

East against the West?

Representations of war in egodocuments of British and Russian participants of Crimean War 1853-1856.

Doctoral thesis

Mgr. et Mgr. Petr Wohlmuth

ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis adheres to genre of historical anthropology of war and military. It draws on two theoretical sources. The first consists of paradigms of cultural and social anthropology, more specifically symbolic historical anthropology in the tradition of Geertz, Darnton, Sahlins and others. The second represents the cultural history of war in the tradition of Keegan, Hanson, Lynn or Isabel Hull. The research question is focused on the culture of war during the Crimean War, especially during the Crimean campaign and siege and defense of Sevastopol in 1854/55, as its variables were represented in egodocuments of its Russian and British participants. Crimean War has been the subject of many historiographic texts, but most of them were essentially conservative, relying on national, ideological and civilizational labeling instead of deeper analysis. This doctoral thesis analyses in detail first the formal order of the above-mentioned culture of war, but more importantly, it analyses using the method of thick description its logico-meaningful relations, the hierarchy of levels of meaning in the sense how the culture of war represented the proverbial symbolic system, the web of meanings, within which actors existed. Western and especially Anglo-Saxon conservative literature often labels the Crimean War as an absurd and almost inexplicable conflict. The historical anthropological analysis of the Crimean War, however, poses an opportunity to understand the conflict in deeper manner. The alleged inexplicable character of the conflict derived mainly from the fact, that key cultural symbols and variables within the culture of war on the British side from many reasons included a dominant cultural complex of desperation and shame, which resulted from a grueling and protracted character of the conflict, including numerous losses. The final battle, almost suppressed in both British conservative literature and military culture, represented a major failure on part of British troops. The text also critically opposes the tendency of Russian literature to employ rather irresponsibly various civilizational and religious labeling. It is demonstrated that this level is almost completely missing in surviving contemporary Russian egodocuments. On the Russian side, the dominant cultural complex of fatalist desperation was not ideologically aimed against the Allies, but represented a primary response to the premier and major use of modern technological and infrastructural innovations in war, which caused an unprecedented escalation of military mechanics of the conflict and extremely high losses on the Russian side. The thesis also deployed the theory of emergency religion, created by Michael Snape. This phenomena represented a primary instrument of cultural modulation of the generally fatalistic and despairing experience of great majority of combatants.