

The publication of this volume is timely and important for three principal reasons. First, while Russian scholars . . . have rediscovered Old Belief as a topic of research, Western scholars remain largely indifferent to the subject. Western historians interested in Old Belief and other aspects of Russian religion will find this book an indispensable introduction to the field. Second, the archives and manuscript collections holding information about Old Belief (and described here in the essays of Pozdeeva and Demkova, among others) are now, for the first time, readily available for research. This book provides guidance to prospective researchers and helps set research priorities. Finally, in Russia today, the “search for a new identity” (James Billington) has generated an unprecedented thirst for knowledge of the country’s religious heritage.

It is our goal here to bring together the research of leading scholars from Russia and the West. The essays taken together provide a rich introduction to the current *Stand der Forschung* and can provide much help in determining the priorities for further investigations of Old Belief’s history. It is our hope that this volume may inspire not only new research, but also collaborative projects involving both Western and Russian historians. For too long, the study of Old Belief has been undertaken by individuals working largely in isolation from one another. Scholars in both Russia and in the West are now open to new perspectives and approaches, as the contributions to this volume indicate.

*From the introduction*

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