RUSSIA'S ORIENT

Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917

Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini
EDITORS

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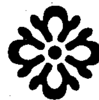

Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, editors

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS   BLOOMINGTON & INDIANAPOLIS

PUSTAKA PERDANA

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Preface

This volume is a product of the collective labors of people within and around the academic community having a scholarly interest in the oriental borderlands of the Russian Empire. It began in 1990 as a collaborative and impoverished research project, which was soon generously funded by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research. In that early stage our only clear objective was bringing together scholars daring or foolhardy enough to judge Russian imperial history in need of revision. A struggling "Borderlands Research Group" (BRG) took on new life and momentum thanks to a grant from the council, whose support continued for the entire period of the project.

As it gained focus, the BRG concentrated on organizing a research conference dedicated to the discussion of essays proposing new approaches to that long-neglected area of Russian history. The two-day conference, held in September 1994 at the University of California–Berkeley, gave its twenty-five participants the opportunity for an intensive and extremely fruitful exchange of concepts, theories, and information spread unevenly over two centuries and covering even more unevenly the enormous territory of the Russian Empire. The conference received additional financial backing from the Social Science Research Council, supplementing funds from the National Council. Thanks go to the staff of Berkeley's Slavic Center, who ensured that the conference ran smoothly and that the participants had ready access to everything from hotel rooms to sharp pencils, while discreetly placed microphones and a reliable tape recorder retained for posterity those two days of animated discussions. Guest moderators Ronald Suny, Thomas Metcalf, and Mark von Hagen ably and enthusiastically presided over the sessions.

The ultimate mark of the conference's success was the general agreement among participants to seek publication of revised conference papers. The editors were further gratified to find that each of their universities was

prepared to provide subsidies to ensure the generous inclusion of illustrations and maps as well as the appearance simultaneously of both paperback and hardbound editions. For this we wish to express our thanks to Alan Olmsted, director of the Institute for Governmental Affairs of the University of California–Davis, and to two colleagues at the University of New Orleans—Shirley Laska, Vice Chancellor for Research and Sponsored Programs, and Philip B. Coulter, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Ultimately, our greatest thanks must go to the authors for their commitment to the project and their readiness to put up with periodic demands and pleas from their editors.

Introduction

The collapse of the USSR and the increased access to its former regions (and their local archives) have opened up exciting opportunities for scholars long accustomed to reliance on published materials and, at best, glimpses of places to which they may have devoted years of study from afar. While they have not been the sole beneficiaries of these developments, those who years ago staked a claim to recovering the multiethnic character of the Tsarist Empire can be excused for feeling that they have been reborn as scholars. Being able, as seldom in a long while, to visit the erstwhile borderlands, see the material remnants of local history, tread paths that previously had to be conjured from the travels of others, and experience what only being there can provide may be likened to a smorgasbord for the famished. Events have made the possibility of "revisioning imperial Russia," as the title of a recent article proclaimed, real indeed.[1]

But not events alone. Later in this introduction we shall suggest some of the fresh approaches, research methodologies, and conceptual modeling, often from disciplines other than history, that have helped shape the thinking of all who have contributed to this volume. Much of this rethinking has been late in coming to students of Russian history. But the turn to different kinds of analysis, the most recent and challenging fruits of which can be found later in these pages, was emerging long before the demise of the Soviet Union and was establishing a foundation for what could be done under the changing circumstances of the past decade.

Commensurate with anything that French, English, or German scholars have produced, oriental studies (*vostokovedenie*) in the Russian academy has a long and justifiably proud history of sound research, superb textual analysis, and substantial contribution to the archive of information about the peoples and cultures along the empire's southern and eastern borderlands. Whatever their involvement, direct or indirect, in the creation of a Russian orientalism, in the sense captured by Edward Said's critique,[2] old-

regime specialists such as B. A. Dorn, A. E. Krymskii, V. R. Rozen, and V. V. Bartol'd made oriental studies a pursuit in the best European intellectual and scholarly traditions. The collapse of the tsarist system and the birth of the Soviet did little to undermine interest in vostokovedenie or the skillful training of succeeding generations of researchers and teachers. The political purposes to which the effort was put may have been more blatant, and Soviet administrators certainly shaped it in ways that tsarist bureaucrats could only have dreamed of, yet work of good and even great quality continued to emerge from the labors of many scholars.[3]

Elsewhere, interest in Russia's Orient has been understandably less pronounced and compelling, except insofar as concern for Great Power politics drew attention to the region and those who controlled it. A few small centers of activity, often energized by Soviet or East European émigrés, cropped up in Paris, Munich, Cologne, London, and New York, and an equally small number of academic institutions (Harvard, Columbia, Indiana, Washington) offered hospitable settings for scholars to pursue what most believed to be an arcane, exotic, and impractical field of study.[4] The commitment to area studies, especially in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, certainly bolstered the modest expansion of these activities, but the critical development that ultimately transformed the study of Russia's Orient was generated in Paris through the efforts of Alexandre Bennigsen and his small cadre of colleagues and students.[5]

The major contributions of the Bennigsen *collectif* were several: first, it discovered and recovered published materials, especially of the regional periodical press, that unlocked previously unheard voices and unexamined insights from among indigenous peoples themselves; second, it tapped into archival documents in Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Iran that added another dimension to the study of parts of Russia's Orient, particularly before the Soviet period; third, it drew attention away from the center of the Russian/Soviet empires to the southern and eastern peripheries, assisting thereby to broaden the range of perspectives about events and developments that helped shape the borderlands and the heartland; and fourth, it began weaning scholarship on the subject from its fruitful but limiting philological and literary roots onto a broader-based enterprise that drew increasingly upon the social sciences and their evolving methodologies. At the same time, those working in the social sciences were made to appreciate more than before the importance to their research of the local languages. Bennigsen's "Centre Russe," as it was popularly called, was an integral part of what became the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, France's most esteemed research-oriented institution of higher education, and was housed on its "campus" along the Boulevard Raspail. It eventually served not only as an extraordinary research collection, but as a mecca for scholars young and old from across the world, where they found an eminently congenial setting to pursue their work,

imbibe an afternoon *café turque,* and contribute in separate and collective ways to the development in the West of a fuller study of Russia. The conscious expansion of France's premier specialized journal in the field, *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique,* to include scholarship on the Russian Orient was one more reflection of Bennigsen's influence.

To his French base, Bennigsen added other European and Turkish and especially American colleagues and students—some who worked directly with him at the University of Chicago, where he held a joint appointment in the 1970s and early 1980s; others who made the pilgrimage to Paris; and still others who either heard him lecture or read his publications. We do not need to exaggerate his influence, or deny the controversy he at times engendered with his interpretations, to note that from under his guidance and encouragement emerged a small but innovative and productive generation of scholars who in turn have helped shape some of the best of the newest. We like to think of Bennigsen as a pioneer of sorts whose vision for vostokovedenie in the West included, above all, a fundamental respect for the viewpoint from the borderlands and the development of an ability to interpret it effectively, a sensitivity to the realities of interaction among peoples and cultures as a formative force itself, and a willingness to wrestle with the social as well as the political, the local as well as the imperial or international. Directly or indirectly, echoes of that vision reverberate in our own volume of essays, the authors of which are all beneficiaries of Mikhail Gorbachev's political gambit and Bennigsen's intellectual opening.

Our collection carries forward the work of scholars such as Bennigsen while reframing the subject of imperial history. Though the eastern and southern borders of the empire appear clearly defined on historical maps (those, at least, that include the territories beyond European Russia), inquiry into the evolution of imperial rule and its influence on the peoples inhabiting those regions remains meager. In part, this shortcoming results from scholarly preoccupation with the Russian autocracy. The power of the tsar and the St. Petersburg ministries, the focal point and center of the empire, drew attention logically to the process of policy formulation and to administrative actions, but inevitably away from events and developments in the outlying regions. Yet this reluctance to investigate the eastern and southern borderlands also stemmed from a lack of vision.

Much of the literature produced about the Russian imperial experience has focused on policy as defined from the center, along with generalizations and conclusions from "official" statements that pay little heed to, first, the unarguable tension between theory and practice; second, the influence on policy implementation of local circumstances—whether geographic, economic, or cultural—that varied enormously across a huge territory; and third, the role of regional/local authorities and populations in actual policy formulation and application. Even at the centers of power,

debate over policy choices among and within ministries or other institutions remains essentially unexamined, as do the arguments and counterarguments in and beyond governmental circles about causes, goals, and consequences of administrative decisions. Is it language or religion, for example, politics or culture, invidious discrimination or raison d'état that explains the pursuit of Russification, its absence or increased intensity? For that matter, can one so easily explain policies such as Russification without acknowledging some interaction between the arbiters of power and their presumably obliging subjects?

The debates that went on within Russian elite groups, both secular and religious, have barely echoed in the historiography, as is true for questions of how indigenous peoples conducted their individual and communal lives under colonial conditions. For all the writing on Russia as empire, we have been left a remarkable legacy of significant silences. With its presumption of Russian superiority, the influence/response paradigm that had colored discussions of colonial relations for so long is much to blame. By implicitly accepting the universal and fundamentally determinist future proposed by modernization theory, that paradigm proved especially minimalist and one-sided. All influence, it effectively insisted, flowed from the outside (advanced and progressive) into the native settings (backward and traditional), making colonial domination an apparently necessary stage along the path to the modern. Missing from the discussion were cultures and their fragments, authentic voices from below and on the margins, indigenous ethnographers who could act as cultural mediators of a different kind, and iconographies of the "other" that were self-generated rather than imposed. Narratives about ethnic groups reflected, however innocently, neocolonial assumptions that for all their sympathy reduced the subjects' involvement in the making of history to a shadow of its logical extent. Even when recorded, the drama of insurgency, for example, too often meant the story of colonial administrative efforts at suppression and control, leaving us little understanding of the insurgents themselves. In fact, the equation of insurgency with criminality effaced its significance as a fight for social justice.

For now, histories of imperial Russia cannot claim the distinction of the many recent studies of the French and British empires that have enlarged and enriched their topics by redefining the very notion of imperial history. The essays in our book, however, do suggest ways by which the study of the Russian Empire in its turn can become the source of new insight into the history of that vast land and its peoples, begin to overcome the ethnographic travesties of the past, and make so many stereotypes, by contemporaries as well as historians, less compelling. Our rethinking of this imperial past uses what might appear to be a conventional vocabulary to explore a variety of themes that emerge from the interdependent concepts of empire and colony. Implicit in our approach to the Russian Empire is the

objectivity of dispassionate observation, seem to one contemporary ethnographer to have been a kind of "cultural representation" of ethnic groups. Yet these representations were also "social facts."[8]

Ethnicity acquired special significance when imperial administrators concluded that knowledge of their subject peoples could help them formulate policies for effective, progressive rule. Benedict Anderson points in particular to the use of ethnic labels in censuses, maps, and museums to divide the populations into knowable groups. In his words, these institutions "profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its domination—the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry."[9]

To emphasize the importance of the colonial experience suggests the need to explore points of contact or "encounters," imagined or lived, among the empire's peoples and between the tsarist regime and its subject communities. It underlines the need to understand the response of subject populations to colonial rule. These peoples play a major part in our story of the empire; their accommodation with and resistance to the empire constitute in many respects the real imperial history of Russia. Their response entailed refining, redefining, and codifying their own markers of identity, and in the process shaped their own history as a people.

The contacts across the social and cultural boundaries separating colonizers and colonized, Westerners and non-Westerners, extended far beyond the realm of imperial administration and ethnographic expeditions. Missionaries, traders, doctors, and teachers sought, at times successfully, to penetrate the domain of the colonial "other." To "go native" was yet another mode of infiltration, undertaken not to convert or improve but to escape. Taken all together, these contacts created the immediate context for direct encounters between empire and colony, between colonizers and colonized.

They also produced invaluable records of the impact of colonial rule. The ethnohistorian Greg Dening found that beaches became arenas of exchange and border crossing when Western sailing ships approached Polynesian islands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. He presents convincing evidence that beachcombers, both figuratively and literally, were key actors establishing communication across these cultural barriers. Their records were indispensable to his search to uncover the vanished culture of the Marquesas islanders. Though their testimony could never escape the cultural bias of their origins, he is convinced that "one can see beyond the frontier only through the eyes of those who stood on the frontier and looked out. To know the native one must know the intruder."[10]

This judgment is relevant to our inquiry into the imperial borderlands. It stresses the importance of a close reading of the documents left by the colonizers, for their records remain the principal account of interethnic

relations under imperial rule. They viewed the colonial world through blinders created by ethnic and historical stereotypes, and by clichés built of their own sense of ethnic and national identity and their conviction of moral superiority. Their records are a story of Russian self-representation, official and popular, through the centuries when Russians became increasingly engaged in encounters with non-Russians. At the same time, the information derived from a critical analysis of their observations is a key ingredient in our revised history of the empire.

In the same manner, the records and writings of the colonized present the colonial experience from a vantage point that is essential to our story. Those who sought to "cross the beach" to collaborate in one manner or other with the colonizers have as much to tell us of the encounter as officials whose imperial mission included learning native languages and studying native cultures. This arena, more than any other imperial site, became the location where elements of tolerance and mutual understanding were likely to emerge alongside the intolerance and domination that imperial rule cultivated. Historical hindsight suggests that these moments may have an important lesson for our postcolonial age of ethnic conflict.

This cultural and social encounter was inherently unequal. Although, as one cultural semiotician has recently suggested, the boundary between two cultures resembles a "zone of cultural bilingualism," communication occurs in the colonial context in conditions of what he calls "semiotic inequality."[11] As a result, those who held the instruments of political power also controlled the terms in which that communication took place. This form of imperial hegemony found expression in symbolic imagery and verbal stereotypes, which language embodied and to which it gave voice.

To investigate these forms of imperial domination greatly enlarges the scope of the topics relevant to imperial history. The cultural symbols that embodied colonial inequality appeared in national histories, travel literature, popular newspapers, art, and even exhibits at world's fairs. One historian has investigated what he terms the "rhetoric of empire," that is, the peculiar literary devices that proclaimed the legitimacy of imperial domination.[12] The images that characterized "primitive" and "savage" peoples were the simplest and arguably the most powerful labels to confirm cultural inferiority. They appeared not only in popular literature but in the works of social anthropologists as well. They emerged out of a theory of primitive society, which, as one recent scholar argues, "is about something which does not and never has existed."[13] When colonial empires recognized ethnic differences, they also constructed their own scale of cultural superiority, extending from savage natives to their own self-image of civilized nation. As a result, approaching the history of the empire from this cultural angle opens up new perspectives on the Russian homeland itself.

Probably the most influential study of the textual records of Western imperialism is Edward Said's examination of French and English literary images of the "Orient." In his work this term covers a vaguely defined area extending from North Africa to India. But Said is concerned only with Western literary images, which he describes as a "system of knowledge," of the peoples of these lands. "Orientalism" signifies the Western point of view, or "discourse," that created an imaginary, exotic picture of eastern peoples and lands. For Said, it captures the pervasive, demeaning nature of Western global domination.[14]

Said's perception of the significance to Western imperialism of degrading images of eastern peoples has proved a fruitful foundation for new studies of imperial history, including our own. But it hides a serious weakness. The ethnographer James Clifford has pointed out that Said's literary analysis lacks any allusions to, or even any basis on which to understand, oriental judgments of the West. The West is privileged to the extent of silencing any other, contrary voices. Said's method, in Clifford's opinion, is gravely flawed for want of a conceptual position from which to evaluate "the ways in which distinct groups of humanity imagine, describe, and comprehend each other."[15] This observation is a timely warning. The success of the literary contribution to imperial history must depend on allowing a multiplicity of voices to be heard—Westerners and non-Westerners, colonizers and colonized.

The parallels are numerous between French and British images of Muslim lands and Russian cultural representations of the peoples in the empire's southern and eastern territories. The "Orient" in our title alludes both to non-Russian borderlands extending from the Crimea to Sakhalin and to the various textual portraits and stories of the colonial experience that these borderlands produced. Acknowledgment of a border separating the Russian "West" from its "Orient" emerged repeatedly throughout the long period of Russian imperial rule, yet it fluctuated from place to place, and from one period to the next. Just as no one geographical site could claim to be *the* Russian Orient, no simple line on a map separated Western and Eastern peoples within the empire. Some Russians discussed in this volume even used oriental imagery to express their distaste for political or cultural aspects of their own people and state, placed outside the civilized West. In this respect, too, the Russian Empire occupied a unique place among Western states.

In many ways, our manner of writing the history of the empire is a study in comparative history. Along the borderlands of the Russian Empire, imperial policies and interethnic relations varied from one region to another, each with its own peculiar mixture of language, religious practices, and cultural traditions. Our essays propose a comparative approach to regional developments on the edges of the empire. Without denying the importance of separate histories of different peoples and regions, this

volume seeks to uncover those historical processes common to some or all of the subject peoples.

On a broader scale, the Russian Empire evolved in ways that are comparable to those of other Western empires. The experience of these empires passed into Russian policies and practices of imperial rule beginning with the reign of Peter I. It remained a point of reference, to be condemned or emulated, to the very end of the empire's existence. Yet the Muscovite origins of the Russian Empire continued to influence imperial practices, both at the center and in the borderlands. The empire's historical tradition and geopolitical context set it apart from the other Western states. By keeping in mind these comparative perspectives, enriched by the abundant postcolonial studies of Western empires, we hope to widen the range of relevant issues and conceptual approaches, and expand the place of the imperial experience in Russian history.

The Russian Empire and its successor empire, the Soviet Union, have vanished, leaving behind political borders drawn to isolate ethnically distinct peoples first recognized and represented within imperial borderlands. One heritage of this history is the transformation of ethnicity into the cornerstone of current ethnoterritorial nationalism. The history of the successor nation-states must pay particular attention to the imperial period. Our essays on peoples and borderlands speak to conditions of a very different age, but that age prepared the way for the Soviet project of national territorial divisions and, ultimately, the independence of the republics. We do not demonize that imperial past; we seek, rather, to throw light on the little-known history of those peoples under imperial rule and to make understandable the historical background of the new, post-imperial age of the former imperial borderlands.

Notes

1. Jane Burbank, "Revisioning Imperial Russia," *Slavic Review* 52, no. 3 (1993): 555–567.

2. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979).

3. The legacy of Russian/Soviet vostokovedenie has been the subject of extensive writing within its native setting but has received little attention elsewhere. In fact, even among those who, like Edward Said, have attended to the ideological dimension of "Orientalism" in something of a comparative perspective (at least within the European community), the Russian variant might just as well have never existed. The marginalization of this legacy by the dominant Euro-American academic discourse is testimony to both the linguistic handicaps of non-Russianists (very much like that affecting Americanists who seek to contribute to the historiography of the Cold War) and, contrarily, the indifference of Russianists, though with important exceptions. The most significant publications of the latter may be found listed in the bibliography accompanying this volume.

4. In this context, the careers of Edward Allworth, Michael Rywkin, Alan Fisher,

Omeljan Pritsak, Halil Inalcik, Kemal H. Karpat, Yuri Bregel, Denis Sinor, and Peter B. Golden stand out, as does Serge A. Zenkovsky's pioneering study *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

5. Bennigsen published more than two hundred articles and at least a dozen books during his career, but the two that he wrote with his longtime collaborator, Chantal Quelquejay, stand out in our minds as most reflective of the character of his accomplishments: *Les Mouvements nationaux chez les musulmans de Russie: Le "Sultangalievisme" au Tatarstan* (Paris, 1960) and *La Presse et le mouvement national chez les musulmans de Russie avant 1920* (Paris, 1964). Perhaps more than any other book, the former awakened attention to an aspect of Bolshevik history and the October Revolution that had been unappreciated in its significance *because* it involved bringing in the margins of those subjects, while the latter served to expose the virtually unknown yet extraordinary array of published material—periodical and nonperiodical—produced in the borderlands and by natives themselves.

6. "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. Frederic Barth (Boston, 1969), pp. 4–5 and 9–10.

7. Manning Nash, *The Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World* (Chicago, 1989), pp. 5–6.

8. James Clifford, "Introduction," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. J. Clifford and G. Marcus (Berkeley, 1986), p. 13.

9. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, 1991), pp. 163–164.

10. Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas, 1774–1880* (Honolulu, 1980), p. 43.

11. Iurii Lotman, *Struktura dialoga kak printsip raboty semioticheskogo mekhanizma* (Tartu, 1987), pp. 10–12.

12. See David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham, N.C., 1993), esp. chap. 4 ("Classification: The Order of Nature").

13. Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion* (London, 1988), p. 8.

14. Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 2–8.

15. James Clifford, "On Orientalism," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), p. 266.