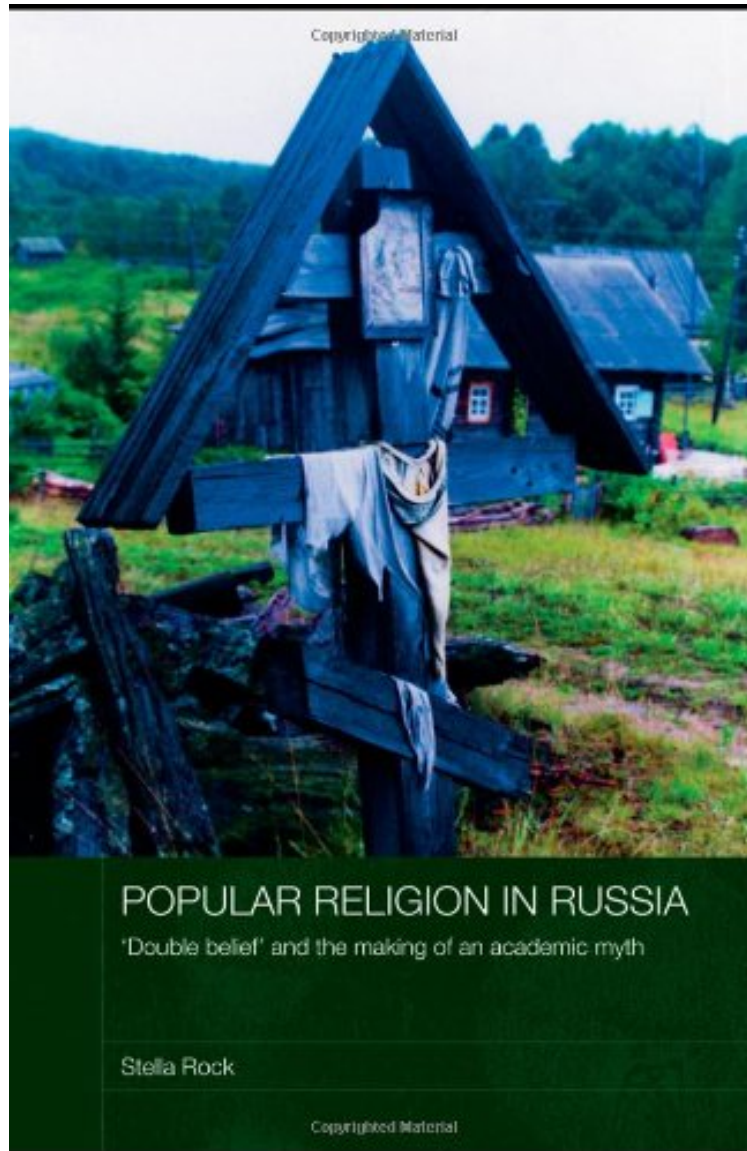


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Popular Religion in Russia: 'Double Belief' and the Making of an Academic Myth (Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe)

Stella Rock

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Stella Rock : Popular Religion in Russia: 'Double Belief' and the Making of an Academic Myth (Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would

be worth my time, and all praised *Popular Religion in Russia: 'Double Belief' and the Making of an Academic Myth* (Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe):

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating study with wide implications
By Dr. Richard M. Price
The aim of this book is not to offer a full description of the practices of Russian popular (or folk) religion, though it contains many vivid references to customs often associated with major Christian feasts, such as bonfires, bathing, drinking, ribald songs and the like, some of which were probably more than mere jollification and contained a magical element. Instead, the book provides a critical analysis of the concept of 'double belief' ('dvoeverie'), namely that Russian popular religion was a mixture of Christian and pagan elements, and that the strength of the pagan element distinguishes Russian religion from the Christianity of other lands, where folk traditions were less robust and normative Christianity more dominant. Dr Rock shows that the notion that this was already perceived by medieval churchmen, and defined by them with the word 'dvoeverie', is a misconception: the word was used rather to refer to wavering and uncertainty (and sometimes to toleration of Latin Christianity), not to a combination of Christianity and paganism. What rather we find in early Russian texts is a recurrent rhetoric on the part of the educated clergy that condemned practices which in their view were unacceptable as 'pagan' or 'demonic'. In a wide-ranging final chapter she shows how this concern was equally strong in western Christianity, from late antiquity to the early modern period, and does not provide evidence of Russian particularity. The book brings out tellingly how analysis of the mixture of Christian and non-Christian elements in European culture has been vitiated by restrictive and often anachronistic notions of what can count as Christian. Most often, what a historian might categorize as a 'pagan survival' was not perceived by those who practised it to be anything of the kind. To define correct Christian practice in narrow terms, according to the convictions of a religious elite -- whether monastic or reformed or rationalistic --, and then stigmatize other forms of religious practice as semi-pagan is simply a refusal to understand.

This book dispels the widely-held view that paganism survived in Russia alongside Orthodox Christianity, demonstrating that 'double belief', dvoeverie, is in fact an academic myth. Scholars, citing the medieval origins of the term, have often portrayed Russian Christianity as uniquely muddled by paganism, with 'double-believing' Christians consciously or unconsciously preserving pagan traditions even into the twentieth century. This volume shows how the concept of dvoeverie arose with nineteenth-century scholars obsessed with the Russian 'folk' and was perpetuated as a propaganda tool in the Soviet period, colouring our perception of both popular faith in Russian and medieval Russian culture for over a century. It surveys the wide variety of uses of the term from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, and contrasts them to its use in modern historiography, concluding that our modern interpretation of dvoeverie would not have been recognized by medieval clerics, and that 'double-belief' is a modern academic construct. Furthermore, it offers a brief foray into medieval Orthodoxy via the mind of the believer, through the language and literature of the period.

About the Author
Stella Rock is Senior Research Fellow in History at the University of Sussex. Her publications on Russian Orthodoxy span the medieval and post-Soviet periods, and her research interests focus on popular faith (in the broadest sense) and the relationship between religious and national identity.