



## **The Dundaga Orthodox Congregation in the Northern Courland (1918–1940): a Short Overview**

Dzintars ĒRGLIS

*Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia*

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### **Introduction**

After the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 and subsequent establishment of the independent Latvian state in 1918, a difficult transition period for the Orthodoxy in Latvia began. It was not only about surviving and development within a new political system and reality, but also about preserving the religious identity and solving practical problems. The choice of the chronological framework of the article was determined by objective factors: the establishment of the Republic of Latvia in 1918 and its demise in 1940.

The history of The Latvian Orthodox Church (hereinafter – LOC) in 1920s–30s can be divided into three periods: 1920–1926 (the struggle for recognition in a new country), 1927–1934 (a period of relative stability), and 1935–1940 (being under quite serious control of state authorities). For a long time, the authorities of the Republic of Latvia obstructed the full recognition of the Orthodox Church in the newly formed state and often looked at it as the remnant of the tsarist Russia. Only on October 8, 1926, a special law on the state of the LOC was passed (Rūnčs 2013, 240). It was very necessary, because there was no common legislation on religious organizations in Latvia. From 1920 to 1926, the LOC in Latvia had limited rights (Цо я 2016, 154). In such a situation, it was much more difficult for LOC to defend its rightful interests. However, thanks to the authority of Archbishop Janis Pommers (1876–1934), the LOC was not divided into Orthodox ethnic groups, and both Orthodox Latvians, Russians and representatives of other nationalities remained united (Rūnčs 2013, 245–246).

According to statistical data, about 170.000 Orthodox persons lived in Latvia in the interwar period, which was slightly less than 10% of the total population of the country. About 105,000 of them were Russians and about 55.000 Latvians, but most of the others (about 10,000 people) were Belarusians (Sālītis 1936,

84–86). In general, the Orthodox Church was the third largest denomination in terms of the number of believers (after the Evangelical Lutheran and Roman Catholic denominations) and was accordingly one of the most influential religious organizations in Latvia at that time. However, in the Northern Courland Orthodoxy was not widespread, accounting for about two to three thousand people.

In Northern Courland (Talsi and Ventspils districts) between 1918 and 1940 there were eight Orthodox congregations: Dundaga, Kolkasrags, Sasmaka (Valdemarpils), Kulciems, Talsi, Piltene, Ugale, and Ventspils (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–219, pp. 3, 7469–1–220, pp. 4, 14, 7469–1–221, pp. 4, 14–15, 18, 23, 40, 7469–1–222, pp. 1–5, 9, 18–19, 24–25; 7469–1–223, pp. 3–4) (see map). The largest of them were congregations of the two largest cities of the Northern Courland – Ventspils and Talsi, and each of the two accounted for about half a thousand members. As for the six other congregations, they accounted for only a few hundred each (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–221, pp. 18, 40; 7469–1–222, pp. 9, 18–19; 7469–1–223, pp. 3–4).



Map: [https://faiiem.lv/u/tz9ah84n3#sign\\_up](https://faiiem.lv/u/tz9ah84n3#sign_up)

The Dundaga congregation was distinctly Latvian in terms of its national composition, as was the entire Dundaga village. In contrary, the most seaside villages were not so uniform in ethnicity, as many Livonians lived there. However, almost all Orthodox Livonians were members of the Kolkasrags parish. Kolkasrags Orthodox congregation was founded in 1885, and its church – the Church of the Nativity of Christ, built a few years later, was consecrated on November 8, 1892. The architect of the church was Apollon Edelson (1827–1896), the chief architect

of the Riga Orthodox diocese. Along with the church itself, the clerical quarters, farm buildings and the Orthodox school were built as well. About 2 km from the church a parish cemetery was created. (Иц е н и к о в 2017, 171–173). Kolkasrags congregation consisted of the Latvians and Livonians – residents of the seaside villages of the Dundaga parish.

In 1935, 89.2% of the population in Dundaga were Latvians, 4.16% Jews, 1.94% Estonians, 1.66% Germans, 1.38% Lithuanians, 0.55% Russians, 0.28% Belarusians, 0.28% Poles and 0.55% others (S a l n a i s, M a l d u p s 1936, 87).

Dundaga village was the largest in the territory of the interwar Republic of Latvia. It covered 853.2 square kilometers (S a l n a i s, M a l d u p s 1935, 351), moreover, it had a 70 km long border along the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Riga (S a u l e s k a l n s 1937, 69). In terms of population, in 1935 Dundaga with 9160 inhabitants took only the 16th place in the country (S a l n i t i s 1936, 56, 64–67). In turn, in Dundaga itself, which was the center of a huge village, only 361 people lived (S a l n a i s, M a l d u p s 1936, 87). There were four Lutheran, two Orthodox (Dundaga and Kolkasrags) and two Baptist churches in the village (S a u l e s k a l n s 1937, 69). At that time, the village was crossed by two narrow-gauge railway lines: Ventspils – Dundaga and Stende – Dundaga – Ventspils. Traveling by rail, Dundaga was 146 km from Riga and 51 km from the county center Ventspils (S a l n a i s, M a l d u p s 1935, 351–352).

At the end of the German occupation in 1918, a religious life of the Dundaga parish was renewed. By a lucky coincidence, parish-owned properties were not damaged during World War I. However, for more than a decade after the war, the congregation was forced to engage in many lawsuits to defend its property rights. A great contribution to the solution of this problem was made by the priest Peteris Gredzens (*Pēteris Gredzens*, 1887–1942).

The aim of the research was to analyze the activities of the Dundaga congregation between 1918 and 1940, which, until now, has gained only fragmented reflection in historiography. The research was not intended to cover the history of the Latvian Orthodoxy as a whole or history of Dundaga village in particular, but only reflect the major problems and activities of the Dundaga Orthodox congregation in the interwar period.

Dundaga congregation still exists today, and since 2010, the church has been renovated, as during the Soviet times, a permanent and long-lasting neglect took its toll on the building (Иц е н и к о в 2017, 107; M i e r k a l n e 2010a; M i e r k a l n e 2010b).

### Sources and literature

Until now, in the studies on the socio-political and economic history of Latvia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Dundaga region of the Northern Courland (Northern Kurzeme or *Ziemeļkurzeme*; according to the administrative division of the Republic of Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s – Ventspils District Dundaga parish) is represented

quite purely and sporadically. There is a lack of wide, archival-based studies on Dundaga in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, moreover, activities of the local Orthodox parish.

This article is mainly based on the study of the archival documents (information on the Dundaga parish in The National Archives of Latvia – the Fund of the Latvian State Historical Archives “Synod of the Latvian Orthodox Church” (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1; 7469–2), with effort to review and analyze the most important activities of the Dundaga Orthodox parish as seen from the institutional sources.

The Orthodox magazine *Ticība un Dzīve* (Faith and Life), which was published in Latvian from 1923 to 1931 and from 1934 to 1940 (*LP* 1988, 629–630), sometimes addressed problems and topicalities of the life of the Dundaga parish, although this coverage was not regular.

With the exception of Jelena Balunova-Kuleveca's (*Jelena Balunova-Kuleveca*) monograph on Ventspils (Б а л у н о в а - К у л е в е ц 2016), there are no extensive studies or series of articles dedicated to other Orthodox parishes in the Northern Courland. In general, historiography on the Dundaga parish in the period from 1918 to 1940 is extremely scarce. The rare exception is a monograph by Aleksandrs Gavrilins (*Aleksandrs Gavriļins*, 1953–2019) on the life and work of Janis Garklavs (Г а в р и л и н 2009; G a v r i l i n s 2015).

### **Priests of the Dundaga Congregation between 1918 and 1940**

Finding a priest who would be interested to reside in Dundaga was a major problem since late 1921. The parish was led by clergymen from two neighboring congregations, who were not able to hold regular services from their home parishes of Kolkasrags, Ventspils District Dundaga parish, and Talsi. Only in 1936 the Synod of the LOC appointed Janis Garklavs (*Jānis Garklāvs*, 1898–1982) as priest of the Dundaga parish, who chose it as his permanent place of residence. After 15 years long turmoil, the parish regained a kind of stability and moreover – was provided with regularity of worship.

In the period of time from 1918 to 1940, four priests served in the Dundaga parish:

- Peteris Klavins (*Pēteris Kļaviņš*, 1881–?); from 1918 to October 1921, resided in Dundaga (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 14, 16, 21, 45; 7469–1–530, p. 14);
- Tom (in Orthodoxy – Foma) Kragis (*Toms Krāģis*, 1861–1936) – appointed by the Synod in December 1921 (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–2–214, pp. 1, 10). He spent his entire service period in Kolka and never resided in Dundaga);
- P. Gredzens – appointed by the Synod in February 1923 (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–2–167, pp. 2, 33, 36, 39). Throughout his service until August 1936, his seat was located in nearby town of Talsi, and he never resided in Dundaga. On October 29, 1926, he became the Senior Priest (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–2–167, pp. 1, 32, 34, 37, 40);
- J. Garklavs – appointed by the Synod in August 1936. He resided in Dundaga

throughout this service there, until August 1942 (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–368, pp. 3, 23–24).

All four interwar period Orthodox priests of Dundaga were Latvians. Two of them: P. Klavins and P. Gredzens, were experienced, but for T. Kragis and J. Garklavs Dundaga was the first places of service. T. Kragis served Dundaga congregation along with the Kolkasrags congregation, but J. Garklavs – Dundaga congregation along with Kulciems congregation.

It must be added, that lack of priests willing to reside permanently in the place of their service was a serious problem for many Orthodox congregations, including one of the Northern Courland. For example, in 1928 forty-five Orthodox congregations in Latvia did not have their own permanent priests (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–221, p. 9).

### **The Dundaga Congregation and Its Activities before 1918**

The Orthodox congregations in the Northern Courland began to form at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is relatively late, and on February 2, 1900, the Orthodox congregation was established in Dundaga (Ицеников 2017, 106–107). In Dundaga Lutheran faith dominated in terms of confession, and Baptist communities were also present. Shortly before Dundaga Orthodox parish, the neighboring Kolkasrags Orthodox parish was founded on September 5, 1885 (Ицеников 2017, 171–172).

Dundaga parish consisted of representatives of the Orthodox Christians residing in Dundaga village and the closest neighborhood. The exception was those living in Kolka and the other seaside villages – they were a part of the Kolkasrags Orthodox parish. Dundaga parish also included some residents of Ance village, Ventspils district (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 10). In 1914, Dundaga congregation had 408 members (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–1046, p. 92), but according to other information – about 500 members (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–1082, p. 43).

In March, 1908, the Dundaga Orthodox parish bought two plots of land from the local Baron Christian von der Osten-Sacken (1859–1919). The parish paid 1766 rubles for the purchase. The largest of the two plots was intended for construction of a church, a schoolhouse and a clergy residence, but the smallest – for the cemetery. While the parish did not have its own place of worship, it received 1050 rubles a year from the Riga Spiritual Consistory (hereinafter – the Consistory) in order to rent it. The worshiping was organized in the private house of “Melki” (*Melki*), Dundaga parish (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 8, 125; 7469–1–530, p. 14; 7469–1–531, pp. 3–6). Erasts Valters, a wealthy Orthodox landowner from Arlava (Ārlava) parish, Talsi District, decided to build necessary buildings for the Dundaga parish at his own expense, if he was paid the rent for 10 consecutive years – 1050 rubles a year. On April 16, 1911, a legal agreement was made between the Consistory and E. Valters, according to which E. Valters took the obligation to build and on October 23, 1911, to hand over to the Dundaga Orthodox parish



a complex of said buildings. E. Valters fulfilled the obligation, therefore in 1911 the Consistory started to pay him 1050 rubles a year, and continued to do so until 1915, when Courland was occupied by the German army (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–530, p. 14).

Thanks to P. Klavins' parents and other members of the parish, who had to humble themselves in front of the Germans in various ways, as well as the help of Emil Karl Johann Albert Moltrecht (1860–1919), the Lutheran pastor of Dundaga, newly built complex of the Orthodox clerical buildings in Dundaga was not destroyed – even more miraculously, it remained fully intact during the World War I. Unlike other Orthodox churches in German-occupied Courland, Dundaga Orthodox church was not even ransacked, so P. Klavins found it in 1918 as when he left Dundaga in 1915. The services begun again without any problems (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 1, 16; V p g. 1935).

### **An Ownership Dispute of the Dundaga Orthodox Parish Building Complex**

At the end of the German occupation, E. Valters recognized the buildings as the property of the parish and the Consistory as the debtor, from whom he was entitled to receive a remaining part of payments. In the autumn of 1919, E. Valters died, but in the winter of 1920, his daughter Marija Eglīte (*Marija Eglīte*, 1873–1944) and her husband Adams Eglītis (*Adams Eglītis (Eglīts)*, 1865–?) returned from Russia. A. Eglītis later became his wife's trustee in negotiations on the ownership of the Dundaga Orthodox parish building complex (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 1, 14, 16; 7469–1–530, p. 14). The situation changed rapidly and clearly not in favour of the parish.

The church, clerical buildings and schoolhouse formed a single complex, which cannot be separated or transformed by construction of new auxiliary buildings. That is why the legal accommodation of E. Valters' relatives in the schoolhouse posed an immediate threat to proper functionality of a whole complex. The LOC did not receive any support from state authorities and officials to defend its interests, but A. Eglītis did.

On December 29, 1920, the Synod as the successor of the Consistory, decided to take over all the rights and obligations mentioned in the contract between E. Valters and the Dundaga Orthodox parish, and authorized the Dundaga Parish Council (hereinafter – DPC) to negotiate with E. Valters' heirs (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 47).

On March 18, 1920, the People's Council passed a law on the Latvian money as the only official currency in the country (*VV* 1920 03 26; *LVRK* 1920 04 30). On February 6, 1921, the general meeting of the Dundaga parish expressed its commitment to pay for buildings under the said contract and on the basis of the law of March 18, 1920 and immediately announced its decision to the heirs. The meeting was also attended by A. Eglītis, who demanded 400 000 Latvian rubles to settle the dispute (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 15). The Latvian ruble was the

official currency in Latvia from 1919 to 1922, when it was replaced by the lats (1 lats was equal to 50 Latvian rubles). The Latvian ruble remained in circulation and was a legally recognized currency until 1930 (Bērzis 2003, 464–467). On October 28, 1921, in Riga, on the premises of the Cathedral, a meeting of members of the Synod with the authorized representative of the DPC Aleksejs Jankovskis and A. Eglitis took place (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 12–13). But the result of the meeting was not as expected, because on the very next day – October 29, 1921, A. Eglitis wrote to the Synod demanding 500 000 instead of 400 000 Latvian rubles (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 18).

At the end of 1921, serious changes took place in the life of the Dundaga parish, as the priest P. Klavins left it. On December 18, 1921, the service in Dundaga was held by the priest of Talsi P. Gredzens (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 24), but with the consent and blessing of the Archbishop Janis and according to the resolution of the Synod, in the last days of December, 1921, T. Kragis was appointed a temporary priest of the Dundaga parish (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–2–214, p. 10).

Meanwhile, the conflict between the Dundaga Orthodox parish and E. Valters' heirs continued to escalate and finally came to a court. A. Jankovskis in the name of the DPC filed a lawsuit against A. Eglitis for the amount of 5040 Latvian rubles, which he had collected arbitrarily from persons living in the parish property, and asked to evict A. Eglitis from the said property. On May 17, 1922, a magistrate of the second circuit, Ventspils District, rejected the claim of the DPC (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 54).

Already on September 10, 1922, and on January 28, 1923, services were held and the general meetings of the parish were chaired by P. Gredzens (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–2–43, pp. 48–50; 7469–1–528, pp. 3, 10–11), who was also appointed by the Synod at its meeting of February 23, 1923 as the new temporary priest of the Dundaga parish (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–528, p. 12).

On April 20, 1923, the Synod authorized priest P. Gredzens to defend the material interests of the LOC in the case of Dundaga Orthodox parish buildings (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–528, p. 1). On September 20, 1923, Janis Balodis (*Jānis Balodis*, 1874–1928), a lawyer from Riga, who was the acting legal adviser of the Synod at that time (Jēkabsons, Ščerbinskis 2007, 97), informed P. Gredzens in writing that the judgement of the magistrate was incorrect and therefore he appealed against it (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 60). On October 26, 1923, at a court hearing in Ventspils, the Liepāja (*Liepāja*) Regional Court rejected the claim of the DPC again (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 65–66).

The next hearing took place on 19 December, 1924, in the Courthouse of Dundaga (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 67–69). This time, the magistrates court of the second circuit, Ventspils District, ruled to evict E. Valters' heirs from the premises and collect the rent from them on behalf of the Synod from January 1, 1921 until the day of eviction, counting 600 Latvian rubles per month (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 69–71).

In January, 1925, Paul Schultz (1866–1926), an experienced German-Baltic lawyer from Ventspils, employed by Eglitis family, filed an appeal with the Liepāja District Court (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 72–73). On February 9, 1925, in an open hearing in Ventspils, the Appellate Division of the Liepāja District Court overturned the judgement of 19 December, 1924, and dismissed the Synod's claim, recovering 45 lats in court and legal advisory costs in both court instances in favor of M. Eglite (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 80–81). On May 5, 1925, the Chairman of the Liepāja District Court, rejected a cassation complaint of J. Balodis, as it was submitted after the expiration of the term of cassation. Obviously, that acting legal adviser of the Synod J. Balodis had missed the deadline for submitting a cassation complaint (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 89), and his ancillary complaint submitted to the Civil Department of the Latvian Senate on May 18, 1925, did not help either (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 87–88, 90). Consequently, the judgment of the Liepāja District Court of February 9, 1925, entered into legal force, determining that the buildings referred to in the case did not belong to the Dundaga parish, but to the heirs of E. Valters.

Long period of uncertainty and bargaining followed, when neither side was able to come forward with some constructive propositions. This situation also had a negative impact on the religious life of the community.

On May 17, 1926, the Synod recommended to P. Gredzens and the DPC to reach an amicable settlement of the case with E. Valters' heirs (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 48, 96). Such a settlement was in fact impossible at that time, because A. Eglitis, after the victory in court, made more and more categorical claims: he demanded 10 000 lats as a possible sum of a settlement (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 98–100, 108).

The years 1926 and 1927 passed in a mutually fruitless controversy, as the Synod was intended to wait for more favorable terms of conciliation (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 98, 100, 103, 109).

On December 5, 1927, the Synod sent a lawyer, Vasilij Karklins (*Vasilij Kārklīņš*, 1891–1969), who was the LOC's legal adviser from 1921 to 1935 (Jēkabsons, Ščerbinskis 2007, 268–269), to re-examine the case of the Dundaga parish buildings and asked whether he would take over the case in court (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 117; 7469–1–528, p. 16). After getting acquainted with it, V. Karklins expressed confidence, that the Synod would win a new court (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–528, p. 17). During 1928 and 1929 many more unsuccessful discussions on possible terms and conditions of a settlement followed (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, pp. 118–119; 7469–1–528, pp. 17–21).

In 1930 A. Eglitis increased the amount of compensation again: from 10 000 to 12 000 lats (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–72, pp. 12–14, 23–24, 31–32, 44–45; 7469–1–527, pp. 125–128; 7469–1–528, pp. 23–26), but in May 1931, the Synod received an authorization from M. Eglite to her son Arkadijs Eglitis (*Arkādijs Eglītis* (Eglīts), 1898–1932), who lived in Riga, to resolve the case of the ownership of



the Dundaga parish buildings once and for all (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–527, p. 122).

In the autumn of 1932, after the unexpected death of A. Eglitis, a member of the Saeima and a prominent politician, the case was indeed finally solved. 1932 was the culmination of negative consequences of the global economic crisis in the Latvian economy, thus only the exchange of the real estate was discussed as a viable option. The final property exchange agreement was signed on October 4, 1932, in the office of the notary Mikhail Chulkov (*Mihails Čulkovs*, 1870–1941) in Riga. It provided that the church building and the former caretaker's house became the property of the LOC, but in return the Synod gave M. Eglite free use of the land, on which the other residential and farm buildings built by her father E. Valters stood, and the garden as well. The period of free use of the property was limited to 50 years (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–72, pp. 196–197; 7469–1–528, pp. 52–54, 56; 7469–1–530, pp. 12–13; 7469–1–531, pp. 9–10).

The agreement was not regarded as advantageous nor in 1932 neither in the following years: the parish was simply forced to accept it, because it was impossible to archive something better in foreseeable future.

### **Gaining the Permanent Priest**

P. Gredzens had served the Dundaga parish through serious turmoil and great challenges. He has done a lot not only for the settlement of property dispute, but also for the congregation as a whole: he had completed a major restauration of the church in 1935 and commissioned a new bell. On August 31, 1936, the Synod appointed P. Gredzens as the Dean of the Jelgava District (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–75, pp. 113, 115–116; [B. aut.] 1936). At the same time, and on the same date, the Synod decided to consecrate Riga Theological Seminary graduate Janis Garklavs, a psalmist from the Limbazi (*Limbazi*) parish, as the new Orthodox priest of Dundaga, Kolkasrags and Kulciems (*Kūļciems*), Talsi District (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–75, pp. 113, 115; 7469–2–167, p. 19; [B. aut.] 1936). His ordination was carried out on September 27, 1936 ([B. aut.] 1936; Gavriļins 2015, 47). None of the three parish entrusted to J. Garklavs was able to support him alone (Gavriļins 2015, 52). Although the priest's apartment in Kolka was in a satisfactory, but in Dundaga – in very poor condition, J. Garklavs chose Dundaga – the intersection of narrow-gauge railway lines – as his place of permanent residence.

Thus, the parish of Dundaga, which, since 1921, had been cared for only by clergy residing elsewhere, regained its local priest, who was available on a daily basis for every parishioner in need of a spiritual guidance and support, and provided regular services.

On October 25, 1936, the parish of Dundaga welcomed its new priest J. Garklavs, whose appointment was made by the Dean of Jelgava District P. Gredzens. It was a festive occasion for the parish, so the church was decorated, and the influx of people was unusually large. Everyone wanted to see the new shepherd and get to know him. In his congratulatory speech, Dean P. Gredzens emphasized that J. Garklavs is determined to devote his life and efforts to the priesthood, which

does not come with a promise of substantial material benefits. So, it is clear that his heart is burning in love for God, for holy Orthodoxy, and for the fellow men. Therefore, he deserved to be rewarded by the parish with the same sincerity and love (- n s 1936).

Archive documents show, that J. Garklavs did not have any conflicts in the parishes he served during all six years of his service, which clearly indicate a great authority of the priest's personality.

### **The Economic Life and Social Activities of the Dundaga Congregation in 1930s**

After *coup d'état* of May 15, 1934, the state intensified its efforts to gain greater control over the activities of the religious denominations, and the Orthodox parish of Dundaga also had to accept new realities of life under authoritarian rule. For example, in September each year, the parish was obligated to organize Harvest festivals with prayers and a special religious service in honor of a year's harvest ([B. aut.] 1937; [B. aut.] 1939).

Since the arrival of the new and energetic parish shepherd in Dundaga, the parish flourished, and, if several clerical buildings (priest's living quarters and schoolhouse) were not handed over to private individuals (to Eglitis family), the parish's welfare would be made even more secure. Moreover, the priest himself would not be forced to reside in the former bathhouse (S v ē t c e ģ n i e k s 1939).

In the summer of 1937, a Women's Committee consisting of six initial members was established by the DPC. The Committees played a very important role in the life of the parish, as it was often able to find some additional resources that were not available through the official channels (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–529, p. 4; *L a b v ē l i s* 1937).

In 1938, several new, mostly farm buildings, were built (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–532, pp. 15, 20). In 1939, the income from the real estate owned by the parish was 257.50 lats (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–532, p. 34). On January 28, 1940, a general meeting of the Dundaga parish adopted the budget for year 1940, which was 1080 lats in total. It was planned to provide certain sum of money for the establishment of a church library (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–532, p. 37). However, not all plans were destined to materialize.

From the summer of 1937 onwards, the parish wanted to sell four plots of land it owned, which were acquired from the Dundaga manor in 1890 and 1893, respectively. These plots were located quite far away (14–24 km) from the church, and it was difficult to manage them. In addition, they generated very little income. But, as these plots were co-registered in the name of the two neighboring churches, bureaucratic obstacles to a sale occurred (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–530, pp. 1–4, 6, 9–10; *L a b v ē l i s* 1937). Unfortunately, until the summer of 1940, they were not solved. Also, until June 1940, various conflicts between the parish and Eglitis family continued, too (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–1–530, p. 19; 7469–1–532, pp. 38–39).

A list of members of the Dundaga Orthodox parish in 1940 consisted of 146 persons (*LNA LVVA*, 7469–2–440, pp. 1–2). The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dundaga St. Constantine and Elena (Helena) parish ([B. aut.] 1940) come under the Soviet regime, which was characterized by a belligerent atheist state's intolerance of any religion and clergy (Г а в р и л и н 2010; 2013). J. Garklavs did not leave his parish even in this difficult and uncertain situation, but resolutely continued to lead it.

### Conclusions

Thanks to a happy coincidence, the real estate belonging to the Dundaga Orthodox parish did not faced destruction during World War I. However, it was the reason why for more than 10 years the parish was forced to engage in many lawsuits defending its property rights.

Since the end of 1921, finding a priest willing to reside in Dundaga permanently, has been a serious problem. For 15 years the parish was run by clergy from neighboring parishes who have not been able to come regularly from their places of residence to worship in Dundaga.

In 1936, the parish of Dundaga had overcome all major difficulties: obtained its own priest, solved the issue of real estate ownership, as well as made major repairs to the church and set up a new bell. For the first time in the interwar period, it was able to embark on a stable and full-fledged religious life, which, unfortunately, lasted only four years – until the fateful events of 1940.

The life of the Dundaga Orthodox congregation was difficult, and its very existence required constant support of the LOC's central authorities. However, the Synod, especially in the early 1920s and during the economic crisis in the early 1930s, was most often unable to provide much needed financial assistance.

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Dzintaras Ērglis

## Dundagos stačiatikių kongregacija Šiaurės Kurzemėje (1918–1940): trumpa apžvalga

*S a n t r a u k a*

**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** *Latvijos stačiatikių bažnyčia, Šv. Konstantino ir Elenos (Hele-  
nos) parapija Dundagoje, Dundagos kraštas, Šiaurės Kurzemė.*

XX a. socialinės, politinės ir ekonominės Latvijos istorijos tyrimuose Dundagos kraštas Šiaurės Kurzemėje (*Zieme|kurzeme*) yra sulaukęs mažai dėmesio. Trūksta išsamių archyviniais tyrimais pagrįstų XX a. vietos stačiatikių parapijos veiklos tyrimų. Straipsnis yra bandymas užpildyti šią spragą ir apibūdinti Dundagos Šv. Konstantino ir Elenos stačiatikių parapijos gyvenimą tarpukariu (1918–1940).

Pagrindiniai šios mažos parapijos iššūkiai buvo seniai neišspręsta byla dėl nekilnojamojo turto ir daugybė su ja susijusių bylų, kunigo, kuris nuolatos gyventų Dundagoje, radimo problemos.

Laimingo atsitiktinumo dėka Dundagos stačiatikių parapijai priklausantis nekilnojamasis turtas per Pirmąjį pasaulinį karą nebuvo sunaikintas. Tačiau tai buvo priežastis, kodėl parapija daugiau nei 10 metų buvo įtraukta į daugybę teisminių procesų, kuriuose turėjo ginti savo nuosavybės teises. Nekilnojamojo turto nuosavybės ginčas kilo tarp Dundagos kongregacijos ir turtingo stačiatikių dvasininko Erasto Valterio. Jis pastatė Dundagos parapijos raštinės pastatų kompleksą žemės sklype, kurį nusipirko 1908 m. iš vietinio barono Christiano von der Osten-Sackeno. Kai 1919 m. E. Valteris mirė, jo dukra, žentas ir anūkas bandė pasinaudoti situacija ir gauti nemažai naudos iš pirminio konsistorijos ir jų mirusio giminaičio susitarimo.

Po 1934 m. gegužės 15 d. *coup d'état* valstybė suaktyvino pastangas įgyti didesnę religinių konfesijų veiklos kontrolę. Dundagos stačiatikių parapija irgi turėjo prisitaikyti prie naujų gyvenimo realijų, tačiau faktinė jų įtaka kongregacijos kasdienei veiklai nebuvo didelė.

Tik 1936 m. Dundagos parapija įveikė visus esminius sunkumus: rado kunigą, išsprendė nekilnojamojo turto nuosavybės klausimą, atliko kapitalinį bažnyčios remontą ir įsigijo naują varpą. Pirmą kartą tarpukariu parapija galėjo pradėti stabilų ir visavertį religinį gyvenimą, kuris, deja, truko tik ketverius metus – iki lemtingų 1940 m. įvykių.



## Dzintars Ērglis

### The Dundaga Orthodox Congregation in the Northern Courland (1918–1940): a Short Overview

#### *S u m m a r y*

**Keywords:** *Latvian Orthodox Church, parish of St. Constantine and Elena (Helena) in Dundaga, the District of Dundaga, Northern Cuurland (Northern Kurzeme, Ziemeļkurzeme).*

In the studies on the socio-political and economic history of Latvia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Dundaga region of the Northern Courland (*Northern Kurzeme or Ziemeļkurzeme*) is represented quite purely and sporadically. There is a lack of wide, archival-based studies on Dundaga in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, moreover, activities of the local Orthodox parish. This article is one of attempts to fill this gap, and it outlines a life of the Dundaga St. Constantine and Elena (Helena) Orthodox parish in the interwar period (1918–1940).

Major challenges of this small parish were long-standing unresolved real estate ownership case and numerous litigations associated with it, as well as problems of finding a priest, who would reside permanently in Dundaga.

Thanks to a happy coincidence, the real estate belonging to the Dundaga Orthodox parish did not face destruction during World War I. However, it was the reason why for more than 10 years the parish was forced to engage in many lawsuits defending its property rights. The real estate ownership dispute occurred between the Dundaga congregation and heirs of Erasts Valters, a wealthy Orthodox landowner from Ārlava (Ārlava) parish, Talsi District, who built a complex of clerical buildings for the Dundaga parish on the plot of land purchased by it in March, 1908, from the local Baron Christian von der Osten-Sacken. When E. Valters died in 1919, his daughter, son-in-law and grandson tried to take advantage on the situation and benefit significantly from the original deal made by the Consistory and their deceased relative.

After *coup d'état* of May 15, 1934, the state intensified its efforts to gain greater control over the activities of the religious denominations, and the Orthodox parish of Dundaga also had to accept new realities of life under authoritarian rule, but their actual influence on day by day activities of the congregation was not overwhelming.

Only in 1936, the parish of Dundaga had overcome all major difficulties: obtained its own priest, solved the issue of real estate ownership, as well as made major repairs to the church and set up a new bell. For the first time in the interwar period, it was able to embark on a stable and full-fledged religious life, which, unfortunately, lasted only four years – until the fateful events of 1940.

D z i n t a r s Ē R G L I S  
*Department of 20<sup>th</sup> Century research*  
*Institute of Latvian History*  
*University of Latvia*  
*Kalpaka bulvāris 4*  
*LV-1050 Rīga*  
*Latvija*  
*[dzintars@lza.lv]*

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