

**Думиника Иван. Църковният живот на българите в Бесарабия (1812–1918).**

**Научни редактори: Николай Червенков, Милко Палангурски; Институт за културно наследство [и др.]. Chișinău: Lexon-Prim, 2023. 456 p. / Duminika Ivan. Church life of Bulgarians in Bessarabia (1812–1918). Scientific editors: Nikolay Chervenkov, Milko Palangursky; Institute of Cultural Heritage [etc.]. Chisinau: Lexon-Prim, 2023. 456 p.**



The publication of a new monograph by Dr. of Historical Sciences Ivan Duminika, has marked a significant event in the scientific community, especially among experts in church history, history of the Bulgarian diaspora in Bessarabia, local history, biography, necropolitics, and related fields. The keen interest and numerous positive reviews in the first days, following its publication, rightly acknowledged the substantial contributions made by the scientist in advancing our understanding of the church life of the Bessarabian Bulgarians, a community to which he himself belongs.

Of course, this achievement is a culmination of many years of dedicated archival research, thorough source analysis, skillful organization of information into coherent thematic sections, and, notably, the excellent quality of the scientific prose. Equally vital is Dr. Duminika's profound knowledge of the methodological tools for scholarly inquiry.

The culmination of Dr. Duminika's success is attributed, in part, to his association with two scientific schools simultaneously – those of Professors Nikolai Chervenkov (Republic of Moldova) and Milko Palangursky (Bulgaria). These two mentors, who had previously guided his postgraduate and doctoral work, significantly contributed to his intellectual development and professional growth. It is worth noting that they also served as scientific

editors for the final stages of preparing this monograph. Their introductory article sets the stage for the book, and without going into extensive detail, it is safe to say that their assessment of the author's qualifications and the quality of the presented material is highly favourable.

In the preface of the book, Dr. Duminika offers to the readers insight into the motivation behind his study, particularly focusing on the significant role played by the Orthodox Bulgarian clergy in the lives of their compatriots. These clergy members acted as spiritual leaders and guides for fellow immigrants from their homeland, contributing to their enlightenment, preserving their cultural heritage, and protecting their ethnic identity. He defines the temporal and geographical scope of his research, explaining the nuances of the church life of Bulgarian settlers in the Chisinau (Bessarabia) diocese. In several instances, this interpretation necessitated special thematic explorations, such as the examination of church terminology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Acknowledging that his work could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many individuals, mainly fellow scholars across various humanities disciplines, he extends his gratitude to them.

The first chapter of the monograph, “The State of Research on the Church Life of Bulgarian Immigrants in Bessarabia”, includes two sections, § 1.1. “Historiography of the Problem” and § 1.2. “Historical Sources”. To maintain fairness, it is important to note that in the context of the term “the state of the problem”, it would be appropriate to consider both the historiographical (academic works) and archaeographic (published sources) foundations laid by predecessors. The analysis of unpublished sources should also be separately highlighted, not just in the subsection title but throughout the entire section.

When analysing historiography, the author duly acknowledges the contributions of scholars who previously compiled historiographical reviews on the church history of the Bulgarian diaspora in Budjak (southern Bessarabia). Notable mentions include the works of Doctors N. Chervenkov, E. Kapatsyna, E. Chelak, and E. Kvilinkova. The examination

of the level of inquiry into the problem is conducted by the author according to his self-developed schema, which is based on a problematic chronological principle. This framework groups specific subtopics, such as parish history, church construction, and priest biographies, within different periods, including the Russian Empire, the USSR, and others. The material within these periods is then categorised based on the authors' nationality, their affiliation with academic institutions, and even the language in which articles and monographs were published. This classification approach has proven effective in covering works from the early 19th century to the early 21st century, allowing for the identification of existing gaps and avenues for further research.

Dr. Duminika employs a similar scheme to organize information about the archaeographic publications he has analysed (§ 1.2). This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of documentary and narrative sources dating from the 19th century to the present. Notably, many of these sources provide historical and ethnographic descriptions of specific church parishes in Bulgarian and Gagauz villages of Bessarabia. These descriptions were authored by local priests during the region's time under the Russian Empire. This period can be characterized as a formative stage in the accumulation of scientific knowledge concerning the church structure of the "Transdanubian settlers". The author also highlights the lack of archaeographic publications during the era of the USSR and credits historians and specialists from Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, and Ukraine for contributing to the field in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Dr. Duminika conducted an extensive heuristic search within the collections of the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova (NARM), the State Archives of Odesa Region (GAOO), and the Izmail Archive (KUIA), as well as the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA). This search enabled him to bring numerous archival materials into the realm of academic discourse. These materials included hundreds and thousands of documents of various types, such as records of church statistics, personnel and accounting records related to priests and their families, as well as clerical and ecclesiastical court documents. Photocopies of these documents, included in the text as illustrations, offer to the readers an additional opportunity to delve into the researcher's creative process.

With this updated source base, combined with the insights from previous scholarship in histo-

riography and archaeography, the author was able to undertake a comprehensive investigation of all aspects of the church life of the Bulgarians in Bessarabia from 1812 to 1918.

The second chapter of the monograph, titled "The Situation of Orthodox Christians in the Bulgarian Lands in the Late 18th – Early 19th Centuries", presents materials that shed light on the church life of the ancestors of the Bessarabian Bulgarians in their native homeland.

In § 2.1, titled "Orthodox Christian Community and Parish Clergy", the author explores the problem on both micro and macro levels. On the one hand, he focuses on pivotal dates and events in the lives of Orthodox Bulgarians, from the time of the Ottoman Turks' conquest (at the turn of the 14th–15th centuries) to the early 1830s, a period that saw the completion of the formation of the Bulgarian diaspora in Bessarabia. He highlights the repressive policies of the Turkish authorities and the assimilationist goals of the Greek Patriarchate, which aimed to subjugate and eradicate the Bulgarian clergy, who played a crucial role in preserving the identity of their compatriots. On the other hand, the author delves into the experiences of individual clergymen and their families at the micro-level, providing a vivid portrayal of the hardships they endured, including violence that forced them to flee their homeland. The use of personal sources, such as memoirs, allows readers to immerse themselves fully in this historical era.

The second subsection, § 2.2, titled "The Participation of the Bulgarian Clergy in Internal Political and Immigration Processes", reconstructs the activities undertaken by the Bulgarian clergy to hasten the liberation from the Turkish rule, safeguard their circle, and provide suitable conditions for their congregants to lead a life in adherence to Orthodoxy. In this section, two main thematic blocks are highlighted.

The first block delves into the dialogues held by Orthodox Bulgarian archbishops, such as Sophrony Vrachansky, with representatives from the diplomatic, military, and ecclesiastical circles of the Russian Empire before and during the Russian-Turkish wars in the early 19th century. Imperial representatives, in turn, readily utilized the clergy as sources of information, guides, and conveyors of their pan-Slavic and pan-Orthodox beliefs.

The second block highlights the involvement of ordinary clergy in various forms of active and passive resistance against Turkish oppression, the

dominance of Greek clergy, and the emigration, and even re-emigration, processes to places like Bessarabia and Tavria in 1861–1862. The biographies of rural clergymen found in Moldova and Ukraine archives helped construct a collective portrait of this social group within the Bulgarian diaspora.

The third chapter, “The Ecclesiastical Structure of the Bulgarian Settlements in Bessarabia”, discusses the organizational aspects of Orthodox communities in Bessarabian colonies during the period in focus. The author covers five key elements: 1) Administrative ecclesiastical structure; 2) Church construction; 3) Church clergy; 4) Religious services; and 5) Parish cemeteries.

The study shows that the organization of church life for settlers closely correlated with the development of the “Bulgarian Settlement” system, impacting ecclesiastical and administrative hierarchies, as well as the choice of worship language. The prosperity of a village depended on its ability to build churches, provide ritual items, and support priests and their assistants in their initiatives. The author enriches the text with historical and contemporary photographs of almost all the churches erected in Bulgarian and Gagauz villages during the 19th century.

The book also examines the lives of church clergy and their families in relation to the communities they served, highlighting the influence of their constant presence on their way of life, which often mirrored the occupations and lifestyles of their congregations.

In the fourth and final chapter, “Social and Cultural Activity of the Bulgarian Clergy”, the author explores issues such as the educational role of the clergy in preserving Bulgarian identity, their social influence within Bulgarian colonies of Budjak, library organization, and support for pilgrimages to holy sites.

The author presents the clergy as not only spiritual guides but also educators who nurture secular knowledge. They actively contribute to the preservation of Bulgarian culture in the diaspora, uphold Orthodox traditions and combat heresies.

The conclusions offered by Dr. Duminika in the “Conclusion” section summarise the main text, providing insightful analysis of the issues explored, the extent of conducted research, and references to unresolved topics, offering potential paths for future investigation.

The monograph concludes with a “Bibliography” and “Appendices”. The bibliography lists the extensive sources and literature used, encompassing archives from Moldova, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation, archaeological publications, scientific articles, monographs, and reference books. The appendices include tables summarising information about paraphery clergy and financial donations, along with ten documents spanning 1815–1907, which are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the discussed issues.

To sum up, as reviewers, we believe the author has thoroughly and comprehensively explored the subject matter, providing a definitive resource for future researchers, and setting a high standard for their work.

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