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Liliya Berezhnaya and Heidi Hein-Kircher, eds. *Sacralization of History in Times of Crises: Modern Eastern Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2026. 418 pp. ISBN 9789048570188.

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Publishers' descriptions frequently indicate the particular audience for which a given book is intended. The volume *Sacralization of History* requires no such note. It is unmistakably a scholarly work—the product of the conference “Sacralization of History in (Contemporary) Eastern Europe: Actors—Networks—Topics”—and it addresses specialists: historians, political scientists, and anthropologists, scholars of religious studies and nation building, and researchers of Eastern Europe.

While the volume draws on all these fields, what makes it a notable contribution is not only its interdisciplinary reach but its effort to describe how a state, a nation, or a particular group can interpret its own history through the categories of the sacred, and to identify the conditions under which local historical events and figures come to acquire that status.

The condition, broadly understood, is already stated in the title: “in times of crises.” The volume's editors, Liliya Berezhnaya and Heidi Hein-Kircher, have in mind the contemporary crises of national integration, moments in which the bond between religion and nationalism becomes, or remains, a mobilizing force. They invite the reader to trace how the individual contributors interpret these processes across the states of Eastern Europe (in its traditional sense) as well as the South Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Baltic countries (introduction, chapter 1). What is at stake here is thus a matter not so much of a geographical territory as of a political and cultural concept of “Eastern Europe,” the postsocialist states on one side of the Iron Curtain that once lay within the sphere of Soviet influence.

The volume rests on a single thesis: In this region the sacralization of history is not a vestige of the past but an active instrument, one set in motion at moments of crisis (introduction, chapter 1). The paradox on which the editors build their framework is that the integration of the nation takes shape under the pressure of a constructed existential threat. Fear of the Other, who threatens the group's very existence or its identity, triggers the sacralization of the nation and offers it a sacralized salvation. This unfolds as a three-part sequence: Nationalization (in the sense of nation formation) generates discourses of securitization, and these in turn lead to the understanding of the “nation” as an eschatological category. The editors draw the tools for this model from neighboring fields. From the Copenhagen School in security studies they take the idea that a threat does not so much exist as it is declared through a speech act. From political scientist Maria Mälksoo's work on “mnemonic insecurity” (p. 17) they extend the same logic to memory, where the object of defense becomes the “correct” image of the past. From the sociology of the sacred they

take account of how events and values move out of the profane sphere into the sacred and become nonnegotiable.

A further thesis of the editors is stated by way of contrast: The dramatization of national history and the recourse to sacred motifs have long been seen as two sides of nationalization, whereas religion, as a factor or even a catalyst of securitization, has rarely found a place in historical studies of security. It is precisely this gap that the volume sets out to close, and in this lies its clear merit. It is worth noting, however, that the editors' framework leans markedly toward religion in its institutional, ecclesiastical sense, toward confessions, canonicity, and church mnemonic actors, even though a number of contributors, as will become clear below, turn to cases of "civil religion."

The cases gathered in the volume make it possible to test whether nations or groups are in fact sacralized in the way the editors' framework describes, and the picture proves quite uneven. In some chapters the proposed sequence is confirmed with real clarity. Drawing on material central to Russian memory, the cult of the Great Patriotic War, Maria Falina shows how a constructed threat turns into a sacralization of the past that converts directly into state control over history and into the legitimization of present-day policy (chapter 10). Here the triad of nationalization, securitization, and sacralization works not as an external scheme imposed on the material but as a description of the mechanism itself. Ursula Woolley applies the same concepts to ecclesiastical material, the Ukrainian autocephaly, adding the further observation that desacralization, too, can be a rhetorical rather than a neutral strategy (chapter 4).

Other contributions supplement and even shift the stated perspective. Drawing on the case of the Heavenly Hundred, the protesters killed by the security forces in February 2014 during Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity, Yuliya Yurchuk and Andriy Fert describe a sacralization that takes place outside the church and apart from any canonical procedure: The fallen are venerated as martyrs without any ecclesiastical consecration (chapter 8). Their "postsecular sacred" is in essence a case of civil religion, of the sacred beyond institutions. The neopagan subjects examined by Karin Reichenbach in Poland (chapter 12) and István Povedák in Hungary (chapter 13) belong here as well, as does the secular display of the Russia—My History parks analyzed by Ekaterina V. Klimenko (chapter 6): In all these cases the sacred operates apart from the church, that is, in the register of civil religion, which remains at the periphery of the framework as the editors set it out.

Finally, some contributors offer approaches of their own that the editors did not anticipate. Irina Paert (chapter 11) analyzes the Estonian canonizations through Hans Joas's notion of "self-sacralization" and through a distinction between the sacralization of territory and the sacralization of the person, and this set of tools proves self-sufficient, with no need to invoke the logic of "securitization." There are enough such contributions in the volume to suggest that the "sacralization of history" is a problem field rather than a settled theory, which is entirely understandable for a subject introduced into scholarly circulation on this scale for perhaps the first time.

That said, this independence of approach also produces outcomes of another kind. Denis Ljuljanović (chapter 7) raises an undeniably interesting problem, Macedonia as a contested *terra sancta*, but the chapter remains historical and descriptive. Rich in historical detail, it draws almost nothing from a theoretical apparatus, and the sacralization of territory is presented as a given, without any analysis of its mechanism. Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek (chapter 3), by contrast, in tracing the evolution of the visual commemoration of the Holodomor in Ukraine, including the copying of memorial models within the diaspora, draws instead on several theoretical models only loosely tied to her subject, while the two traditions that bear directly on it, the social history of art with its work on the replication of models and the scholarship on aniconism and abstraction, remain outside her field of vision. In both cases rich and rewarding material ends up being displayed rather than investigated.

Even so, these particular shortcomings, including errors in dating, do not overshadow the fact that the volume has brought together varied and heterogeneous sources: the museum displays of the Russia—My History parks mentioned above, canonization dossiers with rewritten hagiographies (from the so-called Transylvanian martyrs, eighteenth-century religious figures whose cult the Romanian Orthodox Church sacralized in the postsocialist period, to the Eastern Orthodox martyrs in Estonia—the fifteenth-century Saint Isidore and twentieth-century Ivan Lagovskii), Catholic martyrology together with mass pilgrimages, neopagan symbolism with its runic signs and Trianon monuments, and the theological polemic surrounding Ukrainian autocephaly. Behind this variety lies a common analytical lens, that of post-secular studies, which examine religion, history, and national identity in their interweaving. This intuition presupposes an overall picture assembled from mosaic pieces, and the breadth of coverage is in itself a distinct merit of the volume.

The volume's conclusion, too, is tellingly arranged: The two closing texts place their emphases differently within the formula of the title, "the sacralization of history in times of crises." For Piotr Kisiel (chapter 14) it is history that proves decisive: The sacred, in his account, has to do with the way a society singles out uncontested events in its own past (the Middle Ages, the Second World War), where the basis is neither religious sanctity nor a situation of crisis but the centrality of the event to historical self-awareness. For Alexander Agadjanian (chapter 15) it is crisis that proves decisive: The sacralization of history is understood as a continually renewed production of the "useful past," one set in motion by the very situation of rupture and therefore never brought to completion. The two conclusions diverge, and when each line is carried to its limit, a conceptual problem comes into view, since the notion of sacralization, distributed between history and crisis, loses its power to distinguish. But this also shows that the subject is open rather than exhausted: The volume maps out a field whose systematic elaboration still lies ahead.