

Kassymbekova, Botakoz. *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan*. Central Eurasia in Context. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016. 288 pp. \$28.95. ISBN 978-0-8229-6419-3.

The publication of any new study on Central Asian history is cause for celebration among Central Asian scholars, but when Botakoz Kassymbekova's *Despite Cultures* came out, the excitement was justifiably doubled, for it is a significant contribution to the growing body of literature on the Central Asian region. *Despite Cultures* is a critical analysis of tactics, strategies, and practices of governance in Tajikistan in the 1920s and 1930s. Kassymbekova's approach to written communications, reports, and proclamations is somewhat unique. Rather than judging reports as reliable, unreliable, or ideologically imbued, Kassymbekova treats all documents as means or methods of governance which, she argues, may help us comprehend the methodologies used by modern political actors to gain power, exert control via communication, and implement strategic practices to maintain control.

The study consists of eight chapters, in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. Each chapter analyzes various tactics of governance designed to gain and maintain Soviet rule in Tajikistan. For example, state and local officials in Tajikistan strategically used a resettlement policy to reach Tajiks who lived in remote mountainous areas, while simultaneously diminishing the influence of urban tribal groups. Kassymbekova argues that the resettlement strategy was about uniting with non-tribal Tajiks in remote areas and righting a historical wrong by presenting the sedentary agricultural groups as having been exiled to the mountains by seminomadic tribal groups who moved into the valleys, took over the land, and established cattle farming.

Another example of governing strategy was the practice of granting amnesty to members of anti-Soviet guerilla groups on state holidays. By saving a person's life on a state holiday, the political becomes personal. The government's intention was to win over individuals opposed to the Soviet regime by granting amnesties on specific state holidays and creating grateful and reliable citizens to inhabit the Soviet state.

Violence accompanied all tactics and strategies during collectivization, resettlements, repression of peasants, and cleansing of "disloyal" officials in an attempt to consolidate the power of Moscow's party. While this violence was largely ignored by previous historiographers, Kassymbekova analyzes, among many other things, numerous reports of rape, orgies, and debauchery conducted by officials who visited villages for requisition campaigns. Through her analysis of violence, Kassymbekova demonstrates how Muslim and European Soviet officials used brutality, persuasion, and force to establish Soviet reform and industry.

This fascinating study will be an informational asset for any student of Central Asian or Russian history. Kassymbekova presents an engaging and factual account of early twentieth-century life for much of Central Asia by including numerous stories and individual accounts. The research in Russian and Tajik archives, though extensive and impressive, may have benefitted from the inclusion of archival materials from Uzbekistan, but it would not come as a surprise had Kassymbekova been prohibited from accessing such material.

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Dameshek, Lev Mikhailovich, Budit Tsydipmunkuevna Zhalsanova, and Leonid Vladimirovich Kuras. *Istoriia organov samoupravleniia buriat v XIX–nachale XX v.* Irkutsk: Izdatel'stvo Irkutskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2013. 503 pp. ISBN 978-5-9624-0930-6.

Researchers of the nationality question in late Imperial Russia are well aware that tsarist policy toward the non-Russian peoples was frequently oppressive and intrusive. Yet in some instances the state's hand lay more lightly upon them than we might expect. The Buryats—a Mongol-speaking Buddhist and Shamanist herding nation of southeastern Siberia—enjoyed a surprising degree of local autonomy during much of the nineteenth century, thanks to the Siberian administrative reform

drafted by Alexander I's advisor, Alexander Speransky (1772–1839). This book investigates the origins, activities, and ultimate fate of the Speransky system of Buryat self-government.

Lev Dameshek, Budit Zhalsanova, and Leonid Kuras inform us that in the first century after the conquest of the Buryat lands in the 1600s, legislation on Siberian nationality issues had been “fragmentary,” treating specific aspects of the “collection of *iasak* [fur tax], baptism of Siberian natives, criminal law, landholding, and protecting the frontier” (p. 134). Despite periodic attempts to ease the natives' lot (for example, under Catherine the Great), Russian officials demanded excessive taxes and labor duties; operated exploitative trade monopolies; and ruled as virtual tsarlings. “Reports came to St. Petersburg about the abuses and disorders in Siberia ... and the collapse of the administrative apparatus,” prompting Speransky to thoroughly reform Siberia's administration in 1822 (p. 153). Besides tackling general issues such as the administrative structure, corruption, the exile system, trade, landholding, and tax and service obligations, Speransky gave the Buryats (along with some other Siberian natives, for example, the Evenki, Khakass, and Yakuts) organs of local government that were staffed by natives, used native customary law, and wielded administrative, judicial, and fiscal powers under Russian officialdom's supervision.

The Speransky reform created a three-step system of Buryat self-government: the lowest level, the “clan administration” (*rodovoe upravlenie*), governed individual settlements and herding groups. The “native office” (*inorodnaia uprava*)—the middle level—supervised a variable number of *rodovye upravleniia*. The highest level was formed by the twelve “steppe dumas” (*stepnye dumy*), which directed several *inorodnye upravly*, and governed between around five thousand and thirty thousand Buryats each: these were the Tunka, Verkholsk, Ol'khon, Alar, Balangansk, Kudinsk, and Idinsk *dumy* in Irkutsk Province to the west of Baikal and the Selenga, Khori, Aga, Kudara, and Barguzin *dumy* in Transbaikalia to the east. All the organs operated in spoken Buryat. Written records were kept in Classical Mongolian—the Buryats' literary language—in Transbaikalia (with Russian translations), but records were always kept in Russian in the West, since there were few Mongolian-literate Buryats there, nor any standard transcription for spoken Buryat. The bodies' leaders either were elected by community meetings or inherited their office from blood relatives who had preceded them, but they had to be confirmed by Russian officials, and could be rejected on the basis of the opposition of more than half of the Buryats in the relevant territory, or “bad behavior” (*khudoe povedenie*) verified by a court (p. 313). The *upravleniia*, *upravly*, and *dumy* were responsible for carrying out higher-level Russian officials' instructions and sending them periodic reports; collecting taxes and other obligations (repairing roads and bridges, transporting state and military officials, escorting prisoners, and so on); keeping demographic and economic statistics; issuing travel passes; operating public granaries; supervising trading fairs; collecting and distributing charitable donations; preventing and punishing antisocial behavior such as drunkenness, brawling, and gambling; fighting fires; and fostering public health and education.

The authors demonstrate convincingly that the Speransky system was “effective enough” and gave the Buryats a “unique experience of self-government,” but it certainly did not lack flaws (p. 207). Some native officials indulged in embezzlement, overtaxing, and other abuses, and intrigues between feuding aristocratic factions caused administrative havoc. Many important positions were unpaid, so “access to the native institutions was completely closed for men of few means” (p. 315). Moreover, the absence of the middle level of administration—the *inorodnaia uprava*—in some areas stymied Buryats' quest for justice: if a Buryat was dissatisfied with a judicial decision by his *rodovoe upravlenie*, but there was no *uprava* between him and the local *duma* (which had no court), he had to take his case to a Russian court, which often required traveling great distances and hiring an interpreter and stenographer. Medical and educational efforts faced severe financial and personnel shortages, so in many cases “Buryats were deprived of medical care and the majority of children did not have the opportunity to attend schools” (p. 479). Yet it was not these factors that ultimately doomed Buryat self-government, but the attitude and ideology of Russian officialdom. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, conflicts with the empire's Polish subjects, the acquisition of the Amur territories, the quickening of economic modernization, and the influence of official Russian chauvinism all combined to effect a “deformation of traditional

imperial policy and a sharpening of national and regional contradictions. ... If, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the Russian state viewed Siberia as a source of [income] for the treasury, aimed at a multifaceted system of administration, a high degree of ethnoconfessional toleration and pragmatism, and took into account local particularities, then after the 1850s and 1860s, what became important was not only Siberia's economic conquest but its occupation by a monolithic population of the same faith as [European] Russia." By the end of the nineteenth century, this change of direction resulted in a "fundamental reform of the administration of the natives, founded on Russification" (p. 250). Thus, in the face of native petitions, defiance, and resistance, the Irkutsk Buryats' organs of self-government were removed one by one between 1886 and 1890, and those of the Transbaikal Buryats, between 1901 and 1904. In their place came modified versions of the *inorodnye upravly*, now much more firmly subordinated to, and closely supervised by, Russian "peasant supervisors" (*krest'ianskie nachal'niki*) and far less able to address actual local needs. These actions were in keeping with the simultaneous transfer of Buryat lands to settlers from European Russia and more aggressive conversion efforts by the Church (not to mention similar assimilationist measures elsewhere in Russia).

This book represents a milestone in the historiography of the Buryats in late Imperial Russia. It provides a wealth of fresh, highly-detailed material—not only on the Buryats' administrative organs themselves but also on the social, economic, and religious context in which they functioned—and complements existing scholarship on Buryat self-government by, for example, Helen Sharon Hundley, Marc Raeff, and Saian Darzhaev. The reader is struck by Dameshek, Zhalsanova, and Kuras's patient, conscientious thoroughness in seeking out and judiciously employing the relevant sources, both archival materials (primarily from the State Archives of Irkutsk Oblast, Zabaikal'skii Krai, and the Buryat Republic, as well as other repositories such as the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts) and published items (Russian and Buryat law codes, statistical studies, Buryat historical chronicles, contemporary periodicals, travelers' and ethnographers' accounts, and Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet scholarly works). The book's 114-page historiographical essay, frequent source discussions, seventeen-page bibliography, and detailed archival fund list will significantly ease the labors of future researchers. One fervently hopes that it will be republished in a larger number of copies (only one hundred were printed), with the addition of maps and an index to enhance its ease of use.

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Niqueux, Michel, ed. and trans. *L'Occident vu de Russie: Anthologie de la pensée russe de Karamzine à Poutine*. Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 2016. iv + 793 pp. €37.92. ISBN 978-2-720-40545-7.

Michel Niqueux, emeritus professor at the University of Caen, is a prolific and highly respected French slavist, best known perhaps for his fascinating study, written with Leonid Heller, of the history of utopian ideas in Russia. The present anthology of Russian writings on the West, for which Professor Niqueux has served both as editor and translator, is obviously a labor of love. It is beautifully annotated with rich and informative introductions and biographical notes, and it provides a helpful thematic index in addition to the index of names. It contains 365 texts, many of them not previously translated, by 140 authors. In its scope and sheer size this anthology dwarfs anything previously available in English, French, or German, and the only Russian anthology of comparable scope lacks introductions and contextualization.

What makes the study of Russian images of the West particularly interesting is their variety. Western constructions of a Russian "other" from Custine to Conrad and beyond often took the form of a recurrent and inescapable despotism. Both Madame de Stael and the Marquis de Custine spoke of Russian government as "autocracy tempered by strangulation," and Joseph Conrad's picture in *Under Western Eyes* of Russian radicalism as the mirror image of the violent and arbitrary rule of