Religious Landscape in Post-revolutionary Russia
The Case of Ekaterinburg

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JOHN THE BAPTIST (IOANNO-PREDTECHA) Cathedral from Ekaterinburg

Introduction

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS relations are an important factor of stability and successful development in cities, regions and states. A growing number of recent studies show that Christian urban corporations were crucial for the rise of civil society in the late Middle Ages in Europe, providing precursors and models.[1] Some also point towards regional variations, and stress religious models of social assistance in Southern Europe.[2] Our previous research on the religious development in Ekaterinburg proved that religious minorities, especially representatives of Evangelical movements in opposition to the Russian Orthodox Church, contributed to the development of civil society in late 19th and early 20th century Russia.[3] When the Bolsheviks seized the power, reli-

This research was sponsored by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research Grant No. 15-06-08541A, "Religious Diversity of a Eurasian City: A Statistical and Cartographic Analysis of Late 19th Century to Early 20th Century Ekaterinburg."

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gious institutions played an important role in the mobilization and preservation of other groups' identities. The Soviet state gradually banned religious institutions and deprived them of the rights they had managed to obtain over centuries of state oppression: to register life events, to worship and preach, to have their own prayer buildings, to educate, to help the poor and those in need. In other words, the Soviet authorities seized control over a civil society in Russia which had been developing within the religious institutions.

This article focuses on the history of religious landscape changes in Russia and the Soviet Union in 1917–1941, taking as a case study the city of Ekaterinburg. We use the concept of *religious landscape* to analyze the representation of different religions in the city, in particular the number and types of church buildings, which were the main elements as well as the visual markers of the city's religious landscape. The research is based on 20th century statistics and narrative data on Ekaterinburg's religious institutions and minorities. After extracting the information from the sources and entering it into the database "Ekaterinburg religious institutions," we ran statistical analyses.

While Russia is often perceived as a religiously homogeneous entity with the Russian Orthodox Church dominating the country, in reality it has a long history of coexistence among different religious traditions. There have always been provinces with Catholic or Muslim majorities, as well as those characterized by high religious diversity. The Ural region, located in the middle of the Eurasian continent and having Ekaterinburg (56°5'/60°4') as its capital, has always been multi-religious due to immigration. Peter the Great founded it in 1723 as the main metal production center in Russia (copper, iron, and cast iron). As a booming center of metal production in the eighteenth century, Ekaterinburg needed engineers and managers and Europeans often filled the jobs, since there were not enough Russian specialists. As exiled prisoners of war or workers contracted by the state, they found employment at the Ural metal plants and composed the nucleus of the Lutheran and Catholic communities, which developed into established religious institutions in the city by the late nineteenth century. Urgent need for labor attracted the Old Believers, religious dissenters since the 17th century, to the Urals. Being persecuted by the state, they found the opportunity to settle, get jobs, and enjoy relative freedom to practice their religion away from the Moscow authorities. The city owes them its fast development and prosperity in the 18th and early 19th centuries, when the state initiated a new wave of religious persecutions. Ekaterinburg's Muslim and Jewish communities were formed in the late 19th century: the first one due to urbanization and the second due to the accession of Poland.

Regrettably, because of the lack of state monitoring of religious affiliations in Russia and the Soviet Union, scholars interested in the religious composition

of the Russian population cannot rely on comparable statistics. There were two cases when such a question was included in the census forms in 1897 and 1937, but the primary manuscripts were destroyed. Only a small sample from 1897 survived and resulted in aggregate tables. As to the 1937 census, the Soviet authorities destroyed not only the primary materials but also the aggregates.[4] We may, however, study religious associations and institutions and analyze religious dynamics following changes in the early 20th century urban landscape in other sources. The religious landscape, in our understanding, is a religious situation that developed in a certain place and time, and one of its main markers are religious institutions, which manifest religions in the public sphere. The religious landscape is the product of the dominant group in a society and one of the means by which it retains its power. As Robertson and Richards pointed out, the landscape is one of the principal ways in which the powerful in a society maintain their dominance.[5] In the very same way, first the monarchy and then the Bolsheviks imposed their view on the majority through the landscape they created: with Orthodox dominance until 1917 and ultimate atheism afterwards. However, alternative religions also manifested themselves in the landscape, making it less homogeneous. A religious landscape carries encoded information about the religious situation, which can be "read" and interpreted.[6] As Black argued, buildings are central to the symbolic reading of landscapes, for they frame and embody economic, social and cultural processes.[7]

The purpose of this study is to read and to interpret the changing religious landscape of Ekaterinburg from the late 19th century until 1941, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union; how the state policies affected the religious landscape; the number of religious buildings operating in the city; the weight of non-Orthodox institutions and the number of religious institutions relative to population size.

Sources

The research is based on statistics, including the First All-Russia Population Census (1897), as well as local police, church and municipal records. In addition, we analyzed local newspapers and photo documents from private archives. The information extracted from the sources was transcribed into a database to monitor how many religious institutions operated in each year between 1917 and 1941. That allowed us to trace the evolution of the city's religious landscape and to find out when the destruction policy peaked.

Results

PRE-REVOLUTIONARY Ekaterinburg was an industrial city with a marked ethnic and religious diversity. While most inhabitants were members of the Russian Orthodox Church, there were congregations of Old Believers, Muslims, Catholics, Lutherans and Jews (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS IN EKATERINBURG (1897)

Denomination	Men	Women	Together	%
Orthodox	18,534	21,211	39,745	91.8
Old Believers	766	1,024	1,790	4.1
Muslims	386	292	678	1.6
Lutherans	167	176	343	0.8
Catholics	167	156	323	0.7
Jews	150	153	303	0.7
Other	23	34	57	0.1
TOTAL	20,205	23,075	43,280	100

SOURCE: 1897 census aggregates. N. A. Troinitskii, ed., *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii, 1897 g.* (First All-Russian Census), 1897, XXXI (Saint Petersburg, 1904), 92.

The more than 90 percent Orthodox in the city according to the 1897 population census were overwhelmingly ethnic Russians, which was also the case for the four percent Old Believers. The city's Muslim community was the second biggest (after the Old Believers) religious minority composed of Tatars and Bashkirs—in-migrants from rural suburbs. The overwhelming majority of the 0.8 percent Lutherans were Germans and the 0.7 percent Catholics were of Polish origin, while the same proportion of Jews came from various places, mostly within Western Russia. In addition, there were 24 Calvinists and seven Anglican Church members (likely British and Swiss), six Baptists and a Mennonite, adding to the well-established Protestant congregation.

The Russian government had to postpone the next scheduled census due to the First Russian Revolution (1905–1907); however, a survey was conducted in Ekaterinburg in 1913 by the city's address office. Its results show the increasing religious diversity. All the non-Orthodox denominations expanded their share in the religious composition of the city, mainly due to in-migration and natural population growth; some had increased their size several times since 1897 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Religious denominations in Ekaterinburg (1913)

Denomination	Men	Women	Together	Constructed[a]	%
Orthodox	35,024	34,177	69,201	96,881	90.6
Muslims	2,854	1,139	3,993	5,590	5.2
Jews	679	456	1,135	1,589	1.5
Catholics	587	364	951	1,331	1.3
Lutherans	512	377	889	1,245	1.2
Other	136	43	179	251	0.2
Total	39,792	36,556	76,348	106,887	100

Source: 1913 Passport office data. State Archive of Sverdlovskaia oblast,' Ekaterinburg, Russia (hereafter cited as GASO), F. 62, Op. 1, D. 524, List 126.
a. Children under 14 were not registered in 1913. Based on the 1897 census data on children we roughly constructed the actual population by adding 40% to each denomination.

The revolutionary Bolsheviks attempted to take a population census already in 1920, including questions about ethnicity. This effort failed, however, due to lack of resources and could never cover the whole territory due to foreign interventions and to the civil war which was still raging.[8] However some parts, Ekaterinburg among them, managed to register their population. The results reflected changes in the ethnic composition of the city, caused by the civil war. The 1920 census did not include the question on religion, however we can use ethnic markers to identify religious identity, for they were closely related to each other. In this way we can distinguish Poles as 'ethnic Catholics,' Germans as 'ethnic Lutherans,' Tartars and Bashkirs as 'ethnic Muslims.' Thus, according to the 1920 census, the Jewish population increased, while all other denominations suffered a drastic decrease in numbers, in particular the Muslims (see Table 3).

Table 3. Religious denominations in Ekaterinburg (1920)

Denomination	Men	Women	Together	%
Orthodox	37,121	43,142	80,263	90.7
Jews	1,682	1,923	3,605	4.1
Ethnic Catholics	860	754	1,614	1.8
Ethnic Muslims	774	648	1,422	1.6
Ethnic Lutherans	199	161	360	0.4
Other	765	461	1,226	1.4
Total	41,401	47,089	88,490	100

Source: 1920 Census data. GASO, F. 62, Op. 1, D. 524, List 126.

Eastern Christianity (Orthodoxy) in Ekaterinburg's Religious Landscape

NATURALLY, THE Russian Orthodox Church institutions and church buildings dominated the religious landscape of Ekaterinburg until 1917. There were 45 Russian Orthodox Church buildings, including five parish churches with several thousand members each, three cathedrals and a nunnery with about 1,000 nuns, which itself had five churches and a cathedral. In addition, there were two parishes of Old Believers separated from the official Russian Orthodox Church in protest against the church reforms introduced by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow between 1652 and 1666. The Old Believers kept liturgical practices that the Russian Orthodox Church had maintained before the implementation of these reforms and consider the reformed Russian Orthodox Church as heretics, including former Russian Tsars. The Old Believers manifested their distinct religiosity following pre-Patriarch Nikon habits from the early 17th century: men do not shave their beards, prefer to wear old-fashioned clothes, do not consume imported products such as potatoes and tobacco, do not accept any message from the state authorities, and consider these the devil's servants. They also maintain the pre-reform rituals with a long liturgy, using books and icons either produced before the schism of 1666 or made in the pre-reform style. The state persecuted the Old Believers, who went underground and escaped to remote areas—the Russian North, Siberia and the Urals, which became one of Russia's centers of Old Believers. There were different *soglasiia* (factions) among them: the *popovtcy* had their own priests, while the *bezpopovtcy* (the priestless) had lay religious leaders. The priestless community of Chasovennoe *soglasie* (Chapel faction) in Ekaterinburg had up to 1,000 members and their own St. Nicholas Chapel and Ascension Chapel for common prayer. Another faction, the *Belocrinitckoe soglasie*, recognize priesthood and the church structure. The faction originated in the Russian Orthodox Monastery located in Belaia Crinitca (Romania, Austria-Hungary) in the 1840s.[9] An alternative popular name for this faction is *Avstriiskoe soglasie* (Austrian faction). The first Old Believers of the *Belocrinitskoe soglasie* in Ekaterinburg were those converted by missionaries who came from Belaia Crinitca in the late 19th century. In 1882–1883, they managed to erect their own Holy Trinity Church whose parish reached almost 1,000 believers and steadily increased in the early 20th century due to in-migration into Ekaterinburg. The implementation of the 1905 Decree on Religious Tolerance strengthened the status of Ekaterinburg's Old Believers.

The Imperial Russian religious landscape also included churches belonging to the Edinovertcy, and Ekaterinburg had three of them. These parishes of eth-

nic Russians consisted of the former Old Believers and their descendants, who agreed to the compromise proposed by the state. Edinoverie was a means of joining Old Believers to the official Church, allowing them to maintain their old liturgies and rituals while being subordinated to the diocesan bishops of the Orthodox Church.[10] Thus, the Edinovertcy got official priests and at the same time kept their identity distinct from both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Old Believers. All in all Ekaterinburg's Eastern Christianity landscape consisted of ten parishes with their own churches or chapels.

The city's non-Orthodox landscape consisted of four religious communities with Catholic and Lutheran churches erected in the very center in the late 19th century; a synagogue and a mosque operated in private houses. Thus, at the turn of the 20th century there were eight parishes representing the religious majority: the Russian Orthodox Church members and the Edinovertcy; two parishes had Orthodox minorities—the Old Believers; two parishes were Western Christian and two had non-Christian religions. The number of non-Orthodox parishes demonstrated Ekaterinburg's diverse religious landscape. It may even suggest religious tolerance, taking into consideration the small numbers of the non-Orthodox communities in the city. However, the number of Orthodox buildings, other than parish churches, including the nunnery, chapels and *domovye* (home) churches,[11] churches in schools as well as group quarters placed in military regiments and prisons, demonstrated the Russian Orthodox Church's dominance and its strong support by the state. The ratio of all Russian Orthodox Church buildings to the non-Orthodox ones reached nine to one by 1917.

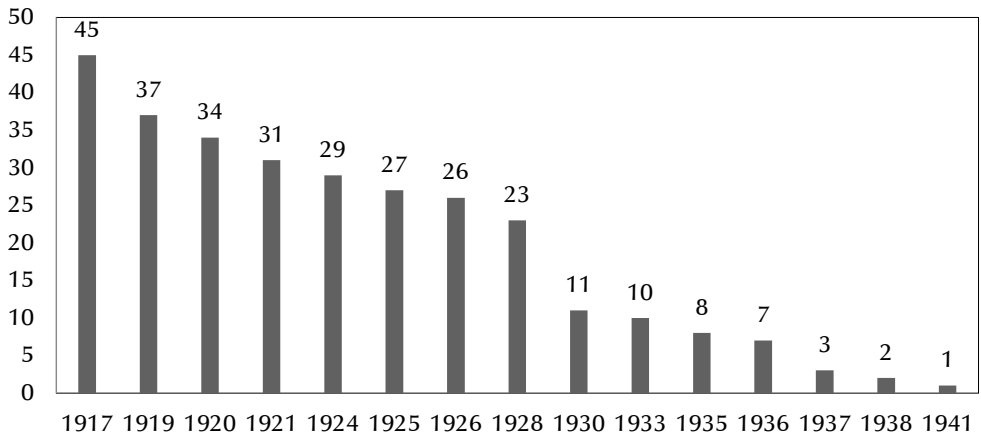
Political changes in early 20th century Russia changed the country's religious landscape. Catholics, Lutherans, Jews and Muslims got more civil rights; they started to develop educational institutions and ran charity programs. The Jews and Muslims got the right to register vital events after 1905. They actively participated in the city's social life. Small groups of newly emerged Ekaterinburg Baptists and Evangelical Christians got a chance to form their religious institutions after the 1917 revolution. Over the next ten years, they were developing dynamically; they gained several thousand followers, organized public sermons; held regional congresses, which gathered hundreds; established training courses for preachers.[12] Meanwhile, the Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) was gradually losing its privileges due to secularization and atheist policies. In addition, several internal schisms weakened the Church,[13] and it was steadily losing followers in a changing religious situation with growing religious indifference and rising popularity for Baptists and Evangelical Christians.

The Bolsheviks started to close churches and expropriate the Russian Orthodox Church properties, including buildings, almost immediately after the Revolution. Between 1917 and 1929, the number of Orthodox churches was

rapidly reduced. Already in 1919–1925, the city authorities closed the Novo-Tikhvin nunnery and most of the city's *domovye* churches. The practice of closing Orthodox churches and depriving the Church of its buildings continued, and by 1928 only 11 Orthodox churches remained in the city, nine of which were closed in 1929. In addition, the authorities closed all churches belonging to the Edinovertcy: first the Salvation Church and the Holy Archangel Michael (former cemetery church) in 1929, and then the Nativity and the Holy Trinity Churches a year later.[14]

Most of the closed Orthodox Church buildings were conveyed to secular institutions, and the main centrally located churches, the Catherine and the Epiphany Cathedrals, as well as the Holy Spirit (Zlatoust) Church and St. Alexander Nevskii (Luzin) Church were destroyed. As a result of this ten years-long campaign, there were only two cemetery churches left in the city. The destruction that started just after the Revolution peaked twice: in 1929 at the beginning of the social reconstruction campaign, and in 1937, when religious practices qualified as counterrevolutionary activity and were punished as a crime. In both cases the authorities managed to close half of the then existing Orthodox churches (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. THE NUMBER OF ORTHODOX CHURCHES OPERATING IN EKATERINBURG (1917–1941)



Other religious denominations experienced the same blow, although some, for example the Baptists and Evangelical Christians, had enjoyed religious freedom for a decade. The Ural Evangelical movement developed in the same way as in Europe, attracting socially active and mobile urban youths and women. Being in opposition to the Orthodox Church, the Evangelical movement presented no

danger to the Soviet state, but rather contributed to the development of civil society in early 20th century Russia. Ekaterinburg was the center of the Ural's religious non-conformists and had the largest Baptist congregation in the region, numbering 80 members in 1928, and the Evangelical Christians attracted up to 400 people to their meetings. Both Baptists and Evangelical Christian congregations disappeared from the city's landscape in 1930. The building that they used for meetings and communal prayer was transferred to the City Council in 1930.[15]

There was no mosque in Ekaterinburg before the Revolution, since the number of male Muslims never reached the 300 members needed to found a mosque according to Russian law. However, the Muslims gathered for Friday prayer and holidays at the house of some Tatar merchants, the Agafurovs. This family did not support the Revolution and left the city after the White Guard retreated and the Soviet authorities expropriated their house in 1919. Despite the fact that the number of ethnic Muslims decreased during the civil war, there were no less than 1400 in 1920 (see Table 2) and they managed to regain the Agafurov house, where they met for prayer until February 1930. However in March this was closed and the building was transformed into a kindergarten which accepted the children of *natcmen* (literally, ethnic minorities), that is, Tatar and Bashkir ethnic Muslims.[16]

The Lutheran church was closed in 1920 or 1921. It was probably due to the ethnic, predominantly German, composition of the Lutheran congregation, with a high number of foreigners, that they were the first religious minority to be suppressed in Ekaterinburg. The Catholic Church was closed in 1930, and after that the Catholic community of the city disintegrated.[17] The Catholic Church, erected in an elegant Gothic style, was converted into a "working youth drama theater."[18] At the same time, the authorities closed churches and chapels where the city's Old Believers used to gather for prayer: the Holy Trinity Church of Byelokrinitskie or the 'Austrian' congregation and the Ascension Chapel of the Chasovennye (priestless) congregation. However, the Old Believers managed to defend the St. Nicholas chapel, where both congregations gathered for worship together with the Edinovertcy until 1941.

Ekaterinburg's Jewish community grew rapidly due to migration from the western provinces, i.e. contemporary Poland, Ukraine, Byelorussia and Lithuania in the early 20th century, especially after the First World War broke out. The city's Jews and wealthy families of Jewish origin (even if baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church) established several institutions to help the refugees: an employment bureau, a housing agency, credit foundations for small business start-ups, a society for the support of the poor, free medical services, as well as free kosher dining and bathing.[19] There were two synagogues in the city, but the authorities closed one of them in 1926. When they attempted to close the sec-

ond synagogue in 1930, the believers managed to have it reopened before long. Apparently, it helped that the synagogue existed along with a mikva, used as a public bath—an obviously social institution, much needed in Soviet Russia.[20]

Thus, most of the religious minorities' prayer buildings were closed and all their markers, present in the city's religious landscape of the imperial period, disappeared in 1929–1930.

Discussion

EKATERINBURG'S RELIGIOUS landscape, as it had emerged by the late 19th century, reflected the position of the authorities towards religions. They supported the Russian Orthodox Church, whose institutions dominated the religious landscape of Ekaterinburg. However, there were alternative religions presented in the city's landscape: the best established were the Lutherans and the Catholics, whose church buildings were very visible and centrally located. The Old Believers, Muslims and Jews were less noticeable but still present in the city. All non-Orthodox religious communities, mediating between the state and the religious minorities, were the signs of an evolving civil society. Ekaterinburg's religious landscape in the early 20th century could be interpreted as a further development of the civil society, with the religious institutions taking responsibility for promoting education, medicine and charitable activities. The Evangelical movements, attracting socially active and mobile urban youths and women, continued the development of civil society in the second decades of 20th century Russia.

Conclusion

IT TOOK two decades for the Soviet authorities to destroy the religious landscape of Ekaterinburg: the liturgical buildings of all religious denominations were closed; churches located in the historical part of the city were demolished or underwent considerable restructuring. First, the authorities crushed non-parish churches, and later the rest. Their most crucial attack on the religious organizations occurred in 1929, when nine of the eleven existing Orthodox churches and most non-Orthodox religious organizations were banned and their buildings expropriated.

The 1937 census, the only Soviet census that contained a question on religious affiliation, indicated an unbalanced religious situation in the USSR and

particularly in Ekaterinburg. More than 50% of its adult population claimed they were religious, and answered positively to the question if they *believed in God*.[21] We have grounds to identify most of them as followers of the Russian Orthodox Church, taking into consideration the historic and cultural background as well as the city's ethnic composition. Therefore, for the believers who could have very well numbered in the tens of thousands of people, there was only one church left to conduct the services—John the Baptist Cathedral, the former cemetery church; the Old Believers' Chapel of St. Nicholas; and a synagogue. The other religious buildings were destroyed or used for storage, as dorms, schools, kindergartens, theaters, etc. All three institutions remained outside the public sphere: according to the law, religious organizations were deprived of the right to carry out any activity other than liturgy, which only adults could attend. Two religious minorities managed to defend their buildings and to gather for communal prayer and keep their religious identity. They were the Old Believers and the Jews: both with centuries of history and experience in withstanding religious oppression and maintaining their religious traditions and values, even under the threat of death. The rest disappeared from the city's religious landscape for almost 70 years.

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Notes

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Abstract

Religious Landscape in Post-revolutionary Russia: The Case of Ekaterinburg

This article presents preliminary results from the project "Religious Diversity of a Eurasian City: Statistical and Cartographic Analysis." The project focuses on the evolution of the religious situation in late 19th–early 20th century Ekaterinburg. The research is based on documents found in state and private archives, statistics, and visual materials. We have reconstructed the manner in which different religious denominations formed their institutions in late 19th century Ekaterinburg and how this diversity increased due to mass migration and a relatively tolerant religious policy in the early 20th century. The paper argues that religious institutions played important roles in advancing the civil society in Russia, as most of them promoted non-governmental forms of socialization, education, and charity. The decade after the Revolution, often called "the Golden Age" of Protestantism in Russia, ended with the Soviet state's socialist modernization and atheist policy. That resulted in the destruction of the city's religious landscape. All the changes manifested in this religious landscape can be presented as a text, which can be "read" and interpreted.

Keywords

religious landscape, Russia, Soviet Union, Revolution, Orthodox Church, religious communities