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# PHOTOS AS A CULTURAL CODE OF THE ODESA REGION

## INTRODUCTION

I survey a sample of the vast cultural wealth that the project I was involved with gathered through an extensive data-collection process of nearly x`ten years. I tour in this paper a range of these cultural contexts to provide a flavour of our developing understanding of family life rituals and their capture for posterity. Thus, I establish the provenance of the project and the data through which I situate the ethnographic engagement with photography via various approaches. The richness of life-cycle rituals in the Odesa region is also explored to show how particularly ethnic Bulgarian rituals have been reflected in family photo archives.

This study has represented a profound investment in careful documentation and collection of the photos. It was a departure for ethnographic inquiry, to collect so carefully the living archive of deep cultural life that the respondents, as amateur ethnographers themselves, had established as a proto-archival resource. While so much may be already lost, they have gathered and curated their own vital clues to the vibrant past of their own people. We merely continue the work here, for them, ultimately, we feel, for Ukraine.

The archive can give insight into larger populations, but can also permit us to focus in on the rich texture of micro-histories of regions and movements by exploring their visual cultures. Thus, the paper ends with an in-depth look at one nun's existential representation of her worldview embedded in her community's religious life.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF READING PHOTOGRAPHS

John Berdzher compares photography to a major cultural phenomenon that infuses virtually every aspect of modern life (2014). Indeed, visualisation of almost all areas of life is generally one of the most prominent trends of our times. In Ukraine, as in the rest of the world, the transition to visualisation has brought an expanding range and evolution of the functions of photography, in part through a simplified

production and presentation of traditional images. Photographic images are specific representations of historical reality that are distinct from textual and spoken language. The emergence and spread of video and digital technologies have significantly reduced the use of analogue photography and influenced the ways in which images are stored and used, as well as attitudes toward their supposed authenticity. These changes have made the study of photographic practices as components of culture more relevant to understanding the ways in which memory and identity are formed and stabilised in visual contexts.

Photography appeared in 1839 and the first hundred years of photography can be regarded as an initial stage of knowledge accumulation, characterised by professionals and amateurs alike exploring the possibilities of photography as a new tool for understanding reality, and the search for its place in science and art. At first, scientists used it as proof and a way to reproduce reality or for illustrative purposes (Derzhavyn 1914; Mead 1988). The ethnographic and anthropological approaches, which consider photography as a tool for their own scientific data collection, emerged in the late nineteenth century when ethnographers began to use photographs to describe and study the ways of life, traditions, and customs of different cultural and ethnic groups (Bateson & Mead 1942). The sociological approach focused on the present moment, on explaining the social phenomena and processes depicted in photographs, the norms of behaviour, and the dynamics of their formation (Bodryiiar 1999; Boitsova 2013; Bourdieu 1990; Shtompka 2007). The historical and cultural approach has investigated not only the technical but also the cultural significance of photography (Arnkheim 2007; Fliusser 2008).

The interpretive approach analyses the content of photographs, drawing on semiotic principles such as denotation and connotation. The art criticism approach, which dominated until the mid-twentieth century, remains widespread, focused only on the specifics of artistic practices, methods and genres, and the aesthetic qualities of photography. This approach considers photography as a part of art that has taken over the functions of painting, rendering a creative view of the world (Barthes 1968; Sontag 1990). The psychophysiological approach is also worth noting here, as it involves solving psychological problems of photography in the context of the development of human memory (Nurkova 2006).

In recent decades, a multicultural approach (or multimodal analysis) has become widespread. This perspective explores the methodological possibilities of interpretation and is based on the creation of complex "texts" in which visual elements are woven in. This perspective describes how people in modern, industrialised nations have a better perception of information presented as a combination of visual and textual blocks (Batchen 2002; Dmytriuk & Prigarin 2015).

One innovative trend was the treatment of photography as a new category of historical sources for everyday life (Arnkheim 2007; Berdzher 2014; Chalfen 1987). The most recent developments in this field relate to the "digital revolution" and the transition to "post-photography", in particular due to its loss of connection with immediate reality. It is characterised by diversity and innovation in this research, much

of which focuses on the phenomenology of photography. In the case of Ukrainian historiography, creating comprehensive research – combining archives, ethnography and photography – on specific features of the development of photography in different regions of Ukraine helps us recognise the vast diversity of culturally-shaped practices across the state. In what follows, I analyse the evolution of photographic practices within the Odesa region from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century among the various ethnic groups from across this region with whom I have worked over the last decade. I trace the local differences between research cohorts through photography, and the way photographs are involved in everyday life, and the religious and secular cultures of these groups.

STUDYING PHOTOGRAPHY IN ODESA.
CAPTURING A DIVERSE PLACE: THE ODESA REGION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Modern Ukraine is a complex territorial entity, in which each of the political and cultural regions has had its own historical trajectory that developed within different, often overlapping, civilisational systems (Nahorna 2008, p. 11). The Odesa Region (*oblast'*) is a special historical and ethnographic region with a multicultural population that can be considered a kind of multifaceted frontier due to its geographical location at the intersection of different borders, cultures and historical legacies. This territory has long been a borderland between settled and nomadic populations, Christianity and Islam, traditional agricultural and industrial economies (Smolii 2014, p. 94). Today, Odesa is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in Ukraine.[1] The area falls within several historical and cultural regions within the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea; the Balkan-Danube, the Carpathian-Black Sea, Northwest Black Sea, as well as the historical borderland regions of Budzhak and the Bessarabia, straddling Ukraine, Moldova and Romania. The Odesa region is also classified into three historical areas: Southeastern Podillya, the Bug-Dniester steppe interfluve and Budzhak (the latter two are coterminous with the western part of Southern Ukraine). Historically, different parts of the current Odesa region belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Kingdom of Poland, the Tatars, the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Kingdom of Romania. In the nineteenth century, Odesa developed as the main seaport town in the region between the Southern Bug and the Dniester. As a major port city in the region, it has become a melting pot for various ethnic and religious groups to congregate and make their home there.

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[1] According to the 2001 All-Ukrainian Population Census, representatives of over 133 nationalities and ethnic groups inhabit the region, including Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, Moldovans, Jews, Gagauzes, Belarusians, Poles, Armenians, Roma, Crimean Tatars, Germans, Albanians, Romanians, Czechs, Greeks, and others [Derzhavnyi komitet statystyky Ukrainy: State Committee of Statistics of Ukraine].

CREATING A DATABASE.
NOTES ON A METHOD: FROM DATABASE TO INSIGHT

My long-term research project includes the examination of the photo archives of Odesa residents and residents from the wider region of southwestern Ukraine. I started working on it as a professional photographer and a Ph.D. researcher in the research team of the Department of Archaeology and Ethnology of Ukraine, Faculty of History, I. I. Mechnikov National University of Odesa in 2012. In accordance with the method of classifying collected archival photographs, these images can be divided into discovered sources (in the collections of archives, museums, and during extensive field trips), and created sources (ethnographic and oral history databases).

Based on the form of preservation I divide them into printed and digital sources, drawn from the introduction to scientific archival, field, and published data gathered. Especially important were sources gathered during field trips, such as collections of digital copies of photo albums, individual photographs, narrative memories about the photographic process and the use of photographs. In total, over 150 in-depth biographical, fifty-three structured, and sixty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2012–2019, in fifty-one settlements of the Odesa region, including Odesa itself and other towns of regional significance. I conducted my fieldwork both independently and as a research member and photographer of comprehensive historical and ethnographic expeditions from the I. I. Mechnikov National University of Odesa, first as a Ph.D. student there, and then undertaking supplementary self-funded research across the entirety of the Odesa region to augment the dataset, in towns from Balta, Bilyaivka, and Podilsk, to Chornomorsk and Izmail. To compare regional and local features with national specifics, interviews were also conducted in certain locations in other regions of Ukraine (namely in the Mykolaiv, Vinnytsia and Kherson regions). Information on the functioning of photographic institutions and the activities of photographers in Odesa in the second half of the nineteenth century was found in the State Archives of Odesa Oblast'. Moreover, extensive collections of photographs from the family archives of residents of these districts were found in the local history museums of Balta, Kodyma, Podilsk, and Izmail. Publications in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Odesa periodicals and local history works formed an important part of the database (Drozdovskyi 2013; Vizirov 2012). Internet sources also played a significant role.[2] Data from various specialised websites and relevant internet social networks were used to establish certain aspects of the functioning of photography in different social contexts. These included photos of respondents from their personal pages on Facebook and Instagram.

Accessing, processing and interpreting this empirical data has allowed me to explore the multi-faceted role of photography in contemporary cultures in a new

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[2]  *Derzhavnyi komitet statystyky Ukrainy. Pro kilkist ta sklad naselennia Odeskoi oblasti za pidsum-kamy Vseukrainskoho perepysu naselennia 2001 roku*, http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/nationality/odesa (accessed 11.10.2023).

State archive of Odesa region https://archive.od.gov.ua/ (accessed 11.10.2023).

light. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation makes the issue of preserving Ukrainian diverse ethno-cultural heritage more pressing as well. As such, continuing the work on identifying, preserving, and processing photographs from family albums of Odesa region residents becomes imperative for me as a photographer, an anthropologist, and a Ukrainian citizen.

Viewing family photo albums holistically involved using ethnographic and interview techniques to supplement basic elicitation strategies. Deploying this more comprehensive approach during ethnographic fieldwork among local communities allowed me, then, to better understand better how particular images could function in a given culture and context. One of the most effective ways to build communication between the researcher and the interviewee was by accessing family memories, where the conversations were usually more sincere and open. Ironically, family albums often also acted to structured interviews like a type of questionnaire, that is, structured by life itself and by converging individual biographies stored in the albums, not by the researcher.

In order to capture a wide range of interpretative variations from these sources and provide them with scholarly reflection, a special, mixed method was developed for processing extensive collections of photographic images. It comprises two components: the first was the study of the specifics of photographic creation and associated practices, and the second was the photographic heritage available in the cultural environment by converting image elements, first orally, and then into printed form. The first component concerned direct interactions with the interviewee, to capture interviewee characteristics such as gender, age, social status and level of education. Depending on the flow of the conversation, I conducted formalised or semi-formalised interviews – where I used a pre-designed questionnaire – or in-depth biographical interviews conducted with a special questionnaire based on the structure of an in-depth biographical interview framework (Hlushko 2008). In addition to viewing photographs together with the respondents, I covered many thematic issues that had been developed before the interviews, a list of mandatory topics was developed.[3] During my fieldwork, I also set the criteria for selection: by time of origin (photographs that belong to a specific historical period); by composition; and by a complex processing of photographs of a given locality or ethnic group. Occasionally I asked interviewees to choose their favourite photos from a family album.

The second component of research concerned the recording and description of private photo collections, and it consisted of two stages. The first involved obtaining information, and the second stage involved deciphering it. Where possible, different people asked questions, took notes and took photos to avoid distracting the interviewee from the story. For description and decoding, I used the methodology proposed by visual anthropologists for analysing an image and its corresponding text, which includes: description (technical characteristics and description of the image's plot), reconstruction (the analysis of the meanings of textual and visual materials

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[3] For example, an ethnographer may be interested in the problem of the ban on photography in certain local cultures.

and the reconstruction of the cultural context) and socio-cultural interpretation (interpretation of the symbolic and semantic content of the image) (Dmytriuk & Prigarin 2015, p. 1420).

Considering each family photo album as an object of archival studies, i.e. as a mono-document that is a single archival record (Kasian 2016), I found it necessary to draw up a full archival description for each photo album. This description included external and internal information about the document. The external information also consisted of the following: archive (or assigned) number; title (if any); type of album; personal data of the album owner; number of pages and photos; and their chronology.



Photograph 1. Odesa, 1910, Staged family portrait in Gottlieb's photo studio (archive of the author).

Typological analysis procedures such as classification, categorisation, and periodisation were used to organise the collected material. The classification was carried out according to several criteria: the form of storage (printed, electronic media); the nature of the image (portrait photographs include individual, couples, collective; photographs of material culture objects include houses, clothes, tools and crafts; tourist photographs; photographs of everyday life and festive ceremonial events; photographs of religious feasts); places of residence (city or village) and locations. Family photo albums were also divided by genre into general, children's, school, demobilisation (dedicated to military service), wedding albums, and others.

The internal content description included a chronological description of the photos. Before describing them, the photos were numbered in order (from left to right, top to bottom). The "five W's rule" were used when completing the description: who (who is in the photo?); what (what is there?); why (why was this photo taken?); when (when it was taken?); and where (where it was taken?). That is, all available data were recorded: place; date; filmmaker; description of the event or plot; and actors or agents. When filling in the description, as much as possible was discovered about each photo: who took it and when, why, where, etc. When it was not possible (due to time restraints or technical feasibility) to capture the entire album, the most characteristic or oldest photos were selected for scanning or photographing. Both sides of the photo were scanned because the back (mat) often contained various marks and inscriptions with useful information.

Quantitative processing of such a large amount of data required the use of a sampling method, allowing us to select some elements from the overall pool and form a representative sample, and to extend the results of processing the sample data to make generalisations. This method can be used to find out which practices are common, and which are taboo in certain communities. With the help of comparative and content analysis, it was possible to establish characteristics of given worldviews and identify their manifestations in photographs, as well as to reconstruct the historical and ethno-cultural features of the photographs (Prigarin 2011, p. 440). For example, funeral rituals have traditionally been recorded earlier and more often in the Balkan populations of the Odessa region than among Ukrainians, Russians, and Germans, and more frequently among villagers than urbanites. Researchers also found examples that documented different traditional forms of Bulgarian wedding rituals over time. These examples particularly showcased such rituals from the central Odesa region, which southern Bulgarians have not practised. In each album, it is possible to see both modern and traditional features and trace the specifics of the genre composition.

To study the characteristics of creating photography as an everyday phenomenon in ethnic cultures, I propose to use semiotic analysis to focus on systems of signs that carry cultural meaning. After all, an anthropologist is interested not only in photographs of events but also in the events of photographing. For example, during the Second World War, and for years after, brides used ordinary, everyday clothes for their weddings due to financial constraints. Wedding dresses could be of different colours, even multi-coloured, where only a veil with a wreath would act as the "sign" of the bride's wedding dress. In such a case, the semiotic approach is useful for comparing the values of different groups and their cultural codes.

Photographs from family albums of residents from the Odesa region can be used to study the microsocial spaces of different ethnic and religious cultures of Ukrainians, Old Believers, Greeks, Poles, Bulgarians, Albanians, Gagauzes, Moldovans, Roma, among others, living in rural and urban areas. While analysing these photographs it was clear to me that examining them without acknowledging the context of their creation and functioning would prevent us from determining the ethnicity of the subjects depicted. Ethnical belonging is, conversely, something difficult to

understand at first glance; we must carefully read various cultural codes to reveal it. Nevertheless, with a sufficiently nuanced approach to the images and the material sources, a number of carefully preserved family photo albums – approximately thirty or fourty as it turned out in my fieldwork – from one village or town became a unique, multifaceted source for the study of micro-history (family history) and a fascinating reconstruction of everyday life not only of these villages and towns but the entire Odesa region.

INTERLUDE: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF
PHOTOGRAPHY TRADITIONS IN THE ODESA REGION
(MID-NINETEENTH – EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY)

Here I distinguish three historical stages in the evolution of photography: professional or occupational (traditional); amateur (related to the Soviet period); and contemporary. The first period, which began in the second half of the nineteenth century and ended in the 1920s, was characterised by elitist photographic practices. In terms of the studied region, the first customers of photographic products came from the Odesa "beau monde", aristocrats, merchants, and wealthy urban citizens, who used photographs to create and supplement their own portrait galleries. As photography became accepted by the upper classes, photographs were commissioned not only as an alternative to painted portraits, but also as a way to capture and display status.

In this stage, the photographer was seen as a bearer of secret knowledge and mystery for customers; the photographs were mostly staged (taken in a studio), and created by professional photographers. By the early twentieth century, the practice of periodic family visits to the photographer by entire families to create family portraits had become widespread. For example, one photo from 1910 (Photograph 1) typifies the tradition of family photography as practised by a wealthy German family living in Odesa. We see a mother with her children and their godparents. Although the photographer at that time acted as a scriptwriter and fully controlled the process, the clients required him to show the attributes commonly accepted for their status in the photograph, sometimes even bringing certain items with them. Photographs had to emphasise social position and point to the income level of the subject. For this purpose, various backgrounds and accessories were used. The very fact of visiting a photographer was significant and elevated the status of the customer.

Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the first photographic studios, often divisions of Odesa businesses, appeared in remote suburbs and towns. Until the 1920s, the practice of domestic photography had been largely regarded by peasants as a whim or as entertainment for the rich. The prosperous social strata of the countryside, priests, tavern keepers, teachers, etc., did, however, visit photographers when visiting an urban centre, as evidenced by photographs from rural family albums dating from the 1880s and later. From the 1920s on, though, with easier access to more rural studios, local peasants, for example,

from the village of Znamianka – Katarzhyno (which belonged to the Tiraspol district until 1920) would visit photo studios in Yanivka, Odesa, and Tiraspol. In the village albums of this period, we found a number of typical group family photographs. All of them were staged: older family members are sitting, sometimes holding small children or grandchildren in their arms, and adult children are standing behind them.

The next, amateur period, from the 1920s to the 1990s (referred to hereafter as the "Soviet" period), is characterised by the development of a photography that began in the last pre-revolutionary years. Anyone could take pictures if they mastered photographic techniques, and the photographer became an active actor in photographic practices. It should be noted, too, that in the southern Odesa region, representatives of the clergy (priests, deacons) of various Christian confessions were engaged in photography. The development of photography in the late 1950s and 1960s was associated with a clear division of photography into amateur and commercial, professional photography. The democratisation of social life, which had been observed since the late 1980s, led to the polarisation and separation of family and work/leisure time. In urban families' albums, there are photos of picnics, city walks, fishing, etc. New household items, such as a new car, a fashionable dress, or furniture, triggered a desire to be captured on film. Since Odesa is a famous tourist Black Sea resort, every Odesa family typically has pictures at the seaside or on the beach.

The last period begins in the late twentieth century and involves the coexistence of modern (digital) and traditional (analogue) forms of photographic images. The transition from film (analogue) cameras, which would not allow one to immediately see the final snapshot, to digital cameras, has meant that photographers can take advantage of not only taking a photo instantly, but also to evaluate it, delete a bad image, and publish a good picture on social media. Today, cameras are integrated into all popular digital devices and in the twenty-first century, almost everyone can take a vast number of pictures instantly without asking permission from photographed subjects, an emergent ethical and practical context for contemporary photography.

## LIFE CYCLE RITUALS IN FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS

At the beginning of the twentieth century, photography emerged as an important part of many ceremonial practices, and from the second half of the twentieth century it became indispensable, forming a certain "photographic ritual", and in some cases even canonically depicting events like weddings and funerals. The photographer in effect became an obligatory and active participant in many rites of passage. The proliferation of amateur practices over time has led to the emergence of a new type of source, conventionally called vernacular photography. Photographs that reflect the ritual and its process have acquired the status of official public documentary, providing visual evidence that can be considered a unique source for a detailed study of historically-ephemeral social processes in general. Photo albums of residents from

the Odesa region convincingly demonstrate that these were the most frequently photographed subjects. Rural and urban spaces did not always have the same photographic canon, which was due to a variety of factors, such as the availability and proliferation of photographic practices at different times, and according to changing rules, and taboos among certain ethnic groups.

Family photographic rituality and formality primarily involve recording the most important rituals of family life that accompany the main life-transitions; births, weddings and funerals. Every family album contains photos that capture the main events of the first months and years of a child's life. Since delivery rituals have always belonged to the domestic sphere, however, the birth of a child and accompanying rites were not photographed. During the Soviet era, it became a common tradition to photograph a baby with its parents, close relatives and friends at the doorstep of the maternity hospital when the mother and the baby were being taken home. In fact, for many, these were the first pictures of their lives. Such photos are quite schematic, and their style has remained unchanged to this day.

Some significant changes and transformations began at the beginning of the twenty-first century when smartphones made it more possible to take pictures of the first days of a child's life. The special feature of these photographs is that they are rarely printed; instead, the mother sends them directly to the father, relatives and friends. For a long time, there was a widespread taboo against showing a child and his or her photos to outsiders until the age of one month; even with the advent of social media, some respondents noted that they did not post photos of their own children until a certain age (one year or three months). Since most of the owners of the photo albums we studied were Christians, the first transitional rite in a child's life that was photographed was related to religious initiation, namely baptism. In Soviet times, though, when baptisms were prohibited, parents did not dare invite a photographer or take pictures of the ceremony themselves. In the post-perestroika period, Christening photographs began to appear in family albums on a massive scale. The tradition of photographing this rite simultaneously became commonplace both in towns and villages. Other important events in a child's life, related to both socialisation and personal history, were also subject to "mandatory" photography. Special children's albums were even created to document the main rituals and which contained amateur photographs from the child's everyday life: bathing, first steps, first tooth, first day of school, graduation, etc.

The wedding photographic canon was also subject to transformation. For a long time, the staged studio portrait was the only photograph to document the wedding event. It was common practice to take a "portrait" photograph after the wedding, where sometimes the time between the date of the wedding and the visit to the studio was more than a month. The newlyweds could wear their best weekend clothes rather than wedding outfits, which was especially true in rural areas, particularly in the post-Second World War period. It was in the second half of the twentieth century that events on the wedding day began to be recorded in greater detail, thanks to the work of photographers employed at civil registry offices.

Photographers who worked in registry offices during the Soviet era note that there were certain clichés: portraits of the newlyweds before the wedding, the wedding itself (the newlyweds and witnesses), the exchange of rings, and group photos with guests. When we consider the period from the 1950s to the 1980s, we can talk about the dominance of the Soviet canon of wedding photographs. In the city, this involved photographing the main moments of the wedding ritual at the registry office, the wedding procession walking through the city being photographed near the monuments, or studio shooting, and the banquet. Portraits of the newlyweds and group portraits with guests against the backdrop of memorable places during the wedding walk (Odesa Opera House, Teatralnaya Square, Potemkin Stairs, Duke's Monument, etc.), which took place after the marriage ceremony, were *de rigueur*. Wedding photos with local tourist landmarks in the background are recorded in almost every family album. There is evidence from respondents of a well-established tradition of handing out printed wedding photos to guests on the second day of the wedding. As one respondent, a former photographer of village weddings noted, the photos of the first day had to be developed and printed overnight, as some of the guests were not local and were leaving for home the following afternoon.



Photograph 2. Pasitseli village, Odesa region. A Ukrainian family. Photo after the wedding in church, during the Romanian occupation, 1942 (archive of the author, Odesa region).

There was a distinct canon for photographs of village weddings in the Soviet period too. The ritual actions and the corresponding attributes and symbols that reflected a local or ethnic flavour were an indispensable part of the photographs. A custom often encountered in Ukrainian village-wedding photos is the so-called "wedding train", that is, a wedding procession walking through the village after the wedding. Until the 1950s, horse-drawn carts were used as part of the procession, and since the second half of the twentieth century, cars have been used. More recently a motorcade of cars is used, decorated with ribbons, flowers, and dolls on the hood. The wealthier the family hosting the wedding, the more impressive was the "train" (or convoy), and its passage was accompanied by music and songs. In the early twenty-first century, methods related to the transition to digital photography and the use of photo editors such as Photoshop became increasingly popular in wedding photography, subtly changing the parameters of the canon again.

In the 1850s and 1860s, a new fashion for posthumous photography emerged in Western Europe. The obligatory list of services provided by photo studios included taking pictures of the dead, who were posed and portrayed as if they were still alive. The most common photographs were of children, who were captured with a favourite toy in their hands and other symbols of their everyday life surrounding them. Sometimes the dead were even depicted as alive by using retouching to "open" their eyes.

Less typically, we find variations in how children are depicted. We have, for instance, only two examples of photographs from the mid-twentieth century in which deceased children were not depicted in a coffin. According to the photographs' owners, both were created as mementos for the parents, as they had not taken any photos with the children during their lifetime. The first photo was taken in the south Odesa region, in the village of Vladychen, Bolhrad district, showing a small, deceased child with his mother next to him. The second photo was collected in the northern Odesa region, in the village of Demydove, Bereziv district. It depicts a mother with two children, one child deceased, the other alive. This latter photo shows the final farewell. According to the information provided by the respondents, there were no other photographs of the deceased child, so they decided to make a single posthumous one. Such scenes are thus atypical for the Odesa region and are an exception rather than a tradition, even though they reveal much about photographic techniques there.

The tradition of photographing funeral rites was more typical for villages than for cities. As a rule, if such photographs were found in photo albums of urbanites, their owners came from rural backgrounds. I have a whole array of sources from the southern Budzhak region, where the tradition of photographing funerals became widespread during the Soviet period.[4] Some of our respondents, mostly from the Old Believers community, an Eastern Christian sect who settled in the region in the early eighteenth century, testified to a long tradition of sending funeral photos by post to relatives unable to attend the funeral. Another death-related custom is the

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[4] One of the respondents noted that she had seen a whole album dedicated to the funeral of just one person, but unfortunately, I was unable to see it.

marking of a deceased person with a cross, placed in a photograph either over the deceased person or on their forehead. The date of death would be indicated on the reverse side. The popularity of the genre of the funeral photo was observed only for a few decades, until by the end of the twentieth century, the practice became less common. Today, the funeral rite is not documented photographically. The most recent photographs I have seen date back to the 1980s.[5]

In addition to being taken during the ritual, photographs can capture places before, after, and even instead of it, due to photography's primary purpose, to capture the outcome of the transition. For instance, I recorded a case in the village of Pasytseli, Balta district, Odesa region, where in 1942, during the Romanian occupation, the new authorities forced a couple to get married two years after their (Soviet) wedding. This fact is captured in a photograph of the "newlyweds". The "bride" is wearing an ordinary dress, but the wedding candles testify to the ceremony. The couple actually celebrated their married life from the moment of the wedding and treated this photograph with respect as a historical document (Photograph 2).[6]

### ETHNO-CULTURAL EXPRESSION OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICES

One of the peculiarities of photography is its ability to reflect through visual codes and symbols the spiritual, symbolic culture of a nation, its psychology, worldview, ways of thinking, and aesthetic tastes. Photos from family albums provide information about how much tradition has been preserved in different periods too. My research indicates that photographs documented a number of elements of traditional rituals, particularly specific features of festive meals, folk weddings and festive costumes, dance and music traditions, for instance. For cultures inhabiting the Odesa region, one of the regional and local peculiarities is the preservation of traditional norms and practices among certain ethno-cultural groups (Old Believers, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, etc.), as evidenced by the distinctive symbols portrayed in the photographs. For example, certain attributes of the Old Believer culture, like icons, bread, *kibalka* (traditional headscarf), are regularly visible in many photos. The Ukrainian context includes traditional, embroidered towels (*rushnyky*), icons, wedding candles, or a wedding loaf. It is characteristic of Ukrainian weddings that the parents are the main masters of ceremonies during the wedding. Parents blessed their children with "farewell" bread and icons decorated with "blessed" towels, which were embroidered

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[5] At the time photography was developed in the region, the festive culture included a set of religious, royal, church parish, military, city, and folk holidays. Some of these festivals had disappeared or were banned before photographers could begin to record them, though. We did, however, come across cards documenting the celebration of Christmas and Easter from when the ban was rescinded.

[6] Looking at contemporary photographs from the family albums of Odesa region's residents, one notices the diminishing and evolving holiday traditions from Soviet times to the socio-cultural space of modern Ukraine, where the emphasis had been on official public events, while personal history gradually comes to the fore in contemporary culture.

with traditional motifs (*rushnyky*). For the Old Believers, the priest played a leading role in the wedding, and icons were obligatory and occupied a central position in the wedding processions even in Soviet times.

Bulgarian group photos often depict wedding ceremonies, specifically the ritual of transporting the bride's dowry to the house of the bridegroom.[7] In the villages in Bulgaria such as Znamenka and Blagoevo, for instance, the bride comes out onto the porch, looking through a mirror that lies on a plate with wheat, coins, sweets, and three apples (sometimes with an onion and apples); one of them has an iron coin (Photograph 3). "After bowing to the guests, she scatters all the treats from the dish in different directions. She throws one apple to the right, one to the left, and the third, the most beautiful, in front of her. After that, she takes five steps and returns to the house with the support of a boy from among her relatives (Dmytriuk 2019b). Based on my research it seems that Ukrainians who lived in the ethnically Bulgarian villages for a long time adopted this rite. But similar evidence is not to be found among the "northern" Bulgarians of Budzhak, so we can conclude that this rite is based on authentic Bulgarian features associated with the colonists' ancestral homeland (Katarzhino and Blagoevo were founded by Eastern Thracians from south-eastern Bulgaria) (Vizirov 2012). The custom of the bride coming out on the porch with a mirror and a tray is confirmed by numerous photographs and demonstrates cultural variation: the rite is typical for Bulgarians in the north of the region and is not known to Bulgarians in the southern (Bessarabian) part.

Instead, among the Bulgarians of the south of the region: villages Holytsia, Krynychne, Vasylivka, Zhovtneve (Karakurt) we found photographs depicting the veneration of St. Trifon, whose day is celebrated on 14 February. In Bulgarian Orthodoxy, he is considered the patron saint of vineyards, so the main ritual of this day was the pruning of vines, which was performed only by men. Interestingly, this custom was adapted to socialist life during the Soviet era and even continued to be reproduced in collective farms.

As a result of various factors (urbanisation, secularisation, changes in economic situation, etc.), some rituals have disappeared from the traditional culture of various ethnic and religious groups of the region, or have been reduced or modernised. Thus these efforts to track and trace of the provenance of the photographic memory of the rituality of the Odesa region ensures that the vast cultural richness of these people remain evident and accessible. Such photographic practises also highlight the dazzling complexity that Ukraine contains, making projects like these more than academic exercises; such documentation may well become part of the struggle for Ukraine in time.

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[7]  Today, the Bulgarian diaspora in Odesa region is the largest and accounts for 73% of all Bulgarians living in Ukraine (Yevtukh 2004, p. 56). The most densely-populated area is Bolhrad district, created in 1940 after Bessarabia was annexed to the USSR. The history and everyday life of the Bessarabian Bulgarians living in southwest Odesa differ significantly from the "northern" group.

Photograph 3. Znamianka village (Katarzhyno), Odesa region. A Bulgarian family wedding ceremony, 1976 (archive of the author).

## THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES IN HOME INTERIORS

This study also investigated evolving traditions around the use and function of photographs in the homes of residents in the Odesa region over 150 years as expressive components of folk life. It considered factors that influenced this process: living conditions, social class environment, ethnographic and territorial features. In contemporary Odesa urban culture, family photography that reveals the interiors of private homes is practically absent. In rural areas since the mid-twentieth century, in contrast, the interior photo has been playing a leading role in signifying home comfort, and still functions as a cult object, along with family icons.

Studying the correlation between the practical and symbolic functions of photographs over time suggests that photographs in home spaces function not only as visual (iconic) evidence but that they also have different symbolic meanings. The

multi-ethnic arrays of photographs we studied reproduce local models of this phe-nomenon in contemporary living spaces. I have considered the use of photographs in housing interiors, private albums, and religious practices, outlined trends in con-temporary photographic practices and demonstrated how visual images form part of a system of constructing social identity. I have traced clear differences in the social functions of photography in various periods. The function of the photography in the first period (ca. 1850–1930) was to "capture the moment", preserve (primarily family) memory and reflect the times and the people in them. After the digital revolution, however, contemporary photographs began to reflect everyday life in social relations and interactions too. Digital communication in everyday life has led to the fact that the functions of the family album are now almost entirely transferred to virtual space, and the emphasis has shifted from capturing significant events in family life to the field of individual practices. The relative simplicity of handling a photographic image and the possibility of computer-aided design have led to photography losing its single author and has become a collective work.

The earliest dated portrait that I have managed to find was taken in 1900. It depicts two men in military uniforms with the inscription, "In memory of military service". The photograph was taken in a photo studio, as evidenced by the stillness and static poses. The photograph itself is in the centre of a coloured illustration featuring military insignia. It was taken it seems for the purpose of sending it to relatives as a memento of military service. The recipients of the photo are displayed on the wall, as evidenced by the nail hole in the wall. Such storage, without a frame and glass, suggests that the customers were middle-class. In rural communities of the region during the Soviet era, photographs were often hung above or pinned to the carpet that was erected on the wall (a common practice in Soviet times). The presence of a carpet and a large-format portrait in a village house was a sign of a family's wealth, but also its secular or atheistic belonging. During my fieldwork, I observed wedding portraits of the owners, their ancestors, or descendants in the corners or above the bed on the wall in almost every village house. The frequency of placing such photographs in an honourable, prominent place, sometimes next to icons, suggests that the photographs were equated with family icons. This way of using the photographs is particularly common among Bulgarians, Moldovans, and Old Believers in Budzhak, and Ukrainians in the northern Odesa region.

THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

As part of the research, I investigated photographs of religious practices as well as how people engaged in religious rituals were captured, various religious attributes, and the use of photographs in these practices to sanctify public and private spaces.[8]

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[8] One of the signs of Sovietisation was the state's monopolisation of all spheres of life, including religion, which was manifested by imposing atheism on rural, agricultural communities deeply rooted in religion.

Folk or vernacular religious practices often entail a rather free interpretation of (Orthodox) church teachings. Since believers value the essence of an image and its "divine" power, as they believe, rather than how this image was made.

The secularisation of everyday life in Soviet Ukraine has given rise to various blended forms of religiosity. In their post-Soviet efforts to recreate the Christian world, various groups of Christians have endowed photographic images of icons with the same power as hand-painted ones (Dmitryuk & Prigarin 2019, p. 100). This substitution has taken place gradually and unevenly, with local differences in ethnic traditions, and with a characteristic change in form and function.



Photograph 4. Odesa region, Podil district, "Novyi Rai", religious community "Innokentievtsi", 2014. The house of Mother Seraphima (archive of the author).

During my fieldwork, I documented the amateur photography of religious practices and the associated photographic elements, participants and objects, and studied the use of photographs in such practices and how they can become a tool for sacralising space. In the churches and home shrines of the Lipovans[9] in Bessarabia, there are still many near-iconographic photographs of Orthodox metropolitan bishops, bishops, monks, and priests, as well as photographs of diocesan meetings, congresses, or ordinations of mentors, and isolated examples of religious processions and church festivals. In general, photographing the consecration of churches, cathedrals, and meetings was almost ritualistic for this group. Similar phenomena were found

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[9] One of the sub-ethnic groups of Old Believers.

among Orthodox practitioners. Their iconostases (screens where icons are hung) contained photographs of church holidays, places of pilgrimage, and portraits of clergy. In contrast, Roman Catholics practiced having portraits made after the rite of confirmation.

Church parish feasts in honour of parish patron saints or local church holidays, called *khram* ("temple") and *sobor* ("cathedral"), occupy a special place in the ritual calendar for mainly Old Believers and Orthodox communities, and attracted both local amateur photographers and visiting professionals. These holidays continue to be celebrated in grand fashion, and neighbours, priests and church choir singers from other parishes are regularly invited for a festive meal in the churchyard. It was believed that the more guests who visited a parish house on this day, the better the family's life would be the following year. Most of those who had left the region for work, or emigrated permanently, planned return visits to their homeland to coincide with these feast days. Thus, photographing such events had a socialising function, contributing to cohesion, formation of ethnic identity, and collective memory, as the photos documented people who no longer lived in the village, and people collected such photographs as souvenirs.

Using a regional example of one religious sect, the quasi-monastic, utopian community of followers of the Innochentism movement in Podillya district of Odesa region (*rayon*), I studied the use of photographic prints as sacred objects. Communities of followers of the Innochentism movement are now widespread in Romania, Moldova, and in the neighbouring territories of Ukraine (see Kapaló 2019).

The Odesa region is thus the historical and religious centre of the Innochentism sect's formation (Dmytriuk 2019a). My colleagues from Odesa university and I travelled to visit them in the Kotovskyi district and Baltskyi districts of the Odesa region, subsequently adding Podilskyi district in 2015 to our itinerary. Photograph 4 is a regional example of the use of photography as a "mega-photo-iconostasis", captured in July 2014 during my fieldwork in the Innochentism community Odesa. This community lives in the village they call a "New Paradise" (*Novyi Raj*), on the outskirts of the Lipetsk (Kuibyshev) village council. I found a multiple usage of photos as icons in the house of the self-styled Mother Seraphima. Until her death in 2015, she lived in one of the small rural houses built close to a local former monastery, an ardent apologist for her faith, calling herself *matushka* ("mother") or *ihumenya* ("abbess"). The place where she lived is called "the Garden of Eden", "the New Jerusalem", and "Golgotha" by community members and it was here that a specially-built underground monastery was located from 1913–1920, almost 100,000 sq. m. of underground utilities connected up, with hundreds of cells for monks and nuns, and three churches. Above the monastery was a garden with an orchard surrounded by farm buildings, chapels, and a cemetery. The monastery itself was built by the followers of Innochentism to save the righteous during the Last Judgement, and so Innochenitist supporters called the monastery "the New Paradise".

Ivan Levizor (in monastic life, Innochentiy, hence the name of this sect and the community) was born in 1875 in the village of Kosoutsi, Bessarabia province

(territory of current Moldova). In 1908, Levizor was invited to a monastery in Balta, where he took the vows and became Hieromonk Innochenity. In 1908-1909, his staged miracles of healing in Balta sparked a massive obsession with faith in the new saint, the so-called "Balta psychosis" (Sushynskyi 2005, p.189). After being exiled to Kamianets-Podilskyi in Western Ukraine and then to the Murom Monastery in Russia, in 1917 Innochentiy appeared in Lipetsk and returned to active preaching. He died in 1919.

In 1980, Neonila Safonova learned about his teachings from Father Nektarii (Archimandrite Nikodim) and decided to move to Lipetsk, closer to the monastery, where she took the name Seraphima (Dmytriuk 2019a). Almost all the walls and corners of Seraphima's house were covered with many icons, reproductions, and photographs. Her personal photographs (photos of herself at different ages and photos of her relatives) were placed in the same row as images of saints, symbolising her involvement in the sacred sphere. The presence of photographic portraits of Innochentiy, and amateur photographs of the apostles and his followers indicates the magical presence of the saints in the space of the house. According to Seraphima [personal communication], she "communicates with the saints" through photographs. A large number of reproductions, cut-outs, and non-canonical images of Orthodox saints, which are also photographs in terms of their technical characteristics, were documented by my colleagues and me in her house. Innochentist believers perceive such images to be true icons, despite the absence of the usual attributes of sacred images.

For a person from the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, such photographs are a kind of marker not only of memories but also of ritual practices. It is significant that in the context of non-canonical beliefs, artisanal and amateur photographs are more in demand, playing the role of coded transmission, objects of worship, objects of interpretation, and contestation.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, photographic practices have acquired everyday cultural and practical forms that were naturally embedded in the infrastructure of each ethnic group in the Odesa region. The archaeographic evidence of the origin and development of photography in the Odesa region is helpful in reconstructing this part of the region's past. Indirectly, they allow us to reveal the specifics of the transition from photographic art to craftsmanship, the functioning of photographic genres and compositions, their dissemination to different strata of society, etc.

Since its founding, the city of Odesa itself has been a powerful centre of cultural modernisation. The analysis of the multicultural variation in family photographs has shown that photographs from family albums provide information about the degree of preservation of traditions within and across periods. A photograph is not only a document that records an event (for example acquisition of a new status) or a source for studying rites of passage, but also an integral part of modern ritual practices.

The studied museum collections of photographs, materials from periodicals, as well as local, historical, printed sources (journals, newspapers, reports) contribute to the categorisation and restoration of urban and local photography customs. They allow us to conduct historical and anthropological comparisons and reconstruct secular and religious festive practices among city dwellers and rural residents. The data collected during my own fieldwork allow me to comprehensively establish the general characteristics of a history and anthropology of photographic almost from the moment of photography's appearance in the region to the present day. Thus I have been able to analyse ethno-regional features of photographic practices among the multi-ethnic population of the Odesa region, and to point out both general and specific features. The processed photographic materials allows one to identify and explore the specific features of the historical past, traditional identity, and interactions among representatives of different nationalities as well as the mutual influence of cultures.

The patterns recorded in the Odesa region reflect both the traditions of individual ethno-cultural groups and the general photographic practices over the entire history of photography. The discovered original and newly-produced corpus of sources significantly expand the source of historical and ethnological research in the South of Ukraine, and the work on their identification and preservation continues.

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VIKTORIIA DMYTRIUK

PHOTOS AS A CULTURAL CODE OF THE ODESA REGION

**Key words:** photography, amateur photography, family photo album, ethnocultural variability, field fixation methods, sociocultural anthropology, visual sources, Odesa region

In Ukraine, the transition to visualization is observed in the expansion of the range, change of functions, simplification of production and demonstration of the traditional photo image. Personal and family photographs play an important role in cultural memory, and working with photographs offers a particularly productive way to understand social and cultural aspects of memory. In the article

proposed, I research the variability of the functions of photography in polyethnic and multicultural region of Southern Ukraine, taking as the main example the city of Odesa and the Odesa region. I seek to reproduce and describe the historical and cultural dynamics of the development of photographic practices in Odesa from art to craft, and eventually to everyday practice from the middle of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century. I aim to reveal the ethno-cultural expressiveness of photographic practices among the multi-ethnic population of Odesa, to point out general and specific features, to investigate local differences of ethnographic groups, structures and everyday practices, features of material and spiritual culture, socio-cultural norms. During 2012–2019 independently or taking part in complex ethnographic expeditions of I. I. Mechnikov Odesa National University, I have conducted more than 150 in-depth biographical, 53 focused interviews and 68 semi-formalized interviews in 51 towns and villages of Odesa region, including Odesa, Balta, Bilyaivka, Podils'k, Chornomors'k and Izmail.

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