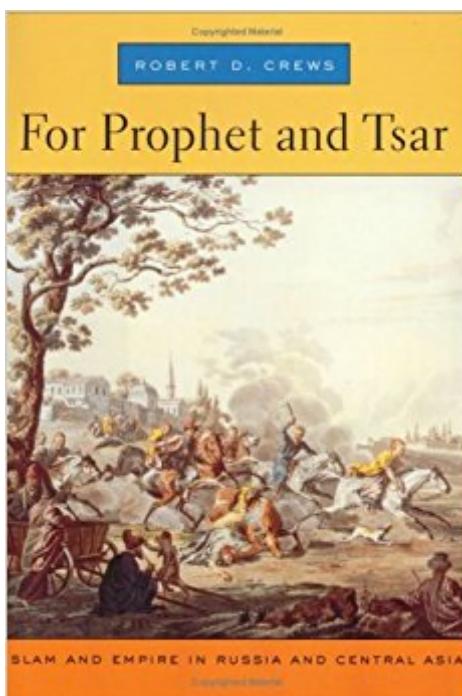


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# For Prophet And Tsar: Islam And Empire In Russia And Central Asia



## **Synopsis**

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.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Lucidly written and deeply researched, this is a revelatory analysis of how the Tsarist state sought to

rule its Muslim subjects. An invaluable resource for anyone interested in comparative empires, this book speaks directly to the imperial politics of religion as well as contemporary debates about how governments try to manage confessional minorities. --Mark Mazower, author of *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430-1950*This book illuminates as never before how Tsarist policies fostered structures of Islamic religious authority that came to occupy a critical position not only in the imperial administration but also in the Muslims' own, evolving, understandings of Islam. It brilliantly demonstrates how ordinary Muslim men and women competed with the religious elite in shaping particular interpretations of Islam. This is a work of great comparative interest for the study of Islam, politics, and religious authority in the modern world. --Muhammad Qasim Zaman, author of *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*Beautifully written and meticulously researched, *For Prophet and Tsar* casts relations between the imperial state and its Muslim subjects in an important new light. Crews demonstrates how the Russian imperial state established an important site of accommodation and mutual interest between the Muslim communities and state power. Remarkable for its chronological and geographic breadth, this book is an impressive achievement representing a major contribution to the field. --Peter Holquist, author of *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*Crews provides an important corrective to the usual understanding of Russia's imperial rule over its Muslim peoples...Crews' case for Muslim adaptation to a Christian empire is carefully and impressively drawn, and explains more than any previous history why Muslims, who have lived with Russians for 500 years, were not especially confrontational or antagonistic toward the "ruling nationality." With this rich and subtle book, Crews forces us to rethink our current Manichean division of the world into us and them. --Ronald Grigor Suny (Moscow Times 2006-06-16)[An] original and insightful book...Mr. Crews's research, much of it conducted in the newly accessible archives of provincial Russian places such as Ufa and Kazan, is of huge relevance to the present day. Although modern Russia has a secular constitution, not a theocratic one, some elements of the old relationship between the state and Russian Orthodoxy are being rebuilt. (The Economist 2006-07-13)*For Prophet and Tsar* is an original and revelatory book. Clearly written and well researched, it sheds new light on the complex interplay between the imperial state and its Muslim subjects in a way that may illuminate contemporary debates about how to secure the allegiances of Muslim populations in modern Western states. Crews's analysis of the imperial politics of religion presents a cogent and persuasive explanation of the Russian empire's relative stability in its Muslim territories during the long nineteenth century. It is refreshing to see the question posed this way, not with a view to discovering the social forces that undermined the empire in the longer run, but with a view to

understanding the sources of the empire's durability. For what strikes one about the Russian empire is not that it collapsed, as all empires do, but rather that it managed to survive so long (and resurrect itself in the Soviet era) in such a vast and backward landmass as Eurasia, where the Russians were themselves more than a large minority. --Orlando Figes (New York Review of Books

2006-12-21)Crews has uncovered ample evidence, and developed a well-reasoned analytical argument, to defend his thesis that "prophet and tsar" were compatible, not antagonistic poles of loyalty within the Russian empire. No author to date has achieved as much. His book is recommended reading to anyone interested in the history of relations between Western colonial empires and their Muslim subjects. --Daniel Brower (International History Review

2007-06-01)Robert Crews's *For Prophet and Tsar* is a work of historical scholarship, but it speaks directly and effectively to today's burning debates. Drawing attention to the ways in which the Tsars simultaneously used and promoted Islam as a tool for co-opting and controlling its far-flung Muslim populations, Crews implicitly addresses three crucial issues...Crews has written a splendid book that should be read by anyone interested in contemporary Russia, Central Asia, or the predicaments and challenges of Muslims in states not usually identified with Islam. It will foster both debate and a research agenda for many scholars to come. Moreover, it is a good read. --Edward Schatz (Middle East Journal 2007-04-01)Crews's book is solid and enlightening, and his research is prodigious, documenting a century and a half of the state's role as mediator, enforcer, and supreme resource for the claimants to the leadership in Muslim communities. Crews has studied police reports, court records, the writings of Russian Muslim clerics, and the petitions of Muslim subjects, and he comes away with a fascinating and important story, which he tells skillfully. --Leon Aron (New Republic

2007-11-05)Stanford historian Robert Crews' *For Prophet and Tsar* is a well-researched, timely study with relevance for current questions about Russia's long relationship to Islam...Crews brings together the diverse interests of Russia's empire and adeptly balances them to stimulate constructive thought about important issues. He demonstrates the breadth of his expertise by drawing not only on Russian historiography but also on such non-Russian language Turkestani sources such as Shihabetdin Marjani's work in Tartar. --Victoria Clement (The Russian Review)

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Crews's research found 'systematic investment in particularism had managed to accommodate diversity while strengthening the regime's hold on these populations;' on the other hand, 'the state

remained the weakest where it was least entangled with the affairs of Islam and where Muslims could not utilize its power on behalf of religion.' During Catherine the Great's reign, the establishment of a state-backed Islamic hierarchy in Ufa extended the state's power throughout Ural and Volga regions. Her successors' attempt at marginalizing state-sponsored Islamic involvement in Kazakh steppe and Turkestan 'deprived themselves of a mechanism for controlling Muslim intermediaries' and thus 'full integration of the populations of the steppe and Turkestan was inhibited by the state's failure to establish more extensive ties to Muslim institutions and collaborators.' By grounding 'imperial authority in religion,' 'the tsarist state became an essential forum for the resolution of disputes among Muslims, who learned to associate the state with the mediation of family conflicts as state reached deep into the mosque communities.' By turning her regime into a patron of Islam, Catherine the Great's religious toleration per her 'Instruction' was a 'pragmatic means to avert confrontation' and 'accommodation becomes a means to win over Muslim intermediaries who might assist the regime in securing eastern provinces and projecting Russian power into the steppe.' In Ufa, she supported the creation of 'an Islamic establishment under imperial direction' - the Orenburg 'Ecclesiastical Assembly' under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education until 1832 and the Ministry of Internal Affairs - which became 'a center of doctrinal authority' and 'a framework of bureaucratic supervision' by licensing clerical duties. Heading the Assembly, the first mufti Kusainov and his successors were 'willing to employ their interpretation of Islamic writ to legitimize tsarist law.' These helpful intermediaries also alleviated tensions and contradictions between Muslim beliefs and state laws. In the dispute over the timing of burying the deceased, they 'evaded enforcement rather than assumed an wholly oppositional stance that would have led to the momentous undertaking of emigration or rebellion.' The compromise of the 'Muslim traditional interests and tsarist administrative demands' also manifested itself under 'common religious idiom focused on sin.' Such 'improvisation of moral language' could be found in the case of venereal disease prevention: Governor Obruchev amended Mufti Suleimanov's religious exhortation to 'omit references to Imperial law' and assert that 'the regime disciplined not for its own sake but for Islam.' The anti-clericalism of Catherine's successors elevated the state to become a 'critical tool for ulans and lay people alike' and 'redefined orthodoxy and amplified the reach of the state into previously inaccessible locales.' Conflicts arose as lay people were given new venues in the Assembly and the imperial legal traditions to air grievances against the clerics over the 'parishioners' own understanding of the sharia.' Accusations over mullah's neglect of duties, competition between rival mullahs and intrafamilial conflict all reinforced the state's role as the arbitrator. Hence, many unpredictable outcomes resulted since even the 'guardians of law did not

always gain state backing for the efforts to extirpate a false teaching.' Officials at the time also interpreted the state's intervention in family matters as 'Muslim submission to the paternal authority of the state.' The chief feature of the tsar's justice was to 'define guardianship of the sharia.' On property division and rights of female heir, the state 'indirectly sanctioned polygamy' by enforcing sharia norm. Woman's rights in many cases advanced 'following textual tradition of Islam': 'Disputing practices afforded women novel opportunities as volumes of demands for divorce enabled women to end/renegotiate unhappy marriages.' In the case of Mar'iam Zubairova and Zuleikha Akhtiamova, the 'Assembly overrode parental wills and upheld the right of these women to marry men of their choices.' State sponsorship of Islam furnished many rigorous debates within the Muslim communities and provided opportunities to challenge the status quo. 'Treating the Kazakhs as a special case and distinguishing them from both Muslims in Orenburg,' 'governors there undermined the general statutes of toleration with administrative decrees that closed mosques and schools and in doing so, deprived themselves of the regulatory apparatus that accompanied toleration throughout the rest of the empire.' By preferring customary law over an Islamic one, the court of biys was 'absence of formality and all official routine' and as Kazakh informant Valikhanov contended that 'its informality precluded various kinds of intrigue.' The state became less involved in familial life as shown by the low appeal rates and Kazakhs' efforts to appeal to the Orenburg Assembly for direction were institutionally forbidden. The Ibragimov report 'forced lawmakers to rethink their strategy of leaving Kazakh religion without hierarchical regulations,' while N.A. Dingel'shtedt in a 1892 publication of the Journal of Civil and Criminal Law found 'officials' tendency to idealize the patriarchal charms of the customary court, whose main element is represented by arbitrariness.' Ironically, nearly half a century before, Kazem-Bek rallied against 'the disarray and the arbitrariness that marred the legal reasoning of Muslim scholars.' In Turkestan, 'Russian rule was made conditional upon the new authorities' support for the preservation of the moral injunctions and rights granted by sharia.' The state found itself allied with a cast of unsupportive intermediaries in existing religious notables and conferred upon them tax exemptions and other perquisites. The result was chaos and manipulation. For example, the Namargan kazis seized the power to make jurisconsultant and legal appointments by taking advantage of imperial policies - the district chief was tricked. On the burial law, the kazi judges ruled against the state instead of working with it and regulators contended that such 'decision provoked disturbances.' Crew concluded that 'the particularistic order of confessional politics remained the foundation of the empire' and the 'empire was a product of imagination, not just of elites but of heterogeneous groups of subjects. He also refuted many Muslim reformers and Islamic scholars' contention of stagnation under the

establishment of the mufti because they `downplayed the dynamism and vitality of religious debate that contact with tsarist institutions had unleashed and ignored the initiative of Muslim laypeople who challenged the authority of the `ulama by adapting imperial law and bureaucratic procedure to Islamic controversies.'

Excellent

I could do no better job than Alexander Morrison's critique of this book, see:

[https://www.academia.edu/466457/Review\\_of\\_Robert\\_D.\\_Crews\\_For\\_Prophet\\_and\\_Tsar.\\_Islam\\_and\\_Empire\\_in\\_Russia\\_and\\_Central\\_Asia](https://www.academia.edu/466457/Review_of_Robert_D._Crews_For_Prophet_and_Tsar._Islam_and_Empire_in_Russia_and_Central_Asia)

"For Prophet and Tsar" is like a moderately interesting magazine article expanded into a book. The core of the work consists of repetitions, with slight variations, of some not-very-surprising observations about the challenges of maintaining a monarchy in a multi-ethnic, multi-faith state, especially during the tendency towards rising nationalism in the nineteen century (perhaps I should write "nationalism", since the author is one of those who liberally sprinkle quote marks around words like nationalism and civilization, as if afraid that we might not be sophisticated enough to grasp that these words might mean different things to different people, or worse, suspect that he is not). To this is added a rather small amount of essentially anecdotal evidence, after which the reader is constantly reminded not to draw overgeneralized conclusions. This book is not cultural or religious history: there is surprisingly little about the actual practice of Islam in the Russian empire, or if and how it changed after Russian conquest. It's also not clear what we meant to take from this history today: after the Russian Revolution, the book flies over the Soviet period (whose theories and practices must have been quite different) in a few pages and then very briefly registers a vague concern about efforts by current European governments to engage with some sort of moderate Islamic authorities. Again, this might be thought-provoking in four or five pages of, say, *The New Yorker*, but it is a long slog in book form for relatively thin conclusions.

Robert Crews' pathbreaking book forces us to rethink Imperial Russia's relationship with its Muslim populations. Elegantly written, and drawing on sources in numerous languages from largely untapped archives, Crews' work is balanced and insightful. It is sure to become a classic.

Most difficult to read. A heavy subject made all the heavier by the author's approach of writing this

book as 1) a two-semester course on the subject delivered by a graduate student delivering prepared text and/or 2) a doctoral dissertation not edited for reading; but rather to be used as footnotes in someone else's dissertation on a similar subject. Almost unbearable.

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