



For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia

Robert D. Crews

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Russia occupies a unique position in the Muslim world. Unlike any other non-Islamic state, it has ruled Muslim populations for over five hundred years. Though Russia today is plagued by its unrelenting war in Chechnya, Russia's approach toward Islam once yielded stability. In stark contrast to the popular "clash of civilizations" theory that sees Islam inevitably in conflict with the West, Robert D. Crews reveals the remarkable ways in which Russia constructed an empire with broad Muslim support.

In the eighteenth century, Catherine the Great inaugurated a policy of religious toleration that made Islam an essential pillar of Orthodox Russia. For ensuing generations, tsars and their police forces supported official Muslim authorities willing to submit to imperial directions in exchange for defense against brands of Islam they deemed heretical and destabilizing. As a result, Russian officials assumed the powerful but often awkward role of arbitrator in disputes between Muslims. And just as the state became a presence in the local mosque, Muslims became inextricably integrated into the empire and shaped tsarist will in Muslim communities stretching from the Volga River to Central Asia.

For Prophet and Tsar draws on police and court records, and Muslim petitions, denunciations, and clerical writings--not accessible prior to 1991--to unearth the fascinating relationship between an empire and its subjects. As America and Western Europe debate how best to secure the allegiances of their Muslim populations, Crews offers a unique and critical historical vantage point.

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