is difficult to name any other mass data source that was subjected to

so many moves and reorganizations over the period of its preservation," which explains, at least in part, why parish registers did not become the subject of special study in the Soviet period (p. 193). In Soviet eyes, parish registers were not especially valuable and consequently occupied the lowest rank of importance. The history of survival of registers from the city of Krapivna (Tula District) indicates how grave the losses were. A prerevolutionary inventory of the consistory's registers from 1740 to 1856 identified only twelve years as missing (all from the eighteenth century, probably from the 1782 fire). Presently, however, a total of only twelve years from the eighteenth century *survive*, and the archive holds only thirty-three registers compiled between 1800 and 1856 for Krapivna. Altogether, then, about 60 percent of the Krapivna metrical books known to nineteenth-century archivists disappeared when under Soviet control. Parish-level records suffered even more grievously, although how devastating were the losses countrywide remains unstudied.

The precise timing of transfer of the imperial-era books to state control was complicated and no doubt varied from place to place. A 1919 statute demanded that all records for the period since 1863, including parish registers, be transferred to ZAGS, the rest going to regional archives. But only in 1922 did the first parish registers enter the Tula State Regional Archive, and the transfer included registers up through 1866, not 1863. Other archives accepted registers at different times and from different years–through 1840 in Tver', through 1850 in Orel, and through the 1860s in Kursk. In contrast, when ZAGS later transferred all its old parish books to the archives, they sometimes sent back books from the entire era of parish registration–including a 1780 register from Tula, for example. In addition, the frequent reorganization of the Soviet administration, including ZAGS, meant that the parish and consistorial copies of parish registers might take different paths, ending up in different repositories or being lost altogether. Beginning in the 1950s, ZAGS began to transfer registers to regional archives, but this was not a uniform process countrywide, and, according to the Antonovs, even today many registers remain uncared for and away from professional archives. Furthermore, judging by replies to questionnaires that the Antonovs received from regional archives, the process of acquisition of parish registers meant that ZAGS had possession of registers that properly belonged to the archive of some other region rather than the institution to which ZAGS delivered them.

The archives, in turn, discovered that ZAGS officials, in attempting to make the old registers more easily useful for their purposes, had sometimes disassembled the annual books in which christenings, marriages, and deaths had been bound together, with inevitable losses. Elsewhere, officials devised new principles of joining the books; some registers lost bindings, hard covers, and various pages (including especially initial and concluding pages); and some entirely new copies were made, parish and consistory copies confused, and so on. Worst of all, legislation authorized archives receiving both the consistory and parish versions of registers to dispose of the original parish copy, leading the Antonovs to observe that "if parish registers, this most valuable source, are preserved somewhere in their complete form [including both the parish and consistory copy], this is not thanks to, but in spite of existing instructions" (pp. 208-209). In defending the importance of this history in deciding how to group the records in archives, the Antonovs point out that no common principles decide this question across Russia. The prolonged process of transferring registers from ZAGS to the archives meant that different generations of archivists decided how to organize and file the records, a circumstance that complicates the identification of and access to desired registers for users. Consequently, precisely because of the different histories of parish and consistorial versions, the authors argue, archivists should distinguish the two kinds of registers, and file parish copies with records of the specific churches whose priests created the registers and the consistorial copies with the relevant consistories.

Surely, one reason that so few Soviet historians or students of historical sources paid attention to the registers is that research on these subjects was distinctly unwelcome in official Soviet society. Consequently, the fact that so many regional archive guidebooks (*putevoditeli*), especially those published before *perestroika*, make minimal or no mention of parish registers is far from unexpected. Similar dynamics explain why few regional archives offer detailed inventories (*opisi*) or full descriptions (*opisaniia*) of archival collections of parish registers, and why some descriptions done in the 1950s are so vague as to be useless. Nevertheless, the Antonovs point to some regional archives that have prepared high-quality descriptions of their parish register holdings, and there is reason to think that, especially now with this useful guide in hand, still more local archives will improve their aids to research.[3]

Chapter 5 moves beyond the registers to discuss a whole range of sources useful to historians of the family. Correctly noting that most Russian handbooks on source study make no reference to church sources, the Antonovs hypothesize both a schema of the sources (including church-generated sources) and a brief introduc-

tion to their origins and use. Among the most useful and underutilized are the so-called confessional lists (*ispovednye rospisi*), designed to respond to the legislated demand that all Orthodox Christians confess and take the Eucharist annually. Although children under seven years of age were exempt from these requirements, not infrequently priests listed even infants, since the usual organization of the lists was by household, thereby providing a neat annual snapshot of household organization, complete with ages of each person. Less important, but potentially useful, are the so-called clergy bulletins (*klirovye vedomosti*), which identified the church in question–its property, income, and any related institutions (schools, almshouses, etc.), as well as all the church officers, their ages, and the number and names of their children.

In their conclusion, the Antonovs return to a theme important to historians, although of less import to genealogists, namely, to emphasize that Russian parish registers were clerical only in form. In the context of the state's new interest in population movements and their connection to fiscal demands, a literate clergy increasingly came to serve secular interests, so that by 1775 the records penned by parish priests all across the Russian Empire gained the status of official acts. Here, parish registers constituted an important tool through which the state identified, monitored, and tracked its subjects, making its domain "legible."[4]

Even so detailed a review as this cannot identify all the virtues of this small volume; it is quite simply an outstanding addition to our understanding of sources from imperial Russia and will lead, I hope, to greater exploitation of parish-level information to help better articulate the lived experience within prerevolutionary Russia. The one regret I have is that, although early in the text the authors remind readers that Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and Lutheran clerics also composed registers that approximated their Orthodox parallels, the text in fact rarely mentions these books or alerts readers to problems particular to their composition and preservation. As Paul W. Werth has recently reminded us, the confessional basis of the Russian Empire not only explains the desirability of requiring parish registers from all religious communities, but also complicates efforts at systematizing them.[5] Therefore, more attention to the peculiarities of non-Orthodox registers would have made the Antonovs' book more useful. But, even with this omission, *Metricheskie knigi* is a book that deserves special praise; there is quite simply nothing like it, and I hope that, for the sake of the many thousand Anglophone genealogists with an interest in Russian parish registers, a publisher will soon see the wisdom of issuing an English translation.

Notes

[1]. For examples of Soviet-era use of parish books, see N. A. Minenko, *Russkaia krest'ianskaia sem'ia v zapadnoi Sibiri (XVIII-pervoi poloviny XIX v.)* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1979); and Heldur Palli, *Estestvennoe dvizhenie sel'skogo naseleniia Estonii (1650-1799)* (Tallinn: Eesti raamat, 1980).

[2]. Steven L. Hoch, "Famine, Disease, and Mortality Patterns in the Parish of Borshevka, Russia, 1930-1912," *Population Studies* 52 (1998): 357-368; *Sotsial'no-demograficheskaia istoriia Rossii XIX-XX vv. Sovremennye metody issledovaniia* (Tambov: Tambovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1999); Sergei Kachtchenko, "On the Marital Behaviour of the Population in the North of Russia in the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Centuries," in *Family Life on the Northwestern Margins of Imperial Russia*, ed. Tapio Hämynen, Jukka Partanen, and Yury Shikalov (Joensuu: Joensuun yliopistopaino-Joensuu University Press, 2004), 135-145; Ol'ga Vasil'evna Fomina, "Rozhdaemost' i smertnost' v srede moskovskikh kuptsov v poslednei chetverti XVIII veka," in *Goroda Evropeiskoi Rossii kontsa XV-pervoi poloviny XIX veka*, ed, N.V. Sereda, pt. 2 (Tver': Tverskoi gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2002), 382-394; and Aleksandr Avdeev, Alen Blium, and Irina Troitskaia, "Sezonnyi faktor v demografii Rossiiskogo krest'ianstva v pervoi polovine 19 veka: brachnost', rozhdaemost', mladencheskaia smertnost'," *Rossiiskii demograficheskii zhurnal* 1 (2002): 35-45. However, despite the explosion of popular interest in genealogy, handbooks on genealogy continue to ignore parish books. See, for example, M. E. Bychkova et al., *Russkaia genealogiia* (Moscow: Bogorodskii pechatnik, 1999).

[3]. See, for example, I. Iu. Uskov, *Metricheskie knigi prikhodov Kemerovskoi oblasti* (Kemerovo: Kuzbassvuzizdat, 1998). For Ukraine, see O. Kachkovs'kyi, Iu. Rudenko, and E. Franskevich, eds. *Derzhavnyi arkhiv Khmel'nyts'koi oblasti: Anotovanyj reestr opysiv. Fondy kolyshn'oho Kam'ianets'-Podil's'koho mis'koho arkhivu periodu do 1917 r.* (Kyiv: Derzhavnyj komitet arkhiviv Ukrainy, Derzhavnyi arkhiv Khmel'nyts'koi oblasti, 2003), esp. 312-387, which lists all Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish registers transferred from Kamenets-Podil archive and now held in the Khmel'nytsky Regional State Archive. This publication is also available online at http://www.archives.gov.ua/Publicat/References/Xmeln_references.php.

[4]. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[5]. Paul W. Werth, "In the State's Embrace? Civil Acts in an Imperial Order," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7 (2006): 433-458.

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