



## **THE SOUNDSCAPE OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH ETHICS**

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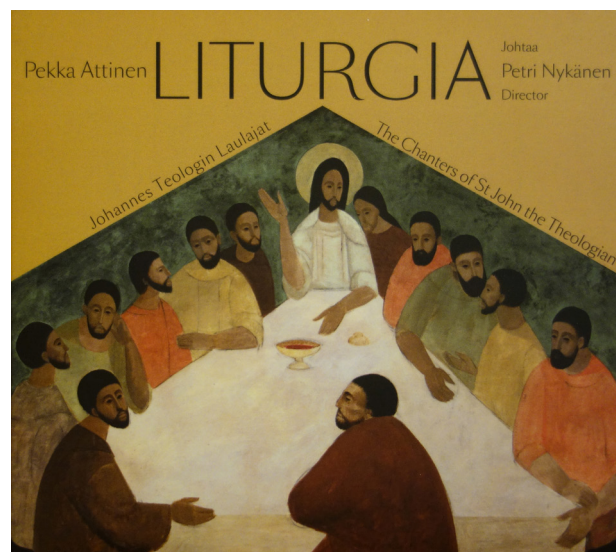
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Orthodox Christian worship is a combination of written and oral tradition. Many aspects of a divine service are predetermined by instructions and rubrics, but the people performing the service nevertheless have some freedom in carrying out their task. They are not immune to cultural, historical or ideological influences, and the decisions they make when performing services are related to their background and context.

For example, what we can find in the history of the Orthodox Church of Finland in the twentieth century are efforts to become more culturally independent from the Russian Church. The ideas that were emphasized in all aspects of church life, including worship and church music, were nationality – Finnishness and Karelianness – (*Illustration 1*) as well as transnational Orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup>

Nationality in the liturgy of a Church is an example of a topic that can be studied based on evidence found in written sources. However, if we could listen to the actual divine services from past times, it would be an invaluable extra source of information. Of course, it is not possible for us to go and record



*Illustration 1.* The Divine Liturgy was first set in the Finnish language by Pekka Attinen in 1936. Recording: Chanters of St John the Theologian (2016), cover design: Leea Wasenius. Photograph: TL

1 E.g. Katariina Husso, *Ikkunoita ikonien ja kirkkoesineiden historiaan. Suomen autonomisen ortodoksisen kirkon esineellinen kulttuuriperintö 1920–1980-luvuilla*, Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 119 (Helsinki, 2011), 190, 198; Wilhelmiina Virolainen, “Suomenkielisen liturgian kehitys,” *Ortodoksia* 52 (2013): 13–15, [http://ortodoksia.fi/ojs\\_3.1/index.php/ortodoksia/article/view/66](http://ortodoksia.fi/ojs_3.1/index.php/ortodoksia/article/view/66); Maria Takala-Roszczenko, “The Nationalization of Liturgy in the Orthodox Church of Finland in the 1920s–30s,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 9, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1515/ress-2017-0012>; Hanna Kemppi, “‘Vieras’ ja ‘kansallinen’ ortodoksisessa kirkkotäiteessä 1918–1939,” *Ortodoksia* 58 (2018), [http://ortodoksia.fi/ojs\\_3.1/index.php/ortodoksia/article/view/129](http://ortodoksia.fi/ojs_3.1/index.php/ortodoksia/article/view/129).

a service in the past, but why not do that today? Present-day fieldwork allows us to ask questions for which written sources do not have answers. Moreover, today is tomorrow's history; scholars of the twenty-second century may well appreciate the recordings we make now. Despite the obvious advantages of fieldwork, participant observation, interviewing and the use of audio recording technology, this kind of more ethnomusicological approach to researching Orthodox worship is fairly recent.

Orthodox worship is a multisensory experience, with auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory and gustatory elements all present. However, there is a strong emphasis on the sense of hearing. Throughout a service, there are practically always words being read or sung aloud and heard. This enables some of the main purposes of worship: common prayer, as opposed to silent, private prayer, and the sanctification of time. Sounds do not last for a long time, so people must set apart a certain period of time to go to church, to listen or to sing, to pray together. From a cultural stance, short-lived sounds are signs of activity and signs of interaction.<sup>2</sup> Thus, focusing on sounds is a fruitful way of studying Orthodox worship and its meanings to people.

The term "soundscape", developed from the 1960s onwards,<sup>3</sup> can be understood as an auditory counterpart of landscape. Roughly defined it means everything a person can hear in a given place and time. For example, if we were in a university auditorium, and there were a conference presentation going on, what kind of sounds could we hear? Perhaps the hum of air conditioning, some rattling from different electronic devices, someone coughing or a chair creaking, and of course someone speaking at the front. These would be rather typical elements of a conference presentation soundscape.

However, it is important to note that the concept of soundscape includes subjectivity. In our example of a conference presentation, you may imagine that if the person sitting next to you in the auditorium yawns, you both hear it, but it means different things to you. You may be annoyed, or you may be reminded how tired you yourself are after only five hours of sleep, whereas the person yawning may just be bored. The person sitting on the other side of your yawning neighbour may not have heard anything, because they are preparing their own presentation, due the next day, so intently that they would only hear a fire alarm. Thus, the soundscapes of two people in the same place at the same time will never be identical.

## WHAT, WHY, AND HOW: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

My research concerns the soundscapes of Orthodox worship. What would I like to find out about them? I have divided the preliminary topics of interest into three rather broad groups.

As a background, I would like to gain some overall knowledge of the elements comprising the soundscape of worship. What are the common denominators, and what kind of local variation is there for example in the singing repertoire, its use, and other auditory elements?

Second, how are the varying soundscapes experienced by the participants in the worship? What do people hear? What would they like to hear, what do they expect to

2 See e.g. Noora Vikman, "Alussa oli askel – katsaus kuuntelukävelyn ympäristökulttuurin tutkimuksen metodina," in *Vaeltavat metodit*, ed. Jyrki Pöysä, Helmi Järviluoma, and Sinikka Vakimo (Joensuu: Suomen Kansantietouden Tutkijain Seura, 2010), 194.

3 Jonathan Sterne, "Soundscape, Landscape, Escape," in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past. Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld. (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 184–7, <http://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/31458>.

hear? What kind of meanings do they give to different elements of the soundscape, how do they interpret them?

Finally, in what kind of contexts are the soundscapes produced and experienced? Who makes the decisions involved in shaping the soundscape of a given service, and on what grounds? Are there ideals or other influences to be traced?

Why should we study these questions? Very briefly put: the present reality of Orthodox worship is understudied. Scholars around the world have started to take an ethnomusicological approach to Orthodox church music,<sup>4</sup> but in Finland only sporadic observations of church music repertoire and liturgical practices have been published.<sup>5</sup> Knowledge of how people experience worship is likewise scant. Studies taking a sensory approach have so far been mostly historical.<sup>6</sup>

Orthodoxy in Finland is especially interesting for a number of reasons, one of which is the growing multiculturalism of parishes. Orthodox Christians living in Finland, independent of their background, go mainly to the same churches and attend the same services together. The change in parish life because of increased immigration in the past decades can be heard in worship, too. Often several languages, or music from different musical traditions, can be heard within a single service. This is an interesting form of transnationality that challenges the nationalization processes of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

How, then, can we study these preliminary topics or questions? My choice has been ethnographical work in Orthodox parishes in Finland.<sup>8</sup> I participate in their worship and other activities, making observations, talking with people, and interviewing them. I also make audio recordings of services. I aim to visit all 21 parishes of the Orthodox Church of Finland. As it is a small church, with 60 000 members (*Illustration 2*), the task is not overwhelming. I spend two or three weeks in each parish, in which time there are about ten–fifteen services in a parish. I conduct semi-structured interviews with different kinds of participants of worship: congregation members, singers, cantors, priests. I hope to interview altogether about 25 people from different parts of Finland, different ages, and different cultural backgrounds.

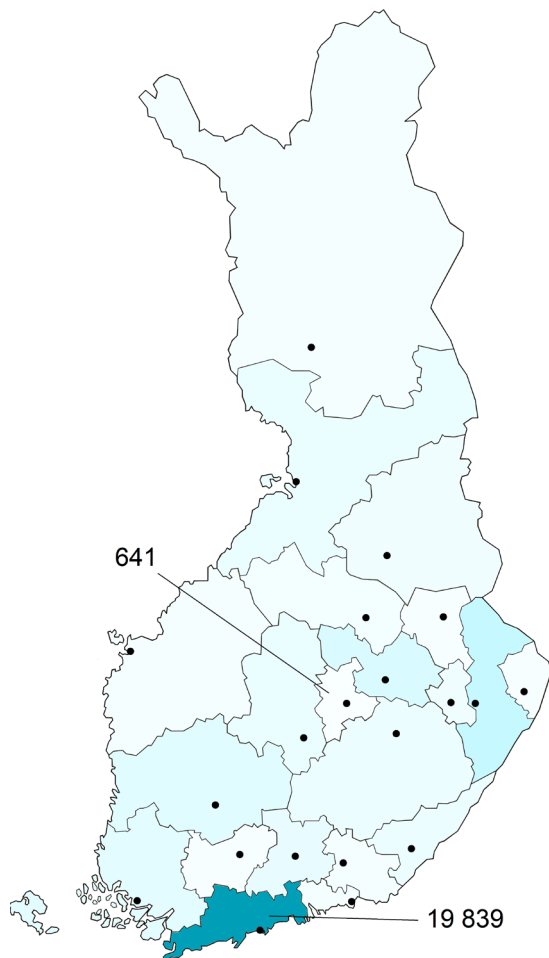
4 E.g. Jeffers Engelhardt, "Right Singing in Estonian Orthodox Christianity: A Study of Music, Theology, and Religious Ideology," *Ethnomusicology* 53, no. 1 (2009); Costin Moisil, "'You have to sing them correctly!' Notation and Performance in Cunțană Chant", *Musicology Today* 19 (2014), <http://www.musicologytoday.ro/BackIssues/Nr.19/studies1.php>.

5 E.g. Jopi Harri, "Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon vakiintuneen sävelmärepertuaarin tausta," *Ortodoksia* 52 (2013): 22, [http://ortodoksia.fi/ojs\\_3.1/index.php/ortodoksia/article/view/67](http://ortodoksia.fi/ojs_3.1/index.php/ortodoksia/article/view/67); Johan Bastubacka, "Congregational Singing in the Finnish Orthodox Divine Liturgy: Contemporary Orthodox Liturgical Praxis – its Origins and Effect on Worship," *Anaphora* 9, no. 1 (2015): 18–19; Damaskinos Olkinuora, "Ecumenism in Liturgy? Changes in Finnish Orthodox Liturgical Texts Stimulated by Co-Existence with Lutherans," *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 9, no. 2 (2017): 175, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ress-2017-0013>; Jopi Harri, "Contemporary Practices of Church Singing at the Valaam Monastery in Heinävesi," *Journal of the International Society for Orthodox Church Music* 4, no. 2 (November 2020), <https://journal.fi/jisocm/issue/view/6949>.

6 E.g. Alexander Lingas, "From Earth to Heaven. The Changing Musical Soundscape of Byzantine Liturgy," in *Experiencing Byzantium*, ed. Claire Nesbitt and Mark Jackson, The Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies, Publications 18 (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013); Bissera V. Pentcheva, "Performing the Sacred in Byzantium. Image, breath and sound," *Performance Research* 19, no. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2014.935185>.

7 Similar phenomena may have different reasons and can be studied from different angles. Cf. Peter Drobac, "The Problem of Pastiche, part I," 11–13, and Aaron Eldridge, "The Problem of Pastiche, part II," 14, 16, in *Liturgy and Music. Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Orthodox Church Music*, ed. Ivan Moody and Maria Takala-Roszczenko, Publications of the International Society for Orthodox Church Music No. 8 (Joensuu, 2019).

8 Ethnography is well suited to elaborate on a set of questions ranging from the elements of the actual services to the experiences and interpretations of people attending them, for it allows me to acquire a combination of different kinds of research material. For an ethnography of Orthodox liturgy in Finland, see Tatiana Tiaynen-Qadir, "Glocal Religion and Feeling at Home: Ethnography of Artistry in Finnish Orthodox Liturgy," *Religions* 8, no. 2 (2017): 23, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8020023>.



*Illustration 2.* Parishes of the Orthodox church of Finland, their centres and sizes (in 2019). The intensity of the blue colour denotes the number of members of the parishes in relation to one another. The sizes of the largest and smallest parish are given in numbers. TL

After this study, the recordings I make will be archived at the Finnish Literature Society.<sup>9</sup> Although Orthodox Christianity has a long history in Finland, very few recordings of Orthodox worship have been archived permanently, and there is still no consistent recording of services.<sup>10</sup> This new audio archive collection will serve future scholars as a source of research material as well as document cultural practices related to Finnish Orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup>

During the first eight months of fieldwork (October 2018–June 2019) I visited eleven parishes, attended 133 services, of which I recorded 120, attended 22 choir rehearsals and other choir related events, had 36 people volunteer for interviews, and conducted twelve interviews. I have a great deal of research material, which means a great deal of work. It has been very demanding in simple terms of time and energy, and it has been tremendously rewarding. So far, I have had no trouble in finding interviewees, but priests and cantors do not seem to be the first ones to volunteer. I have had some minor technical issues but nothing disastrous, which is quite surprising.

9 The archive (<https://www.finlit.fi/en/archive/joensuu-branch-collections>) is located conveniently next door to the School of Theology, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu. The recordings can also be accessed electronically in the Helsinki premises of the archive.

10 Recordings of individual services can be found in the Folklife archives of the University of Tampere (<https://sites.tuni.fi/kansanperinne/folklife-archives/>), the Archives of the Turku University School of Cultural Research (<http://kultut-arkistot.utu.fi/english/indexenglish.html>) (Archives of History, Culture and Arts Studies (<https://www.utu.fi/fi/yliopisto/humanistinen-tiedekunta/hkt-arkisto>), HKT archive, TKU collection), and RIISA – Orthodox Church Museum of Finland (<http://www.riisa.fi/en/home/>). Recordings of some of the services broadcast on radio and television, with recent decades strongly emphasized, reside in the Radio and Television Archive (<https://kavi.fi/en/radio-and-television-archive/>). This collection, while very valuable, does not represent perfectly the ordinary liturgical life of parishes, for the broadcast services are usually prepared for in an exceptional way.

11 This work has not been systematic so far. In 2014, the central synod of the Orthodox Church of Finland accepted a Cultural Heritage Strategy that mentions liturgical life and church music as intangible culture heritage of the Church, but action was explicitly required as late as in November 2019, when the synod determined that the Church must systematically catalogue, digitize and archive divine services, interviews, and church music. “Kulttuuriperintöstrategia 2015–2020,” Viralliset asiakirjat, Hallinto ja päätöksenteko, Orthodox Church of Finland, 2014, <https://www.ort.fi/suomen-ortodoksisen-kirkon-toimintaa-ohjaavat-asiakirjat/kulttuuriperintöstrategia-2015-2020>; “Pöytäkirja, Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon kirkolliskokous,” Kirkolliskokous, Hallinto ja päätöksenteko, Orthodox Church of Finland, 2019, 42, <https://www.ort.fi/sites/default/files/2020-01/P%3%B6yt%C3%A4kirja%202019.pdf>.

## METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL QUESTIONS

The questions that concern me most at this stage of my research are questions of methodology and research ethics. If this were the most traditional kind of ethnography, I would have chosen two or three parishes and spent several months in each of them. Instead, I have opted for a more applied research design, collecting material from a larger area, and consequently spending less time in each place.

This decision has much to do with work like this not having been done before. Anyone who has visited two or three parishes in Finland can tell us that the services sound different in different places. But what is the extent and quality of this local variation? Are the different histories of parishes reflected in the ways that different members of those parishes experience worship? Given the lack of systematic prior research, it is useful to gain some basic knowledge of “what is out there”. Thus, I consider the field of my study to be the whole Orthodox Church of Finland, a fluid field, with more or less variation between the local communities that are parishes.

Some of the most problematic ethical questions of my study concern insider research and participant observation, especially in worship.

### INSIDER ETHNOGRAPHY

I am a long-time member of the community I study, the Orthodox Church of Finland. I have grown to know five parishes quite closely – my own home parishes – and visited most others, some on a regular basis. I am also a trained church musician and a former cantor of a parish.

As a result of my background, I know nearly all cantors working in parishes, and a great many of the priests. Good networks among the employees of parishes, as well as practical knowledge of the everyday of their work, naturally help in gaining access to the field. An insider knows the language used by the community members, and thus may get at their own interpretations more easily. I may be able to spot exceptional phenomena more quickly, for example, deviations from the books the performers of services are using – or at least claim to be using. It is also easy for me to share the results and benefits of my research with the community researched.

There are also obvious challenges in insider ethnography. Can I hear the familiar with new ears? Can I trace all my assumptions, preconceptions and biases and handle them in an open and honest manner? Can I ethically balance the privacy of certain conversations and the interest of the information I get from them? When I present my results, will there be conflicts of loyalty?

I also have to be aware of my different roles in the field, or rather, the different ways in which people position me, and I position myself.<sup>12</sup> I have known some of the people I meet in the field for a long time; for example, I may have sung in their choir or they may have sung in my choir. And, as these circles are small, someone may have heard something about me without my knowing it. As a church musician I am often expected to have views about how worship should be conducted or what kind of music should be used, while, as a researcher, it is problematic to take part in these conversations. I have been asked after a service I recorded, by one of the performers, in a slightly worried tone: “How did it go?” These situations require diplomacy and self-control that I must admit I do not always feel I can evince satisfactorily.

12 Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré, “Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves,” in *Discourse Theory and Practice. A Reader*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 261; Michael Murphy, “What does it mean to take a position? Researchers and the researched”, *Social Theory Applied*, July 9, 2014, <https://socialtheoryapplied.com/2014/07/09/mean-take-position-researchers-researched/>.

## PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Participant observation has many inherent ethical questions. When one observes public events and spaces, it is often not possible to ask for the informed consent of every individual being observed.<sup>13</sup> This is true here as well, as the people among whom I do this research number thousands. Asking only the blessing of the bishop and the priest will unavoidably lead to situations in which, no matter in how many ways I try to inform the parishioners about my research and fieldwork, someone goes to their own church to attend a divine service and – to their great surprise – becomes a participant of my study, whether they want it or not.

Services are open to all, but are they in fact completely public? One could well ask whether placing microphones in church and writing down notes during a service does not cause unease and discomfort to the people attending the service.<sup>14</sup> Especially in the Finnish context, where many people consider religion a rather private matter, observing people in worship may evoke suspicion.<sup>15</sup>

What about outside the liturgical context: before and after a service, at coffee hour, in other activities of the parish? When I am not visibly recording or interviewing, I often doubt that people realize I am there as a researcher making observations.<sup>16</sup> This is partly related to being an insider, because in many places and situations people position me firstly as something other than a researcher.

There are also other intriguing ways in which these two ethical questions intertwine. In participant observation, the degree of participation chosen for the study reflects the research questions and the research design.<sup>17</sup> A researcher who is an insider may sometimes want to participate to a higher degree than her research plan suggests. Participant observation becomes observant participation,<sup>18</sup> and if all participation becomes observant participation, the researcher may find herself in trouble with research and other aspects of life commingling.

There are several ways in which I try to solve or mitigate these problems. I use all opportunities to speak and write about my research, emphasizing that the recordings will not be published online,<sup>19</sup> and also highlighting the advantages and potential advantages of the study to the local community, the parish, the church, and the society. I use recording methods as unobtrusive as possible: audio and a few photographs,

13 Giampietro Gobo, *Doing Ethnography*, trans. Adrian Belton (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 140. For discussion about informed consent see e.g. Marilys Guillemin and Lynn Gillam, "Ethics, Reflexivity, and 'Ethically Important Moments' in Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (2004), 271–2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>.

14 In qualitative research, the harm caused to the participants that must be avoided may be very subtle, such as an uncomfortable feeling. Guillemin and Gillam, "Ethics, Reflexivity, and 'Ethically Important Moments' in Research," 272–3; Ron Iphofen, *Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology* (European Commission), 23–4, [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-anthrop\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-anthrop_en.pdf).

15 Iphofen, *Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology*, 47. Spaces neither completely public nor completely private can be called semi-public spaces (e.g. Melike Peterson, "Living with difference in hyper-diverse areas: how important are encounters in semi-public spaces?" *Social & Cultural Geography* 18, no. 8 (2017): 1070–1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2016.1210667>) or "micropublics" (Ash Amin, "Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity," *Environment and Planning A* 34, no. 6 (June 2002): 969, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a3537>).

16 Cf. Iphofen, *Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology*, 47. I do not attempt to hide that I am a researcher, but I cannot advertise it constantly either. As is well-known in ethnography, this would be rather counterproductive. For the so-called Hawthorne effect, see e.g. Gobo, *Doing Ethnography*, 124–5, 134 (footnote 2), 206; Iphofen, *Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology*, 20, 22.

17 Gobo, *Doing Ethnography*, 105–6.

18 E.g. Carolyn Sufrin, "'Doctor, Why Didn't You Adopt My Baby?' Observant Participation, Care, and the Simultaneous Practice of Medicine and Anthropology," *Culture, Medicine & Psychiatry* 39, no. 4 (2015): 621–2, 627–8, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-015-9435-x>.

19 People mostly associate audio recording in church with either radio broadcasting, live streaming or sharing on social media. Although the archival material will be openly available to all, access to it requires physical presence and thus considerably more effort than in the case of online material.

and the latter only of the people performing the services, not of the congregation. I also thank people all the time and profusely. They may not have had a direct say in my being there, but as a community they produce my research material,<sup>20</sup> and even though I may juridically own the material I collect, morally I feel I am only borrowing it from them. Finally, I limit my research to parishes, which secures me some places where I can attend services without feeling I should be writing everything down, such as the Orthodox seminary church.

This paper is a brief introduction to my doctoral research project in the midst of its long fieldwork phase. In summer 2020, I still have some parishes left to visit. The past months have not enabled travelling to do fieldwork, but new ways of experiencing – or not experiencing – services have emerged and given many of us novel insights into the sensory in Orthodox worship.

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<sup>20</sup> I naturally have a central role in producing the research material, which I am not trying to hide. Acknowledging and treating myself as a visible (or audible) part of the whole research process is an important question that also has an ethical aspect to it, but it is a question I must address with due attention in another occasion.

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