

“National in Form, Orthodox in Content”¹

An Examination of Russia’s Imperial Pursuits of Muslim Kazakh Populations at the End of the Tsarist Period

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¹ Isabelle Kriendler, “Nikolai Il’minskii and Language Planning in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 22 (1979), 5 in reference to “national in form, proletariat in content,” coined in Joseph Stalin, “The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East” (speech, Communist University of the Toilers of the East, May 18, 1925), Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/05/18.htm>

Dedicated to Dr. Mustafa Tuna and Dr. Mona Hassan and the passion they share with their students in their respective fields of expertise. Without which, I would not have experienced or been inspired to choose the engaging, challenging, and fulfilling academic path I did while at Duke.

Abstract

The last 50 years of the Tsarist period in Russia were marked by an extensive absorption of steppe lands and their nomadic, Muslim populations. The acquisition of these lands allowed the Russian empire to expand its territory to the South and East greatly but also bringing the heart of the Russian empire – the Russian Orthodox Church -- into closer contact with the cultures and religions of its Eastern neighbors than ever before. Russia always had an uneasy relationship with the East, at times rejecting that part of its geography and culture in an attempt to be a Western empire in the mold of France and Britain. By the end of the nineteenth century, Russia's emulation of its Western peers took the form of colonial-style conquest of the predominantly Muslim groups to the East. However, because of Russia's historic relationship with the East, its imperialism manifested very differently than that of the Western empires towards their colonies in Africa and Asia. This period was marked by a strong sentiment of Russian nationalism, which was extrinsically linked to the Orthodox church. Orthodoxy became a defining point of Russian identity.

This Russification through religion was vital to the absorption attempts of the Kazakh population in the second half of the 19th century. Russians erroneously saw the Kazakhs as “superficial” Muslims who would relatively easily convert to the Orthodox religion and subsequently be receptive to Russian culture and citizenship. However, the Kazakhs had a centuries-long connection and commitment to Islam, and their Muslim conviction only grew and hardened after Russia's conquest of their lands. Russian elites failed to acknowledge and recognize the deep and faithful connection of the Kazakhs to Islam. Instead, they saw only a group of nomadic savages needing saving and civilizing.

The writings of Ilya Merkur'ev, a student of the Kazan Theological Seminary in 1916, are an excellent example of the attitudes of Russian elites and their views of Islamic populations, particularly the Kazakhs. An examination of Merkur'ev's work reveals the clouded view held by Russians at the time. In their drive to create a unified Russian empire, rooted in loyalty to and pride in Russia – and, by extension, the Orthodox church – Russian leaders stumbled in their attempts to assimilate and absorb their neighbors. Throughout this period, we see examples of opposing opinions and observations of the Kazakhs, which often led to a misguided policy of Russification and assimilation of these peoples.

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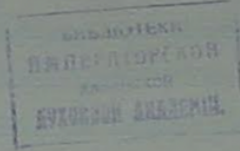
Preface and Notes on Translation

My main archival source for this thesis is a document written by Kazan Theological Academy student Ilya Merkur'ev. This document is a roughly 300-page, handwritten term paper from 1916, written in pre-Soviet Russian. I have spent the better part of the last year working on translating it and using the information that was uncovered to spearhead my secondary source research. Professor Tuna and I knew this would be an ambitious project when I took it on, and I cannot thank him enough for the countless support and encouragement he has given me in the translation process. The document is split into two distinct parts. To create the most compelling argument, I decided to prioritize the translation of the first part of this source and utilize that information to navigate my subsequent research. While there wasn't as much raw material and knowledge as I was hoping for, there were themes present throughout the document that I focused on instead. Thus, while my argument is stemmed from the realizations and connections I made during my translation and analysis of the document, much of this thesis relies on secondary sources to provide concrete evidence. I took the information and topics that my source discusses and the context in which it was written as a springboard for further, extensive support for my argument. In utilizing this primary source in my thesis, I aim to demonstrate new historical knowledge by translating a document into English that has never been translated or used in a scholarly setting.

The most effective and efficient way to translate this document was to pull out the author's main ideas while incorporating some of the specific vernacular used. I, in no way, claim that this was a professional document translation. Below I have provided two images of the translated document to help the reader visualize my research and efforts.

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Доценту М. Тр. Шванову.

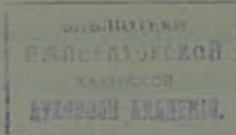


Религиозно-нравственное состояние
казакъ - киргизовъ и распростра-
ние среди нихъ Христианства.

Курсовое сочинение студента 2-го курса
Императорской Казанской Духовной
Академии Ильи Меркурьева.
19^{15/16} г. г. 2008.

И'ia Merkur'ev, "Religiozno-nravstvennoe sostoianie kazak-kirgizov i rasprostranenie sredi nikh khristiantva" April 1916, f. 10, op. 2, d. 128, National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan (NART), Title Page

Введение.



Достоинство ли изысканъ въ русской и инородческой литературѣ вопросъ о религіозно-нравственной жизни казакъ-киргизовъ, если же нѣтъ, то почему? - Почему именно ислама исповѣдываютъ казакъ-киргизы? - Характерныя черты ислама: нетерпимость, фанатизмъ и его сковывающее вліяніе на умы своихъ послѣдователей. - Миссіонерство, какъ способъ приобщенія киргизы къ русской культурѣ и гражданственности. - Препиущества просвѣщенія киргизы върей Аристовой предъ школьными образованіемъ. - Задачи и цѣли киргизской миссіи. - Участіе въ ней не только церковной, но и гражданской властей. - Несовершенство мнѣній мнѣ, отрицательно относящихся къ устройству киргизской миссіи. - Взглядъ на инородческую миссію Н. М. Ильминскаго и Я. В. Пущкина. - Благопріятствующія обстоятельства распространенію христіанства въ киргизской степи. - Планъ предлагаемаго нами сочиненія.

Къ числу многихъ инородцевъ, воссѣвшихъ въ составъ нашего обширнаго отечества, относятся и когурціи по степямъ Зауралья и Азіи киргизы. Хотя эти

И'я Меркур'ев, "Religiozno-nravstvennoe sostoianie kazak-kirgizov i rasprostranenie sredi nikh khristiantva" April 1916, f. 10, op. 2, d. 128, National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan (NART), 1

Introduction

At its height in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Russian empire encompassed several regions with large Muslim populations, such as the Volga-Urals, the Caucasus, South Caucasia, and Central Asia. Though these regions have notable differences, and their incorporation into the Russian empire varied, the treatment of the Muslim subjects of the Russian empire in the nineteenth century paralleled the imperialism of Western Europe. While Western European countries were carving up Africa and Asia for colonial domination, Russia asserted its influence over its Muslim population through policies of linguistic and cultural Russification, paternalistic assimilation, and religious conversion. Much like their Western European counterparts, the Russians were convinced of their cultural and religious superiority. This perceived sense of supremacy can be seen in all aspects of the Russian empire's interactions with its Muslim subjects. Russia's expansion eastward to the Pacific Ocean in the nineteenth century made Russia an undeniably eastern empire with its acquisition of Central Asia, the Steppes, and Siberia, despite the long-standing desire of the Russian tsars, beginning with Peter the Great (r. 1683-1725), to be seen as fully Western.¹ While Russian elites² perceived the communities of Russia's eastern and southern borderlands as backward – often due to their ethnic origins, nomadic traditions, and Islamic faith – many of these populations had been part of the Russian empire for centuries and had become a deeply integrated part of Russian culture. The unique geographic position of Russia and its hundreds of years of absorption and conquest of

¹ Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 5

² In this thesis I will be using the term “Russian elites” to represent educated Russians including the clergy, statesmen, bureaucrats, and scholars who would have been knowledgeable about and would have contributed to the events and discussions of this era in history.

Eastern populations created a uniquely hybrid state. Therefore, no amount of Russification attempted by Russian elites in the late nineteenth century could quell the cultural diversity of the borderlands, and the tension between the identity-conflicted empire and the Muslim-influenced East remains a hallmark of the end of the Tsarist period in Russian imperial history.³ Throughout this thesis, I utilize “The Religious and Moral State of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz⁴ and the Spread of Christianity Among Them,” written by Ilya Merkur’ev, a student of the Kazan Theological Academy in 1916, to gain a first-hand glimpse into the effects that the ever-present need for a Russian identity directly had on the Orthodox missionaries and educators that most-closely interacted with the Kazakhs.⁵

Birth of a New Identity

In the nineteenth century, a need to develop a defined Russian identity to connect all the Russian empire’s subjects gained renewed energy and focus among Russian elites. By creating a unique and defined identity, the Russian elites hoped to establish a unified empire with loyalty to the tsar instilled in all its subjects. The pathway to Russification took two primary forms: language or religion. Some of the Russian elites believed that the true meaning of being Russian lay in the Russian language. At the time, many parts of the Russian empire had a primary language other than Russian, be it Polish, French, or various local dialects. Those who thought language should be the focus of the Russian identity believed that establishing the Russian language as the primary language of usage throughout the Russian empire would connect all the

³ Robert P. Geraci, “Going Abroad or Going to Russia? Orthodox Missionaries in the Kazakh Steppe,” in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 274-276

⁴ At the time this document was written, Russians incorrectly referred to Kazakhs as Kazakh-Kyrgyz or Kyrgyz. I will be referring to these populations as Kazakhs throughout the thesis and in my translation of the primary source. I have decided in my translations to automatically switch the term from Kazakh-Kyrgyz to Kazakhs as well. (Shirin Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union*)

⁵ Merkur’ev, Title Page

Russian empire's subjects to the tsar and Russia's mission. However, on the other side, there was a strong argument supported by many Russian elites for the Orthodox Church to be the keystone of the Russian identity. Since the 10th century, dating back to the Russian empire's formation, the Russ people had been tied to Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy evolved with Russia as the state religion and existed in this role until the Bolshevik Revolution, further cementing the associated connection between Russia and Orthodoxy. Beginning in the sixteenth century, the Russian Orthodox Church and the tsar worked together, so much so that the Orthodox Church became one of the most respected advisors to the tsar. The two partnered in their rule of Russia, further linking the Russian identity to the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian elites believed that only once the inhabitants of the far-flung reaches of the Russian empire became believers and followers of the Orthodox faith all people of the Russian empire would have a deep, soulful connection to Russia, inculcating a deep loyalty to the Church and, therefore, to the Tsar.

The development of a unique national identity that defined the approaches of Kazakh Russification followed Russia's "Age of Reason," which dominated discussions among Russian elites during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The "Age of Reason," peaking under the rule of Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796), catalyzed many discussions and movements that directly impacted Russian elites and their views and actions towards the Kazakhs. Like many of her predecessors in the eighteenth century, Catherine the Great encouraged her nobility and court to adopt European Enlightenment ideas.⁶ Her reign was defined by demonstrating Russia's strength and overtaking Europe in stability, prosperity, and modernization. "She set out to prove that Russia was a prosperous country surpassing Western Europe in its observance of legality

⁶ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 1

and in the living standards of its people.”⁷ Catherine the Great and those who most immediately surrounded her were not the only ones exploring Enlightenment ideals and philosophies. A class of scholars and intellectuals began dedicating their studies and efforts to examining the theories relating to human rights, class, government, and faith; these groups became known as the Russian Intelligentsia. Andrzej Walicki, a notable historian and author of *A History of Russian Thought*, categorized Catherine the Great’s reign as a time that “led to the emergence in Russia of a genuine Enlightenment philosophy, practiced by professional philosophers and emancipated from the influence of religion.”⁸ This period’s intellectual developments are recognized, regardless of an individual’s specific position regarding the governmental and ruling structure, by being an era of Russian nationalism and empire.

Following the reign of Catherine the Great and a clear preference for a Western-facing Russia, by the mid-nineteenth century, Russian Westernism was being debated in intellectual and political circles. Those opposing it were known as Slavophiles. This name was coined to challenge the “alleged national apostasy” of those favoring Westernization.⁹ Some thinkers who pushed the intellectual pursuits rooted in Slavophilism were Ivan Kireyevsky, Aleskei Khomikov, Konstantin Aksakov, and Yury Samarin.¹⁰ They called for a return to a pre-Petrine Russia, arguing for “ancient Russian freedom.”¹¹ As Walicki summarizes, this entails “freedom from politics – the right to live according to unwritten laws of faith and tradition, and the right to full self-realization in a moral sphere on which the state would not impinge.”¹² The Slavophiles believed that the westernizing reforms of Peter the Great created and expanded a separation

⁷ Walicki, 7

⁸ Walicki, 8

⁹ Walicki, 92

¹⁰ Walicki

¹¹ Walicki, 96

¹² Walicki, 96

between the elite classes and the common people in terms of society, economy, and culture. They pushed against the European westernization of Russia, believing Russia was in a different social pattern than the rest of Europe since Russians were not subjects of the Roman Empire and therefore followed Orthodox Christianity, not Roman Catholicism.¹³ “Only the Orthodox Church had preserved this supra individual Christian consciousness in all its purity.”¹⁴ This moment directly opposes the secular enlightenment thought of only half a century before. The Slavophiles represent the first steps of rooting the modern Russian identity in Orthodoxy, which would become increasingly apparent as Russia interacted with and assimilated its “non-Russian” populations. While Slavophilism rose in popularity among scholars, Westernism remained strong throughout Russian elite circles. However, there were different approaches to Westernization and theories on the best practices to introduce to Russian society.¹⁵ The first two groups did find common ground over support for the Petrine reforms, often arguing that they were the first step in developing a modern Russia. Konstantin Kevlin, one of the Western thinkers of the time, wrote that “Peter represented the completion of the first phase in the realization of the personality principle in Russian history.”¹⁶ Myriad opinions and thoughts swirled among the court and scholarly circles during this time. This contributed to the complex and deep confusion of Russian identity, whether it should be rooted in its past or its potential.

This era of thought in Russia inspired and developed the context in which this thesis and the document I focus on take place. However, my focus will concentrate on the perceptions and policies of Russian missionary elites on the Kazakh population. For many reasons, some of which stemmed from the need for a Russian identity and, therefore, a resurgence in religious

¹³ Walicki, 101

¹⁴ Walicki, 103

¹⁵ Walicki, 136

¹⁶ K.D. Kavelin, *Sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg, 1897), vol 1, p. 58 as quoted in Walicki, 1499

institutions, the Orthodox church gained influence throughout Russia and the borderland regions after Russia emancipated the serfs in 1861. This liberation of the masses in Russia spearheaded efforts of reform and education throughout the Russian empire. Ideas of Russification and unification dominated Russian thought during this period. The emancipation of Russia's serf class in 1861 inspired an age of reforms to help modernize, liberate, and unify Russia. The Russification policies that evolved to develop a unified Russia applied not only to ethnic Russians and the newly freed serf class but were also relevant to the new populations that had come under the rule of the Russian empire. Tsar Alexander II's (r.1855-1881) Great Reforms that followed the emancipation of the serfs were a series of policies enacted by the tsarist government to assist the integration and modernization of the populations mentioned above. Thus, many government ministries became more involved with specialized departments, such as the Asiatic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Learned Committee of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment, and the founding of the Faculty of Oriental Languages at St. Petersburg University.¹⁷ All of these efforts sought to help improve the situation of the newly absorbed populations in the eyes of the Russian elite.

The third theological academy, joining the existing Moscow Theological Academy and Kiev Theological Academy, was created in Kazan in the mid-nineteenth century in an effort to learn more about the non-Orthodox peoples that surrounded it. The Kazan Theological Academy hoped to educate its students about the customs and practices of these populations to enable their further education and conversion to Orthodoxy. Members of the Russian elite assumed and believed that the Kazakhs did not hold strong Muslim convictions and were, therefore, desirable populations for Orthodox conversion. I argue that the underlying belief that Orthodoxy was the

¹⁷ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8

key to Russifying the Kazakh population and cementing Kazakh loyalty to Russia affected and elevated efforts to educate and convert the Kazakh population. These efforts were carried out mainly by the Kazan Theological Academy and Orthodoxy missionaries but were heavily sponsored and supported by the Russian government and Russian elites. The imperial policy of the Russian state towards the Kazakhs was heavily influenced and affected by the newfound need among Russian elites to develop and define their Russian identity, which was more often than not rooted in Russia's historical and extensive ties with Orthodoxy.

Russia and the East

Religion during the eighteenth century took on several roles as the Russian empire expanded. During this period, four main world religions existed in the empire in addition to the existence of animist traditions: Christianity (Orthodoxy), Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism.¹⁸ Yet, officially, the state was Orthodox. In its origination, the Russian empire tolerated non-Orthodox religions as they were coming from a position of weakness as vassals of the Muslim Golden Horde. However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Orthodox missionaries instigated large-scale efforts of forced conversions and baptisms through coercive methods.¹⁹ Empress Elizabeth (r. 1740-1761) established the Office of New Converts in 1731. This office was tasked with the mass baptism of populations along the Volga through forced campaigns, not religious conviction.²⁰ Elizabeth's successor, Catherine the Great, demonstrated some religious tolerance towards her subjects by "halting aggressive Christianization," which included the closing of the Office of New Converts in 1764 and later outlawing forced conversions after witnessing horrific

¹⁸ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian empire: A Multi-Ethnic History* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 142

¹⁹ Kappeler, 142

²⁰ Elena I. Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 34; Kappeler, 50; Mustafa Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims: Islam, Empire and European Modernity, 1788-1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 41

scenes in her 1767 trip to Kazan of Orthodox churches constructed from destroyed mosques.²¹ However, when Catherine the Great came to power, she aimed to utilize her tolerance of other religions to legitimize her rule and strengthen Russian loyalty among the *inorodtsy*²². Robert Geraci, a Russian historian, goes so far as to claim that Catherine the Great “inaugurated a new view of the empire and of its peoples.”²³ Catherine the Great declared general religious tolerance in 1773.²⁴ This doctrine, in addition to the banning of forced conversions, gave Muslim communities the freedom to practice their religion publicly with their ensured protection and safety.²⁵ Catherine the Great took advantage of providing religious toleration by regulating, policing, and maintaining direct government power over the Muslim religious institutions.²⁶ For example, she permitted Islamic religious buildings and schools to be built using state funds, and she created a muftiate that would register and report on all Muslim parishes. This brought the Muslim communities into the Russian bureaucratic system and, officially, under the Imperial Authority. While Catherine the Great’s direct administrative involvement in the oversight and practices of Islam caused confusion among the Muslim populations as well as it orchestrated conflicting hierarchies not previously indoctrinated in the Islamic faith, it did facilitate the opportunity for Islam to continue to grow and establish itself within these Central Asian populations and cultures.²⁷

²¹ Campbell, 34; Tuna, *Imperial Russia’s Muslims*, 41

²² Russian word used to describe and mean “non-Russians.”

²³ Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 21

²⁴ Michael W. Johnson, “Imperial Commission or Orthodox Mission: Nikolai Il’minskii’s Work Among the Tatars of Kazan, 1862-1891” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2005), 82, 88-89

²⁵ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 22

²⁶ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 22

²⁷ Johnson, 89

Russia's eastward expansion began in the sixteenth century and strengthened as Ivan IV led the city-state of Muscovy²⁸ in its conquest of the Kazan Khanate in 1552.²⁹ Before Muscovy's conquest of Kazan, the Volga-Ural region, Central Asia, and Kazakh Steppes were home to Turkic civilizations. Their most notable ruling entity before the Muscovite Empire was the Golden Horde. The Golden Horde was an offshoot of Ghengis Khan's Mongol Empire that dominated Asia and Eastern Europe in the thirteenth century. The area encompassing Russ³⁰, including Muscovy, was left to Ghengis Khan's grandson, Batu Khan, after Ghengis's death.³¹ Thus, the Golden Horde was named and developed as an independent ruling body. The Turkic tribes of the Kazakh steppe, which the Mongols ruled over, maintained their pastoral-nomadic lifestyle. At the same time, other areas, such as Kazan and Muscovy, had already been sedentarized for centuries. The region was dominated by Mongol rule throughout the following two centuries, with the Slavic peoples taking a back seat.³²

During Özbek Khan's rule of the Golden Horde in the mid-fourteenth century, Islam became widespread and established among the central Horde.³³ The Golden Horde governed by overseeing a centralized administration.³⁴ While the majority of the ruling group of the Horde was Muslim, they did not impose Islam on their subjects or interfere in their culture as long as they were paid the proper amount in taxation. This allowed the Slavic populations of the Horde, in the primarily western sedentary regions, to continue to practice Christianity and develop their

²⁸ Muscovy was the original name of Moscow and original root of the Russian empire

²⁹ Willard Sunderland, "The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office That Never Was but Might Have Been," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 133

³⁰ Russ being used as a term to define the populations that would eventually become ethnic Russians, but at this time it didn't exist.

³¹ Danielle Ross, *Tatar Empire: Kazan's Muslims and the Making of Imperial Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 22; Marie Favereau, *The Horde: How the Mongols Changed the World* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), 186

³² Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian empire and Its Rivals* (London: John Murray, 2000), 216

³³ Favereau, 431

³⁴ Favereau, 438

society separate from the nomadic and Muslim Tatars. During this time, the Christian Slavs of the West, with Muscovy as its liaison, and the Muslim Tatars of the East entered a mutually dependent relationship, based on respect for each other, with the Tatars still as the overarching governing body.³⁵

As the Golden Horde disintegrated, the region it occupied was split into five smaller khanates and principalities. The Kazan Khanate, Astrakhan Khanate, Siberian Khanate, Crimean Khanate, and Khiva Khanate were the hordes that diverged from the Golden Horde and became known as the Tatar Khanates in the late fourteenth century.³⁶ These Khanates represented the semi-sedentary regions of the Golden Horde. In the fifteenth century, the Kazakhs broke out as an independent population, but they continued their nomadic traditions and practices along the steppes.³⁷ However, as the Hordes' powers declined, Muscovy's was rising. Thus, in 1552, Ivan IV's Muscovy was strong enough to conquer the Kazan and Astrakhan Khanates.³⁸ After the annexation of Kazan, the Muscovites, and later Imperial Russia, governed them with a relatively hands-off approach. Islam continued to grow throughout the region; by the mid-nineteenth century, most of the population East of the Volga River was Muslim. These Muslim people were, therefore, "the first major non-Slavic unit to be absorbed by Muscovy."³⁹ As Russia developed its authority in the 16th century and concentrated power into an imperial structure under the Tsar, the people of the Volga-Ural region found themselves considered a part of Russia without being real Russians due to their non-Slavic origins. Robert Geraci argued that Kazan represented a

³⁵ Favereau, 440

³⁶ Favereau, 569

³⁷ Ross, 24

³⁸ Ross, 23

³⁹ Ihor Ševčenko, "Muscovy's Conquest of Kazan: Two Views Reconciled," *Slavic Review* 26, no. 4 (1967): 541

“microcosmic version of Russia’s hybrid identity.”⁴⁰ This hybrid nature of Muslims in the Russian empire would continue for the next 350 years as Russia expanded.

While the Volga-Ural region's populations differ from those of the Kazakh Steppes, they share a similar ancestry and religious evolutionary process from the 13th century until the 19th century. The Kazakhs, however, were not officially brought under the rule of the Russian empire until the nineteenth century. Therefore, the Kazakhs had a very different relationship with the empire than those of Kazan. Yet, to understand the intricacies of later analysis, it is essential to understand the origins of Russia’s relationship with the East and the origins of Islam in the Empire.

In the nineteenth century, Russia solidified its control over the Steppe region. The Steppe became the focus of Russian statesmen and diplomats, but also of the educated Russian elites. This sect of Russian scholars sought to understand and explore the culture of Russia’s eastern and southern borderlands. These scholars contributed to the overall effect of European scholarship on the East. The East remained a source of fascination in the nineteenth century as people in the West grew intrigued by these lands' perceived mysticism and exoticism.⁴¹ The Orient, typically identified as the East, specifically Asia, became a subject of study in Russia during this time (as it did worldwide as well). In the modern day, Orientalism is seen “as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”⁴² and an “integral part of “European *material* civilization and culture.”⁴³ In these regards, the concept of Orientalism applies to Russia as seen through the lens of European imperialism. Yet, Russia’s

⁴⁰ Stefan B. Kirmse, “Law and Empire in Late Tsarist Russia: Muslim Tatars Go to Court,” *Slavic Review* 72, no. 4 (2013): 780

⁴¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979)

⁴² Said, 25

⁴³ Said, 23

relationship with the Orient is much more complex than that of Western European empires. These scholars, coined as Orientalists, “applied to the non-Russian minorities what members of the Russian intelligentsia had proposed in relation to the Russian peasantry in the 1860s: The spread of scientific views among peasants would be a panacea for the evils of the existing order.”⁴⁴ Much as the Russian elites believed that to modernize, they had to civilize and assimilate the peasants into Russian culture, they held the same view towards Muslim populations.

While the Orient was illustrated among Russian elites as an object of intrigue, it was also perceived as something apart from Russia and became increasingly geopolitically separate. This sense of separation between an occidental and oriental Russia continued as a social construct that became a permanent and common term of identification. “... as the Urals ...began to replace the Don River as the accepted dividing line between Europe and Asia. The ultimate effect of this innovation was to create two new regions, ‘European Russia’ and ‘Asiatic Russia,’⁴⁵ bound by an uneven relationship.”⁴⁶ The former being the imperial core, and the latter being the populations in need of civilizing and the help of their “European Russian superiors.” While the Eastern and often Muslim populations and their culture became the subject of Orientalists’ fascination, they remained inferior in the minds of the Russian elites and the tsarist government. “In the political thinking of the time, the Tsar’s Muslim subjects in Asia could largely be discounted from calculations of nationality since they were perceived to be too backward to play a political role.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Tolz, 28-29

⁴⁵ “European Russia” can be imagined as the regions between and closely surrounding Moscow and St. Petersburg. “Asiatic Russia” can be imagined as the regions and populations that are found to the East of “European Russia.”

⁴⁶ Sunderland, 137

⁴⁷ Lieven, 278

The Muslim populations of the Kazakh steppes were one of the first regions to be considered a colony by the Russian elites regarding the Western European nations and their developing Imperial holdings. Before the Kazakhs, the majority of all other borderlands or extensions of European Russia and their populations were categorized as members and citizens of Russia. The time in which Russia was gaining control over the area was the same time frame that the European Great Powers – the very countries that aroused envy among the Russian elites – were also beginning their colonial pursuits. Therefore, since the Kazakh steppe was seen as so vast and so separate from Russia’s heartland, Russians began viewing the Kazakhs and the region as colonial assets. However, the term held more ambiguity within Russia and brought the Russian empire its own set of issues that the Great European powers did not have to deal with. This was partly because Russia was one continuous empire without clear separation between the “empire” and its “colonies.” Russia’s shared history with the regions to its East also contributed to the uniqueness of Russia’s imperial pursuits. Russia’s heritage as a former arm of the Mongol Empire, which continued to be ruled by nomadic Hordes and Khanates until the 16th century, created a deep-rooted bond to the areas it was now attempting to colonize. The other Western empires did not face this common history anywhere near the extent the Russians did. These distinct circumstances that the Russian empire faced were a significant reason the Russian elites felt they needed a definite Russian identity to impose on the Kazakhs to Russify.

Structure and Content

Merkur’ev’s “The Religious and Moral State of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz and the Spread of Christianity Among Them,” a term paper required by the Kazan Theological Academy to complete his studies, helps frame the decades-long discourse surrounding the Russification of the Kazakhs through Orthodoxy. Due to the context in which this document was written, there is

reason to speculate that it reflects many of the beliefs and the agenda of not only the professors and the Academy but also the areas of the Russian government that sponsored the school and also contributed to efforts of colonization and Russification of the Kazakh steppe populations. This document, while being book-length, was a term paper and therefore was written in a casual setting. The goal of this paper was not for the author to necessarily create a groundbreaking discovery or articulate a revolutionary or rebellious theory but rather to please his intended audience: the professors. Merkur'ev was writing this term paper for a particular purpose, for a specific audience, and to follow the agenda of the Theological Academy. While it is only one document, it is fair to speculate that this one document reflects the ideas held towards missionizing and Russification of the Kazakhs that were in circulation, acceptable, and taught in the Kazan Theological Academy and believed among Russian elites. Thus, the racist anti-Islamic thought that permeates the document reflects the ideas and agenda that was being pushed through the Theological Academy. Moreover, this document, in its format, reflects the mission of the Academy. Merkur'ev splits his document into two parts. The goal of the first part of Merkur'ev's dissertation is to display and analyze his findings and beliefs about the Kazakh population. Merkur'ev provides a history of the Kazakhs, including their nomadic practices, their relationship with Islam, their animistic traditions, and how all three are interconnected in their current culture. The second part outlines Merkur'ev's thoughts on how best to proceed with conversion and the implied Russification efforts toward these populations.⁴⁸ This dovetails, as mentioned before, with the goals of the Academy: educate, then convert. Unfortunately, given time and resource constraints, I could only translate the first part of the document. However, it

⁴⁸ All logistical and objective formatting and contextual information in this paragraph on Merkur'ev's "The Religious and Moral State of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz and the Spread of Christianity Among Them" are taken directly from the document itself.

provided me with an abundance of information that helped form and support my argument that the efforts of the Russian core to Russify the Kazakh population through conversion were deeply interconnected and influenced by the growing need for a definite Russian identity. This does provide a new area of study and exploration through the analysis of the second part and the document in totality.⁴⁹

Merkur'ev's writing provides a first-hand glimpse into the Russian rhetoric surrounding the Kazakhs regarding their Russification and Russia's imperial expansion outlined in the modern historiography of this time period. His writings and the evidence Merkur'ev and his paper provide as a Kazan Theological Academy student in 1916 promotes and support many of the findings of scholars and experts in this area, such as Robert P. Geraci, Isabelle Kreindler, and many others. In their historiographical interventions, these scholars have articulated the mindset of the Russian elites that stemmed from the Kazan Theological Academy as efforts for a unified and Russified Russian class, rooted in their fear of the Islamic influence of the Tatars on the Kazakhs Muslims. While these authors mention the discussion and renewed quest to define and instill a Russian national identity, my thesis aims to demonstrate that this had a more extensive and profound underlying effect than has explicitly been stated before. In their research and publications, these scholars have illustrated the larger and pre-existing discourse that Merkur'ev's paper belongs to. I expand upon this discourse through the use of both Merkur'ev's paper and the literary materials of these scholars to demonstrate how the actions, approaches, and mentalities that existed and prevailed among Russian elites from the mid-nineteenth century until the fall of the Tsarist era were created to, tied to, and resulted from the perceived underlying

⁴⁹ I look forward to the hopeful possibility that I will one day find myself in an opportunity to continue this work.

need to absorb the Kazakhs into Russian culture and establish an affiliation between the Kazakhs and Russia through Orthodoxy as the crux of Russian identity.

My goal for this thesis is to demonstrate how Russia's approaches toward the Kazakh population were determined by preconceived notions and beliefs that stemmed from a need to unify the empire under Orthodoxy by examining three main points. The first is the belief of members of the Russian elites in Orthodoxy as the superior religion and reasoning for the basis of the Russian identity and an examination of Orthodoxy's growing importance in and relationship with the neighboring city of Kazan, the perceived "source" of Islam throughout the Russian empire's eastern and southern borderlands, especially the Kazakh Steppes. By seeing how Orthodox missionaries and Orthodox educators treated and approached this community, the fragile connections that supposedly bound Russian citizenship and Orthodoxy together in the eyes of the Russian elites begin to unravel and help dictate and frame the later events which occurred in the Steppe. While my focus is on the Kazakh population, exploring the relationship between the Russian elites and Kazan is crucial as Kazan was the closest Russian province proximally to the Kazakhs. Therefore, they maintained a strong influence on each other as the two regions evolved throughout history. Furthermore, in the eyes of the Russian elites, Kazan and the Tatars were both the reason and the key for so many of their "issues" with the Kazakhs; therefore, their actions in Kazan had rippling effects on the Kazakhs.

In my second chapter, I look at the direct influences of the Russian state and Russian elites among the Kazakh population. For decades Russian Orientalists and Russian statesmen of the mid-late nineteenth century dominated and shaped the course of Russia's approach to the Russification of the Kazakhs continuing into the early twentieth century. The Russian government sponsored many efforts to educate the Kazakhs in hopes that it would lead to

Russification. Many of these systems were born and staffed out of the Kazan Theological Academy in the pursuit of educating the Kazakhs on Orthodoxy rather than forced conversions or targeted conversion efforts. Merkur'ev's writing is a testament to the longevity of this larger discussion and discourse that began in the mid-nineteenth century. The use of education as a means for Russifying and aiding in the colonization process, again framed in Orthodox teachings, not only contributes to the demonstration that education can be a strategic tool in orchestrating the intellectual thoughts and thought processes of the masses but also that by doing so they were embedding an intrinsic connection between Orthodoxy and Russian identity.

Finally, my third chapter takes a deep dive into the contradictions between the realities of the Kazakhs' culture and lives and the Russians' inaccurate perceptions. The Russian elites saw Kazakhs as uncivilized and unable to follow and have deep, meaningful connections to Islamic practices. It was believed by the Russians that only through the influence of the Tatars did the Kazakhs hear of Islam and begin following it. Because of their preconceived assumptions, the Russian elites could not see the Kazakh culture and religion as adequate and instead continued to force Orthodoxy upon others. I will examine how these misguided attempts to Russify the Kazakhs through conversion was not only the incorrect approach to ensure loyalty and Russification but also how their perceptions and views of these populations were clouded by a need to see error among the Kazakh culture to justify their conversion and missionary efforts in the name of Russification.

Chapter 1:

Orthodoxy as a Vehicle of National Identity and Imperial Justification

“‘Nationality’ meant for them [Russians] not only the legendary past and the straight-jacketed present of Russia, but also its glorious, Messianic future. Russia expanded to become a Slavdom... In effect, the entire world was to be recast in response to this call of fate, through blood and iron if necessary. The messianic Russian future demanded an adventurous, aggressive, even revolutionary, foreign policy.”
- Nicholas V. Riasanovsky¹

Introduction

Since its origins, the Orthodox Church has been intrinsically tied with the imperial Russian state. Orthodoxy existed among Slavs and the Russ long before the Russian empire and even before Muscovy gained influence and power.² The Baptism of Kievan Russ in the ninth century is marked as the beginning of Orthodoxy's roots in the region.³ While there were pushes to secularize during Russia's late seventeenth and eighteenth-century Westernization, the Orthodox Church remained steadfast as the state religion. It held esteemed leadership positions among the Tsar's trusted circle, maintaining its influence over the tsar and his policies. The deep-rooted historical consciousness of the Russian elite of the tie between Russia and the Orthodox Church continued to be a prominent characteristic that further developed with growing

¹ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky. “‘Nationality’ in the State Ideology during the Reign of Nicholas I,” *The Russian Review* 19, no. 1 (1960): 41

² Lieven, 233

³ Johnson, 42-48; Shirley A. Glade “A Heritage Discovered Anew: Russia's Reevaluation of Pre-Petrine Icons in the Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Periods,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 26, 4 (1992): 145

conversations about nationalism that emerged from European Enlightenment. As Russia developed into a dominant empire in the nineteenth century, more lands and populations were acquired. Russian elites and statesmen charged with the Russification of the southern and eastern borderlands of the empire often found security and stability in the utilization of Orthodoxy as a means of Russification and developing Russian loyalty among the *inorodtsy*. However, these regions and peoples had established their own culture and religious affiliations independent of Russia and Russian rule. During the 19th century, what could previously be categorized as peaceful, parallel cohabitation began creating rifts and tensions regarding Russian authority and their imposed status quo within Russian provinces, such as Kazan, and their newly acquired borderlands, such as the Kazakh Steppe. Merkur'ev's paper provides evidence and further illustrates the common mentalities behind the Russian elites regarding the Kazakh Muslims, further supporting the idea that the search for Russian national identity affected the approach and dealings of the Russian elite with the Muslim populations of the Kazakh Steppe.

Orthodoxy as National Identity

As the Russian empire went through several drastic changes culturally and geographically during the nineteenth century,⁴ many Russians found security and safety within the steadfastness and solidity of the Russian Orthodox Church. The nineteenth century marked a point in Russian society where the need to define their national identity became an overwhelming drive for the elites. Ideals and concepts born out of the European Enlightenment, such as nationalism, began seeping into the lives and beliefs of Russian society. Conversations sparked by the European Enlightenment created tendrils of potential in the quest for identity, many of which led to Orthodoxy. Intellectual and Political developments such as the Slavophile

⁴ Riasanovsky, 46

movement and other substantial branches that stemmed from it, such as Pan-Slavism, found root in returning to pre-Petrine society with the ideal being “freeing themselves, and to develop both in opposition and parallel to, their Western counterpart.”⁵ Their argument being Russia was an independent and superior entity to Western European society and should evolve and modernize on a path outside of that outlined by those empires.⁶ Many of these groups agreed with promoting political nationalism stemming from the authority of Russian autocracy and the Orthodox Church.⁷ Not only was this sense of national identity based on Orthodoxy popular among Russian intellectuals and elites at the time but also among the Tsars.

During the nineteenth century, five Tsars ruled over Russia, including the empire’s final monarch: Alexander I, Nicholas I, Alexander II, Alexander III, and Nicholas II.⁸ Each of these rulers held different approaches to the role of the Orthodox Church and the relationship it had with the state and the tsar as an institution. During this time of growing awareness and push to create a national identity, these different beliefs and positions significantly impacted Russian elites' perception of the Orthodox church’s role. The increased rise of nationality as a focal point of thought and consideration began under Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855). He reversed the Western aspirations and liberal policies of his predecessors and envisioned the nation with the “virtues and glory of the Russians, Russian history, institutions, and language.”⁹ The Orthodox Church was one such institution that Nicholas I held in high standard to Russian nationality. He emphasized and supported the Church as “an arm of the state.”¹⁰ “In his reign piety was attached

⁵ Denis Vovchenko, “Modernizing Orthodoxy: Russia and the Christian East (1856—1914),” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73, no. 2 (2012): 297-298

⁶ Lieven, 219

⁷ Vovchenko, 298; Riasanovsky, 39

⁸ Laura Engelstein, “Holy Russia in Modern Times: An Essay on Orthodoxy and Cultural Change,” *Past & Present*, no. 173 (2001): 138

⁹ Riasanovsky, 40

¹⁰ Engelstein, 141

to imperial ideology.”¹¹ Therefore re-instilling a sense of deference and national attachment to the Church among Russian citizens. Succeeding Nicholas I and his resurgence of Russian heritage was Alexander II (r. 1855-1881).

Alexander II’s rule was dominated by the peak of revolutionary movements against the archaic serfdom that still bonded the majority of the Russian population to servitude.¹² National identity had become a genuine issue domestically with the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 under Alexander II. It extended into an imperial point of conversation due to the acquisition of new peoples to the empire with the hopes of assimilating them into the Russian culture, better known as “Russifying” or “Russification.” By the second half of the nineteenth century, one of the greatest obstacles to Russia’s modernization was its continuing policy of serfdom. While discussions on the ethics of serfs and their human rights had begun around the Age of Reason, the Russian empire was still made up of millions of serfs, both belonging to the Tsarist government and the nobility’s estates into the nineteenth century. Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War in 1856 brought to light the drawbacks of maintaining a serf population.¹³ “By the time of the Crimean War, Russia, together with Turkey, counted among the economically most backward countries of Europe. Serfdom paralyzed initiative and was responsible for the Russian defeats of 1854-1856 and the considerable social tension which ensued.”¹⁴ The Emancipation Act, signed by Tsar Alexander II in 1861, freed the serf population of the Russian empire. Nonetheless, the changing of the classification from serf to peasant for millions of Russian subjects set in motion a string of tensions between the Tsarist government and the Russian

¹¹ Engelstein, 142

¹² Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient*, 8

¹³ Campbell, 2

¹⁴ Serge A. Zenkovsky, “The Emancipation of the Serfs Retrospect,” *The Russian Review* 20, no. 4 (1961): 284

nobility and sparked many social movements.¹⁵ It created an immediate need for mass assimilation and integration into the Russian empire. Thus, the mission of creating a unified population of the Russian State encompassed by one identity continued to persist and encompassed the minds of most Russian leaders and its educated citizens.¹⁶ In the wake of the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861, Alexander II began the era of Great Reforms.¹⁷ During this era, Alexander II introduced policy that aimed “to replace the discipline and order of serfdom with new political, social, and civic institutions.”¹⁸ Because this period marked progression in domestic policy of the Russian state, Alexander II was focused on the enactments and execution of the Great Reforms of the period.

This led to walking back on Nicholas I’s “aggressively conservative” and Orthodox views; however, Alexander II did create methods to create an easier life for the clergy.¹⁹ However, Alexander II, Tsar Alexander III (r. 1881-1894), and Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1894-1917) followed in Nicholas I’s method of ruling concerning the importance and cultural significance of the Orthodox Church.²⁰ Both devout believers emphasized the connection between the Church and State and the Church and Russia.²¹ Throughout this century of the awakening consciousness of the Russian elite in regards to nationality and nationalism, the majority of Tsars believing in, encouraging, and emphasizing the integral role of the Orthodox Church as a cornerstone of Russian culture and tradition trickled down into the mentalities of many of the Russian elite. Engelstein argues that “on the level of institutions, the state and church present a mixed picture:

¹⁵ Lieven, 254-255

¹⁶ Campbell, 58

¹⁷ Campbell, 2

¹⁸ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 6

¹⁹ Engelstein, 141

²⁰ Engelstein

²¹ Engelstein, 141

conservative and tradition-minded, they sustained each other in maintaining the social and ideological status quo.”²² This period represents the blend of the different tsarist governments’ ideals of Russian nationality and the romanticized nationalism envisioned by Russian intellectuals and elites, culminating in a newfound pride in the Orthodox Church as a symbol of Russia.²³

This period and era of political and intellectual curiosity and rebellion among Russian intellectuals somewhat surprisingly benefited the Orthodox Church. While some intellectual groups were arguing for a secularization of Church and State and a de-emphasis on the power of the Church, they were all discussing Western ideals and different modes of progression for Russia.²⁴ Like many institutions of Russia, the Orthodox church was forced to evolve with the demands of society. While the Church felt that secular movements were attacking them during this period, it led to a need within the Orthodox clergy for growth and evaluation.²⁵ Many members of the clergy and the church began educating themselves in the fashion of the Western ideology and philosophies that had made their mark in Russian culture from the Enlightenment period. This culminated, as Engelstein articulates, in “the Orthodox Church entering the nineteenth century with an intellectual elite steeped in Western learning but determined to shape a native cultural style.”²⁶ The combination of State support from the Tsars, in addition to their efforts to remain intellectually up to date, allowed for the Orthodox church, as an institution, to answer the call for a Russian identity,

²² Engelstein, 155

²³ Riasanovsky, 41

²⁴ Engelstein, 141

²⁵ Frank T. McCarthy, “The Kazan’ Missionary Congress,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 14, no. 3 (1973): 318-319

²⁶ Engelstein, 141

During the ninth century, Byzantine missionary brothers Cyril and Methodius spent the greater part of their lives dedicated to spreading the word of the Orthodox Church and converting non-Orthodox populations.²⁷ Cyril and Methodius spent most of their missionary efforts in Moravia in modern-day Czechia, helping and eventually affecting the lives of countless Slavs.²⁸ Their efforts in missionary activity and translation into Slavic languages and among Slavic populations were so effective that they have been coined “The Apostles of the Slavs.”²⁹ Cyril and Methodius focused their missionary efforts on its potential longevity by creating communities that were “both fully Orthodox and fully reflective of the ethnic groups among which [they] worked.”³⁰ While the prevalence of Orthodoxy faded in Central Europe, it continued and grew in popularity among Eastern Europe and into the areas which would become European Russia.³¹ As the power of Muscovy and later imperial Russia grew, so did Orthodoxy and its following. By the conquest of Kazan by Ivan IV in 1552, almost all Rus populations were Orthodox.³² This deep-rooted connection between the two institutions strengthened the bond many Russians felt between their cultural identity and the Orthodox faith.

One of the strongest pulls the Orthodox Church had to being a core piece of Russian national identity was its history as the state religion and Russia’s legacy as the “supreme protector of the true faith.”³³ The capturing of Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks, in conjunction with “Russia’s deliverance from its Mongol overlords” in the 16th century, left

²⁷ Johnson, 41-49

²⁸ Johnson, 35-37

²⁹ Johnson, 31

³⁰ Johnson, 28-29

³¹ Johnson, 41-49

³² Lieven, 237

³³ Gregory Carleton, “A Russia Born of War,” in *The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815*, ed. Lotte Jensen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 155

Russia to take on the role among the Christian world as the “Third Rome.”³⁴ This ideology of Moscow as the “Third Rome” comes from a view that the Rome of the Roman Empire, “First Rome,” taken over by Catholics and Constantinople, “Second Rome,” fallen to the Ottoman Turks, left Russia as the sole embodiment and center of power for Christianity, aka the Orthodox Church and religion.³⁵ Denis Vovchenko, in “Modernizing Orthodoxy: Russia and the Christian East,” argues that “Muscovite and Imperial Russia claimed to be the only remaining independent center of the truest branch of Christianity and the only potential liberator of those less fortunate coreligionists suffering under the Muslim yoke.”³⁶ In 1562, The Patriarchate of Constantinople named Ivan IV “Tsar and Sovereign of all Orthodox Christians East to West all the way to the Ocean in the bloodline of Roman emperors,” cementing and further emphasizing Russia’s legitimacy as the protector of Christianity.³⁷ Russia lacked the need to develop a national identity because due to the sense of duty, power, and responsibility of protection in the relationship between Russia and the Orthodox Church, a national identity had developed within those terms.³⁸ “Imperial Russia never developed a modern national identity because religious and dynastic loyalties remained dominant on the official and popular levels.”³⁹

In the nineteenth century, the Orthodox Church also continued to grow as a cultural symbol among Russian elites due to trends of the European Enlightenment. The impact of the European Enlightenment in Russia can be seen throughout many aspects of Russian history, culture, and society of the time, but also in how it affected and influenced the Russian elite’s perceptions of themselves and the Orthodox Church, including the perceptions of themselves in

³⁴ Carleton, 155; Vovchenko, 300

³⁵ Carleton, 155

³⁶ Vovchenko, 299-300

³⁷ Vovchenko, 299-300

³⁸ Carleton 156; Vovchenko, 299;

³⁹ Vovchenko, 299

relation to the Church. The historical and cultural significance of the Orthodox Church, outside of its spiritual qualities, also began to be noted by Russians during this period, specifically as noted by Laura Engelstein, in her article examining the connection between Orthodoxy and cultural change in Russia, after the Napoleonic wars.⁴⁰ Orthodoxy in this context began to define itself among Russians as more than just a religion but a point of Russian pride and nationality. Engelstein takes note of Russia's interpretation of Enlightenment iconoclasm that had been developing in Europe and denotes the shift of Orthodox icons from "objects of worship" to "works of art to be treasured cultural legacy."⁴¹ This cultural renaissance of the Church allowed citizens to relate, admire, and connect with Orthodoxy as a source of Russianness, even if they didn't associate as strongly with its faith aspects. In the search for a national identity, an additional sense of significance had been granted to religion and Orthodoxy as an institution through the influence of the Enlightenment's iconoclasm.⁴²

Thus, as this need for national identity emerged in the nineteenth century, there was a widespread push to solidify Orthodoxy as the summation of Russian identity due to the historical legacy between the Church and Russia, the influence and importance placed upon Orthodoxy by the Tsars and the Russian elites, and the growing appreciation for the Orthodox Church as a cultural and religious institution among Russian citizens.

This need to form a national identity among the Russian elites also contributed to their ideology regarding Russia's imperial expansion into diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural regions, such as the Kazakh Steppe. As it was gathering and annexing lands of various ethnicities and religions, the Russian empire had to establish a methodology to "Russify" and ensure loyalty

⁴⁰ Engelstein, 132

⁴¹ Engelstein, 132

⁴² Glade, 145

to the Tsar among their new subjects. While Tsarist Russia had been expanding since the 16th century, the nineteenth century, like much of Europe and the West, created a new category and height of imperial pursuits and nationalism among Russian elites.⁴³ This, in combination with the formation of a national identity at home, left foreign pursuits and Russification to be heavily influenced by efforts to create and instill a common Russian national identity in the hearts of all subjects of the Russian empire. Not only did Orthodoxy become just a pivotal point to rest the definition of Russian Identity on because of the intrinsic connection between the two institutions, but because of the link between the *inorodtsy* and the rest of the Russian population that they believed it symbolized. The depth of the history of Orthodoxy in Russia resulted in many believing that the key to the Russification of the *inorodtsy* was Orthodox Enlightenment.⁴⁴ As Russia encountered and enveloped many new populations into its fold, this impact can be seen as Orthodoxy began intertwining itself “in state-sponsored culture.”⁴⁵ In 1883, the Minister of Education formulated “the doctrine of Official Nationality,” which labeled “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” as the “pillars of the Russian state.”⁴⁶ Orthodoxy was not only one of the “pillars,” but was the first, representing the importance Orthodoxy held among Russian statesmen and elites in creating their national identity and image.

Many of those pushing for Orthodox conversion of the Kazakhs defended their claims by stating that the enlightenment of the Christian faith is far more expedient and sustainable than the spreading of education.⁴⁷ This is reflected in Merkur’ev’s depiction of enlightenment of the Christian faith via “personal observations and telling of Evangelical gospels,” being the most

⁴³ Ulrich Hofmeister, “Civilization and Russification in Tsarist Central Asia, 1860–1917.” *Journal of World History* 27, no. 3 (2016): 412

⁴⁴ Merkur’ev

⁴⁵ Engelstein, 135

⁴⁶ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 25

⁴⁷ Merkur’ev

effective way to Russify the Kazakh populations.⁴⁸ They rested their hopes of Russification of the Kazakhs in the belief that converting these populations to Orthodoxy would hold a deeper meaning and connection than simple Russian history or Imperial authority would. Merkur'ev staunchly believed that the key to Russification was Muslim conversion to Orthodoxy. This represents a view that was firmly held by much of the Russian elite and especially throughout the Church. In this period, where the definition of the Russian identity was a complex and debated topic, Merkur'ev and his peers fell in line with valuing the importance of Orthodoxy overall.⁴⁹ A strong moral connection to Orthodoxy would create a natural transition and affiliation with the Russian empire and overall culture.

Part of the motivation behind strengthening the connection between the Kazakhs and Imperial Russia was the fear among the Russian elites of what they believed to be decreasing loyalty of Kazakhs and other Muslim populations of the empire towards the Russian empire and a growing affinity for Islamic ruling powers, such as the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁰ Many officials and Russian statesmen equated religious status and belief with loyalty and “communal affiliation” rather than an individual’s independent spiritual connection to a higher being.⁵¹ This led to increased distrust in Muslim populations and emphasis on the need for Muslims’ alignment with the Orthodox Church to ensure commitment to Russia and the Tsar. Merkur'ev writes:

As proof of Islam as a true faith, they [mullahs] point to the fact that God put, in the middle of the land, in Istanbul, the only Muslim king from where he, the strongest of the kings, governs all faithful. The Kazakhs are convinced that the Turkish Sultan, as the vicegerent of the Prophet, possesses unfathomable wealth, his country is the most powerful, and his faith is best and true.⁵²

⁴⁸ Merkur'ev, 9

⁴⁹ Merkur'ev

⁵⁰ Hofmeister, 419

⁵¹ Paul Werth, “The Limits of Religious Ascription: Baptized Tatars and the Revision of ‘Apostasy,’ 1840s-1905,” *The Russian Review* 59, no. 4 (2000): 493

⁵² Merkur'ev, 27

According to the Russian elites, one of the critical responsibilities of Russianness was the acknowledgment of loyalty to the authority and rule of the Tsar. Merkur'ev continues to justify conversion to Orthodoxy among the Muslim Kazakhs by appealing to the idea that the end goal is their successful Russification. "The goals of the mission are not only religious but also civil. By welcoming newcomers to the Church, each becomes not only a new member of the faith but a subject and citizen of the Russian state. Therefore, the state is obliged to bear the expenses of the Kazakh mission."⁵³ Members of the Russian elite responsible for the expansion efforts of the empire worried that Kazakhs and other Muslim populations if no intervention existed, would betray and turn on Russia in preference for Islamic states and empires such as the Ottomans. This fear was rooted in the revolutionary potential and the continued underlying fear that held a firm grip on Russia and Russian elites at the time: that the "Great Powers" of the West would perceive Russia as a weak, "oriental" nation.⁵⁴ Much of this fear and desire to Russify the Kazakhs came from the fear of Islam's rise in popularity in the area and the influence of Russia's eastern province of Kazan on the Steppe populations. Hence another reason why the use of Orthodox Enlightenment as the most effective means to Russify stemmed from the efforts to combat Islam and its growing strength.

The Rise of Kazan

Russian elites attributed the growth of Islam among Kazakhs to the influence of the Kazan Tatars.⁵⁵ Kazan, as mentioned in the introduction, was an independently governed Khanate state until conquered by Ivan IV in 1552.⁵⁶ Since then, Kazan had been (and still is) a

⁵³ Merkur'ev, 13

⁵⁴ Hofmeister, 411

⁵⁵ Isabelle Kriendler, "Nikolai Il'minskii and Language Planning in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 22 (1979)

⁵⁶ Sunderland, 133

province of Russia, with its population regarded as citizens of the Russian empire.⁵⁷ Since before the conquest, several large populations in the Kazan province were Muslim.⁵⁸ Islam was also present throughout populations of central Asia. Yet, Kazan and the Tatars were primarily seen as the leading center both economically and spiritually among Muslims of Eurasia and Central Asia.⁵⁹ Kazan was not just important for the Muslim populations in the surrounding regions. While still part of Russia and the Russian empire, Kazan evolved and grew independently over the following three centuries as a prosperous region, accumulating traffic, commerce, and trade throughout Central Asia, the West, and the East.⁶⁰ This broad reach and similar religious affiliation significantly contributed to the influence Kazan held among the Kazakh steppes, especially from the view of the Russian state.

Tatar merchants began promoting and participating in a high trade volume with neighboring populations such as the Kazakhs and other communities in Central Asia.⁶¹ Through the exchange of goods, “in particular the growth of wool, leather, and cotton-related industries,” came the exchange of ideas; this led to the institutionalization of Islam “between Russia, Central Asia, and India” and a strengthening of networks to Kazan among the nomadic and previously isolated communities.⁶² Kazan, therefore, also became a hub of trade, bridging European Russia and the West with the East. Robert Geraci argued that Kazan represented a “microcosmic version of Russia’s hybrid identity.”⁶³ As the Kazan Tatar merchants gained wealth, they began re-

⁵⁷ Tuna, *Imperial Russia’s Muslims*, 37

⁵⁸ Agnes Nilüfer Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 11-13; Galina M. Yemelianova, “Volga Tatars, Russians and the Russian State at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century: Relationships and Perceptions,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 77, no. 3 (1999)

⁵⁹ Yemelianova, 449

⁶⁰ Kefeli, 39; Allen J. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: The Islamic World of Novouzensk District and the Kazakh Inner Horde, 1780-1910*, (Boston: Brill, 2001), 309

⁶¹ Kappeler, 138

⁶² Kefeli, 4

⁶³ Kirmse, 780

investing their earnings into developing Madrassas (Islamic Schools) and Mosques (Islamic places of worship) in their local and neighboring Muslim communities.⁶⁴ The Kazan Tatars, due to their long history as members of the Russian empire and perceived similarities with the empire's southeastern borderlands, were given the responsibility by the Russian government of helping usher these nomadic populations towards the sedentary cultures and traditions of the Russian empire. From the sixteenth-nineteenth century, Kazan was regarded by the Russian state as the intermediary between the government and Islamic populations. "They became the political and economic agent for Russia's relations with the Islamic world."⁶⁵ However, not all supported the rise of Kazan power and influence.

During the mid-nineteenth century, Russian sentiments towards Islam changed with the resurgence of Orthodoxy and the push to create a Russian Colonial empire out of Central Asia. Russia decided to eliminate the middleman and restrict the relationship and interaction between the Kazan Tatars and Kazakhs. Mikhail Speranskii, an advisor to Tsar Alexander I, wrote "Statute on the Siberian Kazakhs" that "used Enlightenment-era language to describe how the Russian state would bring peace and prosperity to the Kazakh nomads, but reached out directly to Kazakh elites rather than working through Tatar intermediaries."⁶⁶ Merkur'ev also shared these ideas about the Kazan Tatars' negative influence on the Kazakh population by writing that the Tatar's, with their "self-imposed pious," held significant influence on the Kazakh people; "for the Kazakhs, the Tatars are the most enlightened, knowledgeable people from whom they borrow Islamic culture for fear of scorn and mockery from Tatars."⁶⁷ After three centuries of

⁶⁴ Ross, 82; Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims*, 132

⁶⁵ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 62; Yemelianova, 499

⁶⁶ Ross, 89 referencing "1824 g. ianvaria 7. – Proklamatsiia general-gubernatora Zapadnoi Sibiri, adresovannaia kazakhskomu naaseleniiu, biiam, sultana v sviazi s vvedniia Ustava o sibirskikh kirgizakh," *Kazakhsko-Russkie otnosheniia v XVIII-XIX vekakh*, 207-209

⁶⁷ Merkur'ev, 68

peaceful “co-existence within the same political framework,”⁶⁸ the culmination of several factors, led to a rise in tension and displeasure from the Russian elites towards the Kazan Tatar elites.

Orthodoxy as Imperial Justification

In the nineteenth century, Kazan saw a massive increase in Apostasy among the population. Apostasy, which Paul Werth defines as “signifying the repudiation of Orthodox Christianity in favor of another faith,” became a momentous movement among Tatars and a grave issue for the Orthodox Church and Russian government because it led to a dramatic loss in revenues.⁶⁹ In previous centuries, many Tatars were given little option by the Orthodox Church and their missionaries except to be baptized and join the church. Upon Russia’s conquest of Kazan in the 16th century, the Orthodox Church “became a pervasive presence” in the region of Kazan.⁷⁰ Churches, monasteries, convents, and other institutions of Orthodoxy were created throughout Kazan to encourage and help facilitate the conversion of the Islamic population to Orthodoxy.⁷¹ However, three centuries of effort put forth by the Church led to very little success in committed faith conversions of Tatars.⁷² In the nineteenth century, as indicated by censuses conducted in the area, the church saw a significant decline in baptized non-Russians and a steep increase in Baptized Tatars and animistic populations converting to Islam.⁷³

In the early days of Kazan’s affiliation with Russia, many Tatars converted to Orthodoxy, a few for faith-based reasons, but the majority were through coercive means to help aid in the

⁶⁸ Yemelianova, 499

⁶⁹ Werth, 493; Wayne Dowler, *Classroom and Empire: The Politics of Schooling Russia’s Eastern Nationalities, 1860-1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 22

⁷⁰ Matthew P. Romaniello, “Mission Delayed: The Russian Orthodox Church after the Conquest of Kazan’,” *Church History* 76, no. 3 (2007): 512

⁷¹ Romaniello, 512

⁷² Romaniello, 513; Werth 494

⁷³ Kefeli, 1

transition to Russian rule.⁷⁴ These groups were categorized as *Kriashens*, or Baptized Tatars, which Agnes Kefeli-Clay writes that the term was derived “from the Russian word for baptized,” therefore *Kriashens* “refers to either a Baptized individual or peasant,” he continues by clarifying that *Kriashens* was the “standard term appropriated by the small minority of Tatars who became Christians, and their descendants.⁷⁵ *Kriashens* in 19th century Kazan represented a legal category of Turkic-speaking people whose religious affiliation was questioned.⁷⁶ This questioning was due to the fact that while the *Kriashens* converted to Christianity, they still retained their Tatar language. This put them in “a distinct ethnic group recognized neither by the Russians nor the Muslim Tatars.”⁷⁷ Over the following centuries, many *Kriashens* did not follow the religious obligations attributed to an Orthodox Christian. Instead, they retained the categorical title but continued to follow Islam or other ancestral animistic traditions.⁷⁸

In the region of Kazan, there were three main categories of religious delineations. The *Kriashens* were the product of the sixteenth-century and eighteenth-century Orthodox conversion efforts, often performed through coercive measures. The second category was New Converts. These were descendants of Tatar Muslims who converted to Orthodoxy in the seventeenth eighteenth century, some on their own accord and others mainly through the Office of New Converts established by Empress Anna Ivanovna in 1731 and episcopate of Archbishop Luka Konashevich of Kazan.⁷⁹ The third was Tatar Muslims, those who never converted over the three centuries of Russian rule and had retained their categorization among the Russian government as Muslim. These three religious divisions (*Kriashens*/Old Converts, New Converts, and Muslims)

⁷⁴ Johnson, 76

⁷⁵ Kefeli, 1; Johnson, 75

⁷⁶ Kefeli, 9

⁷⁷ Kappeler, 151

⁷⁸ Werth, 494

⁷⁹ Johnson, 76; Geraci, *Window on the East*, 20

comprised most of Kazan's population at the time of the "Great Apostasy."⁸⁰ The term "Great Apostasy" represented the height of apostasy petitions among Tatars and peaked in 1866.⁸¹ In 1866, according to official categorization, there were 27,901 recorded *Kriashens*, 16,099 "New Converts," and 444,556 Muslim Tatars registered in the Kazan Province.⁸² However, by the 1870s, tens of thousands of Tatars had made petitions to convert officially to Islam.⁸³

Since the mid-18th century, Baptized Tatars, both New and Old Converts, had been petitioning the government on their labeled Orthodoxy. These numbers escalated and continued rising until their peak in the mid-nineteenth century. Relinquishing Orthodoxy was illegal in Russia during this time, which was why the Tatars attempted apostasy through legal methods such as letters and petitions to the government.⁸⁴ These efforts were made in an attempt to return to their Tatar ethnic roots, as Russia was not the only group to bear victim to nationalism. This gave way to Tatars not only rejecting the Baptized, Orthodox titles for Islam, but also their return to Tatar names, clothing, and other historic Tatar cultural/societal traditions.⁸⁵ While it was illegal to be an apostate, the sheer mass of Tatars filing petitions inhibited the Russian state from enacting any real legal consequences upon the population. In tandem with the Russian government, the Church attempted to halt the apostasy with policies that attempted to incentivize being and remaining an Orthodox Christian. On the other end, efforts were also made to inhibit the practice of Islam in the region to slow the momentum surrounding the apostasy movement. "At mid-century the Volga non-Christian peoples faced more frequent official denunciations of

⁸⁰ Johnson

⁸¹ Johnson, 102

⁸² Kefeli, 10

⁸³ Werth, 495; Campbell, 33

⁸⁴ Johnson; Kefeli

⁸⁵ Werth, 495

their religions, legal limitations on forms of worship, and pressure to convert.”⁸⁶ However, many of these efforts came up short. Agnes Kefeli, an American scholar of the Tatars and religion, argues that the apostasy movement represents a “genuine movement of conversion to Islam”⁸⁷ and that “the apostasies offer a bottom-up perspective on how non-Russian peasants manipulated and adapted the idea of citizenship, promoted by the Orthodox Church and the Russian state, to meet their own needs.”⁸⁸ The Tatars felt a stronger sense of community, belonging, and religiosity from Islam than in the coercive Orthodox conversions forced upon their ancestors in the previous three centuries. Johnson argues, using the arguments of P. Shestakov, that the increase in apostates in the nineteenth century was due to the fact that conversions to Orthodoxy of the previous centuries “were in outward ritual form only and devoid of internal conviction.”⁸⁹ Regardless of the true sentiments, the numbers express that the Orthodox Church was losing power and influence over the Kazan Tatars and feared without intervention, they would continue to weaken and potentially become obsolete among the Kazakhs and other eastern borderland populations.

This mass exodus from Orthodoxy and towards Islam that culminated in the mid-nineteenth century terrified the Russian State and Orthodox Church, each having their own respective reasons. Yet, both agreed that it represented a loss in their power and a cohesive Russian empire. This collective strengthening of Islamic power and allegiance in Kazan heavily influenced the following decades of actions toward the Kazakh Steppe populations. The combination of the Church and State’s negative views towards Islam in Russia and their goals of expansive power spurred new and continued conscious efforts of utilizing Russification through

⁸⁶ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 30

⁸⁷ Kefeli, 5

⁸⁸ Kefeli, 4

⁸⁹ Johnson, 81

Orthodoxy among Russia's southern and eastern borderlands to create a unified Orthodox Russian empire.⁹⁰ The fear that Islam would take control in these regions and become a unifying factor among the borderland populations as it was perceived to have done in Kazan, dominated the thoughts of the Russian elites and was the root behind many of Russia's future efforts. The Tatars of Kazan were already believed to hold immense influence on the eastern steppe populations. Therefore, this movement represented a gap in Russia's ability to maintain control and dictate the status quo throughout its diverse and varied lands, specifically those with Islamic ties and traditions.

Efforts to convert the Kazakhs to Orthodoxy were not solely selfish efforts to strengthen the numbers of the Church or to decrease the spread of Islam in the Russian empire but also aimed to separate these populations from the specific influence of the Tatars.⁹¹ There was an immense fear among Russian elites about the possibility of the Tatarization of the Steppes creating allegiance to Kazan rather than to Russia. Merkur'ev was no exception to the fear of "Tatarization" that plagued many members of the Russian core. The fear that Kazakhs held more allegiance to the Tatars and Islam rather than to Russia, Orthodoxy, or the Tsar often went in tandem with the desire to convert the Kazakhs to Orthodoxy. Merkur'ev, throughout his paper, demonizes not only Islam but specifically the Tatars and their role in "infecting" the Kazakhs with their beliefs and culture.⁹² Many scholars at the time, including Nikolai Il'minskii, a pious Orthodox Christian and an expert in the populations of Russia's southern and eastern borderlands, believed Tatarization was a fear just as important if not more than the Islamization

⁹⁰ Dowler, 15-17

⁹¹ Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims*, 65; Kefeli, 180

⁹² Merkur'ev

of the region.⁹³ One critical aspect concerning Il'minskii was the use of Tatar language among Kazakhs who possessed their own dialect.⁹⁴ Tatarization was characterized among these circles as the spread of the Tatar language and Islam.⁹⁵ This contributed to the fear among Russian elites that the Kazakh populations would follow a similar path as the apostates in Kazan if Tatarization continued to be offered the opportunity to situate itself in Kazakh culture and everyday life. Before any direct Russian interference within the Kazakh populations in the mid-late nineteenth century, the Tatars had held the most significant contact and influence among the Kazakhs through trade, commerce, migration, and immigration. Merkur'ev demonizes the presence of Tatars among the Kazakhs. In describing the educational facilities among the Kazakhs, he states that "the Koran, prayers, and literacy are taught in the Tatar spirit, and Russian and Kyrgyz languages are not mentioned. Students are impregnated with fanaticism and hatred of all things foreign, considering the Qur'an the only life-saving religion on earth."⁹⁶ Here, we get a glimpse of the negative light in which Islam was regarded and the specificity to which Tatarization was disliked and feared. Il'minskii went so far as to argue that "Islamicization and Tatarization of non-Russians in Kazan province was like a 'gangrene, which, if not stopped, could end in fifty or a hundred years with the definite crossing of all our non-Russians to Tatar Muslims."⁹⁷ In addition to the cultural and religious barriers between the Kazakhs and the Russian empire, the existing language barrier significantly contributed to efforts against Tatarization and Islamicization. Thus, the clearest option, according to Il'minskii, to deter the Kazakhs from Tatarization was an educational system that would encourage native Kazakh languages and Russian in efforts to

⁹³ Campbell, 64; Mustafa Tuna, "Gaspirali V. Il'minskii: Two Identity Projects for the Muslims of the Russian empire," *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 2 (2002): 269-271

⁹⁴ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 59

⁹⁵ Campbell, 66

⁹⁶ Merkur'ev, 44-45

⁹⁷ Campbell, 67 quoting Il'minskii, Cited in Larionov, *Nachal'noe obrazovanie inorodtsev*, 90

discourage the use of the Tatar language.⁹⁸ This would lead these populations to dissociate from the strong Tatar influence and turn towards Orthodoxy and Russia instead.

Conclusion

While these efforts, in theory, had the potential to be incredibly successful if executed correctly, the fatal mistake made by the Russians in charge of the Russification efforts of the Kazakh populations was the assumption of the barbarity of the Steppe peoples. The culmination of Russia's imperial efforts into Central Asia, specifically into the Kazakh populations, with Orthodoxy being perceived as the crux of Russian identity, led to the overarching focus and theme of their expansion and Russification efforts to be dictated by religion and the success of Orthodoxy among the *inorodtsy*. Orthodoxy was able to root itself deeply into the national identity among the Russian elites and even among many members of the larger Russian ethnic population; however, Orthodoxy did not carry the same weight among large portions of the Russian empire. Efforts to coerce and force a label of Orthodox Christianity upon regions of the empire that did not share the same beliefs ended up backfiring on the tsarist government and gave way to the opportunity for an even larger dissociation from Russia. At the same time, there were larger issues with Russia's approach toward the Russification of the Kazakhs than its potential Tatarization, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The apostasy of Kazan heavily impacted how Russia viewed the Kazakhs and how it aimed to move forward with its efforts to assimilate the Kazakh population as it entered the second half of the nineteenth century. Many Russian elites were so fixated on their belief in the key to Russification being Orthodox Enlightenment that they failed to recognize the deep roots of Islam that already

⁹⁸ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 59

existed, nor did they respect the nomadic traditions and practices of the Kazakhs that had been at the core of their society centuries before the Russian empire even existed.

Chapter 2:

Orthodoxy as an Imperial Instrument

“The success of the Christian education of the *inorodtsy* will be secured only when they are not simply the passive recipients of instruction, but [when] the leading and most gifted people from their milieu are activists in the spread of this enlightenment throughout the whole tribe.”

- Nikolai Il'minskii¹

Introduction

In the nineteenth century, as Orthodoxy became more developed in the eyes of Russian elites as the crux of the Russian identity, the administration of the Russian empire continued to encourage Orthodoxy's role in the Russian identity by delineating state-sponsored Orthodoxy and Orthodox institutions throughout its imperial endeavors. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the empire had solidified its rule over the Steppes and the Kazakh populations.² Efforts to Russify the Kazakhs lasted from the late nineteenth century into the Soviet period; however, policies and the foundations of these efforts began decades before that, spearheaded by Orthodox orientalist and encouraged via state-sponsored Orthodox institutions. The peak of these endeavors can be argued to have occurred during the professional career of Nikolai Il'minskii (who graduated from university in 1846 and died in 1891).³ Yet, his legacy influenced and revolutionized the Russification efforts of the *inorodtsy*, so much so that he continued to exist as

¹ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 61

² Hofmeister, 411

³ Kreindler, “Language Planning,” 6; McCarthy, 317

the measurement of comparison until the Soviet Revolution, which is evident in Merkur'ev's work written in 1916. Efforts made by orientalists such as Il'minskii drastically impacted all Russian efforts and approaches toward the Kazakh population. His methods, created and established in the latter half of the nineteenth century, became the standard for Russification. Kazan Theological Academy, the alma mater of both Il'minskii and Merkur'ev, systematized these methods and efforts of Russification, combining them with their own education curriculum, rooted in Anti-Islamic beliefs that continued from the mid-nineteenth century through till the Academy's closing in 1920.⁴ These Orthodox institutions perpetuated a rhetoric surrounding the Kazakh population of Russification through Orthodox enlightenment that continued for decades.

With the annexation of the steppe populations, formal efforts of Russification began to be implemented. Although many facets of assimilation were instated via government policy, from military efforts to educational systems, it is essential to note that the vastness of the Russian empire heavily contributed to the effectiveness and enforcement of said actions. St. Petersburg, at this time, remained the capital of the Tsarist government, and with Kazan being the "capital of Russia's East," communication and direct high-level governorship was hard to manage and rely on.⁵ Regional and local authorities had the largest capability of enacting immediate change and influence regarding what policies and initiatives were initiated and their execution. Therefore, discussions in Kazan and St. Petersburg about the approaches and treatments of the *inorodtsy* were characterized by various and often conflicting viewpoints that resulted in no clear or unified decision or action towards these populations.⁶ Russian institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of State Domains, the Holy Synod, Ministry of War, and the Asiatic

⁴ Alexey Khismatulin, "The Origins of Iranian Studies in Russia (Nineteenth to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century)," *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 5 (2015): 664

⁵ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 71

⁶ McCarthy, 309

Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as individual scholars, missionaries, and orientalists all held strong opinions on the correct steps towards the Russification and assimilation of the *inorodtsy* into the Russian empire, leading to a multitude of contentious and often unproductive discussions, actions, and policies that left the *inorodtsy* as the guinea pigs to their bureaucratic games.

Of these conversations, the question of the process of educating the *inorodtsy* became a recurrent and passionate topic of conversation. Under Tsar Alexander II, The Great Reforms of the 1860s brought a newfound light and the prioritization of the importance of an educated and literate majority among the citizens of the empire; this extended into the populations of the empire's eastern and southern borderlands.⁷ This era of enlightenment, prioritizing the education of the masses, was also tied into the enlightenment of Orthodoxy and revitalization of Orthodox faith and State authority, as loyalty to the Tsar and Russian nationality continued to frame conversations of progress within the empire.⁸ Kazan Theological Academy and its expert scholars played an important role in the Russification and imperial efforts towards the *inorodtsy*.

Kazan Theological Academy

Kazan Theological Academy was re-established in 1842.⁹ The Kazan Theological Academy is ravaged by a history of inconsistency both in its mission statement and organizational structure. At its core, however, the Kazan Theological Academy existed as an “incubator of new strategies for religious conversion of the peoples of the Russian East... for the very purpose of stimulating a renewal in Russian missionary activity during a time of perceived

⁷ Campbell, 2, 55

⁸ Campbell, 55

⁹ Khismatulin, 664; Geraci, *Window on the East*, 50; Johnson, 19; Campbell, 36

crisis” as articulated by Robert Geraci.¹⁰ The Kazan Theological Academy was one of four theological academies that existed in the nineteenth century. In 1798 Peter the Great created the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and the Kazan Theological Academy to accompany the efforts already underway by the centuries-long established theological academies of Moscow and Kiev.¹¹ All four would exist under the purview of the Holy Synod to encourage and promote “higher theological learning and research.”¹² Catherine the Great’s administration further encouraged the theological efforts of her predecessor by enacting the Committee for the Improvement of Ecclesiastical Schools in November of 1807 to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the academies.¹³ Unfortunately for the fate of the Kazan Theological Academy, it was the last of the academies to undergo this “overhaul.” It thus was deemed less important, resulting in its reversion to a seminary. Its education affairs were transitioned over to the purview of the Moscow Theological Academy.¹⁴ However, as has been discussed, the mid-nineteenth century was flooded with apostasy movements among the Kriashens of Kazan and a significant increase in the empire’s acquisition of Muslim populations to its East. The lack of non-Russian language and culture instruction, including a complete absence of courses on dissenting movements in the empire, made it clear that the reinstatement of an institution for higher theological education, particularly pertaining to the populations of Russia’s East, was necessary.¹⁵

¹⁰ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 48

¹¹ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 49

¹² Johnson, 19; Geraci, *Window on the East*, 49

¹³ Johnson, 19-20, Geraci, *Window on the East*, 49

¹⁴ Campbell, 36 n.21; Geraci, *Window on the East*, 49

¹⁵ Eugene J. Clay, “Literary Images of the Russian ‘Flagellants,’ 1861-1905” *Russian History* 24, no. 4 (1997): 426; Geraci, *Window on the East*, 49-50

The Kazan Theological Academy was thus reinstated with the purpose, outlined by the Holy Synod, of its “curriculum corresponding with the significance of its location.”¹⁶ In its creation, the Academy was designed to instruct its students in non-Russian languages that held significance to either the populations or one of the religions of Russia's eastern lands – including Islam and other animist traditions – along with the required courses in Orthodox theology.¹⁷ The non-Russian languages included Tatar, Arabic, Mongolian, and Kalmyk, in addition to other languages such as French, German, and Hebrew.¹⁸ The Kazan Theological Academy was the only theological academy sponsored by the Holy Synod that prioritized or even offered tutelage in “languages used by the pagan peoples,” and its publication was the first of such sources to address and discuss questions of opposing faith and the role of language within the populations of the Russian empire.¹⁹

In 1854, the Kazan Theological Academy went through another structural shift that would mark the beginning of the Academy’s most dedicated and effective period of conversion and missionary efforts that would last until another restructuring of its division in 1870.²⁰ During this period, the Academy was divided into four dedicated missionary divisions against Islam, Buddhism, animist religions, and Old belief.²¹ The purpose of the anti-Islamic division, the division that will be of primary focus, according to Academy professor and historian P. V. Znamenskii,²² was to teach “the story of Muhammad in all its detail, the Muhammadan faith according to its sources and explain the general character of the Tatars, their way of thinking

¹⁶ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 50

¹⁷ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 47-54

¹⁸ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 50

¹⁹ P. V. Znamenskii, *Istoriia Kazanskoi dukhovnoi akademii za pervyi (doreformennyi) period ee sushchestvovaniia (1842-1870 gody)* (Kazan, 1892), 1:1-5 as quoted in Geraci, *Window on the East*, 50; Kefeli, 427

²⁰ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 54-68

²¹ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 54

²² Geraci, *Window on the East*, 58

traditions and habits, the necessary pedagogy to be applied to them, and also train the students in the Tatar and Arabic languages to the degree that they may freely converse with the Tatars not only on simple subjects but also about Christian truths.”²³ This maintained the Russification philosophy and aim of eastern *inorodtsy* of Orthodox conversion in the name of religious enlightenment to further support and strengthen loyalty to Russia and Russian authority.

This department of Anti-Islamic Studies at the Kazan Theological Academy was one of only two areas dedicated to Oriental studies in Kazan.²⁴ Making it one of the forefront locations among Russian intellectuals and missionaries interested in furthering an academic or religious career affiliated with the field. The agenda of the Anti-Islamic division can be deduced correctly from its name. The teachers promoted ideologies of Islamophobia and racist rhetoric in their teachings of the cultures of Russia’s Muslim *inorodtsy*. *This curriculum* continued far past the turn of the century, as can be denoted from Merkur’ev’s writing which was completed in fulfillment of graduating from the Kazan Theological Academy. In describing the works of another Kazan Theological Academy graduate, Nikolai Ostromou, Alexander Morrison states that Ostromou’s work was “typical of that produced in Kazan, at the Theological Academy,” and was a “crude Islamophobic polemic.” Morrison details the content of Ostromou’s thesis, where half of it was dedicated “to denying Muhammad’s status as a prophet in openly abusive terms.”²⁵

Another key purpose of the Kazan Theological Academy and the Anti-Islam missionary division was their efforts in translation. In his doctoral dissertation in Russian studies, Johnson

²³ Quoted in P.V. Znamenskii, *Na pamiat’ o Nikolae Ivanoviche Il’minskom: K 25 lettiu Bratstva Sv. Guriia* (Kazan, 1900), 96 as referenced in Geraci, *Window on the East*, 54

²⁴ Khismatulin, 664

²⁵ Alexander Morrison, “‘Applied Orientalism’ in British India and Tsarist Turkestan,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 3 (2009): 640

writes that “the Kazan Academy was the locus of the Russian Orthodox Church’s efforts to prepare native clergy and to translate the scriptures and liturgical services into languages.”²⁶ Initially focused on Tatar translations, the academy extended, through the decades, into translations into several different native languages and dialects of Russia’s eastern populations, with a particular focus on Kazakh language translations.²⁷ These translations would later prove crucial in developing Russifying educational methods for the Kazakhs. The translation efforts of Kazakh languages were fueled by the fear of Tatarization and Russia’s extensive efforts to limit Tatar and Islamic influence among these populations. The mind and leader behind the translation efforts of a Kazakh language was Kazan Theological Academy graduate and linguist Nikolai Il’minskii.

Agents of Influence

Nikolai Il’minskii is arguably one of the most well-known graduates of the Kazan Theological Academy. He is categorized as one of the forefront leaders in educational philosophy, especially regarding the *inorodtsy* population. Il’minskii, a devout Orthodox and Russian nationalist, spearheaded education efforts that aimed to inculcate deep Orthodox convictions among its students and the communities it served, which would naturally progress into loyal and patriotic Russian subjects.²⁸ The education system he developed promoted his personal beliefs, which Johnson summarizes as “Orthodox Christianity, which he viewed as a defining characteristic of Russian national identity, rather than on the appropriation of Russian language and culture by the indigenous population.”²⁹

²⁶ Johnson, 20

²⁷ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 52-71

²⁸ McCarthy, 317

²⁹ Johnson, 5

Il'minskii was born in April 1821 in the rural city of Penza.³⁰ He was among the Kazan Theological Academies first graduating class in 1846 and was immediately hired by the Academy as a teacher of biblical history.³¹ However, his passion was linguistics, specifically those of Russia's *inorodtsy* and combatting the rising apostasy rates in Kazan. Il'minskii came from the clerical class, and following in his family's footsteps, Il'minskii studied at his local seminary, where he excelled and was later admitted to the prestigious Kazan Theological Academy.³² It was at the Kazan Theological Academy that Il'minskii became enthralled with language and the borderland populations. During his studies at the Academy, Il'minskii learned several native languages of the Tatars and Kazakh steppes – had a “thorough grasp of eight” – and focused on educating himself on Islam and Tatar culture.³³ In his first years as a professor, he continued pursuing his passion for language and understanding of Islam by studying at a local Kazan *madrasa* to perfect his Arabic and Tatar while further developing his grasp on Muslim theology and its appeal to the Tatars.³⁴ Throughout the next decade, due to his overwhelming achievements in non-Russian languages, he was sent to various locations to further his knowledge and experiences. Some of these trips included regions of the Middle East to better contextualize Islam and how it affected Russian populations, as well as journeys to the southern and eastern borderlands of the empire to observe, take note, and learn about the language and cultures of Russia's newly acquired coreligionists of the East.³⁵

On these trips, the crux of Il'minskii's educational method, widely referred to as the “Il'minskii system,” took root. While the Il'minskii system has the goal of Orthodox conversion

³⁰ Johnson, 17

³¹ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 50-51

³² Johnson, 17-20

³³ McCarthy, 316; Geraci, *Window on the East*, 51

³⁴ Campbell, 34

³⁵ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 50-57

among its students, Il'minskii made great efforts to de-emphasize “polemic proselytizing.”³⁶ According to Geraci, Il'minskii's experience in the Middle East, where he was able to witness the failure and “inefficacy” of the well-funded and well-organized missionary efforts of Christian Europe, demonstrated that “Muslims' attachment to the figure Muhammad was so complete that almost no other could dissuade them from it.”³⁷ This concept was further confirmed for Il'minskii in his discussion on Islam and Orthodoxy with Kazan Tatars. Il'minskii writes that “[he] has noticed on many occasions that the most decisive (in our opinion) arguments have no persuasiveness for them because [the Tatars] are too strongly prejudiced in favor of the divinity of the Qur'an.”³⁸ He further continues by stating that “the Tatars' inaccessibility comes primarily from the incorrigible habit of their time-honored beliefs, but also from the fact that Islam has all but intentionally closed the eyes of its followers through its one-sided upbringing and unconditional faith in the divinity of the Qur'an.”³⁹ Therefore, Il'minskii concluded that discouraging apostasy via threat of punishment would be ineffective, and instead, there needed to be a push toward moral persuasion.⁴⁰ Il'minskii approached the strategy of “moral persuasion” differently for the Baptized Tatars whom he was trying to dissuade from apostasy, and the Kazakhs, who he believed were only superficial Muslims, still able to learn, understand and convert to the “righteous” and “enlightened” faith of Orthodoxy.

His trips and studies of the Kazakh Steppe populations also determined the second, and arguably the most nuanced, feature of his system: the prioritization of native vernacular as the

³⁶ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 57

³⁷ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 57

³⁸ N.I. Il'minskii, “Oproverzhenie islamizma, kak neobkhodimoe uslovie k tverdomu priniatiuu tatarami khristianskoi very, vsego poleznee mozhnet nachat'sia razybezhdeniem ikh v prorocheskom dostoinstve Magometa,” in Znamenskii, *Na pamiat'*, 401 as quoted in Geraci, *Window on the East*, 57

³⁹ N.I. Il'minskii, “Oproverzhenie islamizma, kak neobkhodimoe uslovie k tverdomu priniatiuu tatarami khristianskoi very, vsego poleznee mozhnet nachat'sia razybezhdeniem ikh v prorocheskom dostoinstve Magometa,” in Znamenskii, *Na pamiat'*, 401 as quoted in Geraci, *Window on the East*, 57

⁴⁰ Campbell, 37

primary language of instruction. Language and its role in unifying a people was the cornerstone of his philosophy. In his method of education, the eventual but distant goal was for the *inorodtsy* students to be taught in Russian and for it to transition into their primary form of communication outside of school and in everyday life.⁴¹ The populations of the eastern borderlands spoke several languages which differed in dialect and structure from region to region and often did not resemble Russian or Slavic language structure.⁴² Therefore, to help stimulate Russian learning, students would be taught basic subjects in their native languages for their first years of education.⁴³ In later years, if the education method proved successful, the hope was for the students' classes to be taught solely in Russian.⁴⁴ This belief of Il'minskii in the importance and necessity of utilizing native languages as the basis of *inorodtsy* education was promulgated by the growing fear of Tatarization among Russian elites. For decades Tatar had been the language the Kazakhs had used to communicate with Russian authorities and the Tatar intermediaries; it was their "language of education and literacy."⁴⁵ Il'minskii did not believe that the Kazakhs had been thoroughly "Tatarized" or "Islamicized" and therefore felt there was still time to Russify them and instill Russian and Orthodoxy beliefs.⁴⁶ Il'minskii noted that to capitalize on the Russification and assimilation of the Kazakhs, the empire would have to hinder their Tatarization and Islamization in such a way that the Russians created loyalty, not resentment.

Another crucial part of Il'minskii's educational method was for the teachers of the natives to be natives themselves. Il'minskii hoped that by having a native as the instructor,

⁴¹ McCarthy, 317

⁴² Dowler, 137-149

⁴³ Dowler, 142

⁴⁴ Kreindler, "Language Planning"

⁴⁵ Nathaniel Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?," *Slavic Review* 59, no. 1 (2000): 95

⁴⁶ Isabelle Kreindler, "Educational Policies Toward the Eastern Nationalities in Tsarist Russia: A Study of Il'minskii's System," (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1969), 19

students, who were primarily children, would hold a higher level of trust in what they were being taught and would be inspired to continue their studies.⁴⁷ Il'minskii wrote that "the success of the Christian education of the *inorodtsy* will be secured only when they are not simply the passive recipients of instruction, but [when] the leading and most gifted people from their milieu are activists in the spread of this enlightenment throughout the whole tribe."⁴⁸ He aimed to instrumentalize the comfort and trust that having a native teacher would have on the students to further benefit the Russian empire and their Russification. Kreindler further articulates Il'minskii's quasi-manipulation of natives: "According to Il'minskii natives who enjoyed the confidence of their peoples should be appointed even if they 'lack knowledge or pedagogical experience.' The Russians, however, were to provide supervision and direction (not because they were superior, but because they had a better grasp of Russian Orthodoxy)."⁴⁹

Il'minskii dedicated much of his time and efforts to developing schools and educational methods for the Kazakh population. He believed that the Kazakhs were "less-confirmed Muslims" and, therefore, more inclined to adopt the values of Russian culture, which Il'minskii translated as Orthodoxy.⁵⁰ Yet, in following his methods, he enlisted the help of Kazakhs to help form and shape his methods to create the best success among the population. With his efforts among the Kazakhs, Il'minskii looked to Ibrahim Altynsarin as his "native front man."⁵¹ Altynsarin met Il'minskii when they were studying Kazakh language together in 1859.⁵² Altynsarin was a devout Muslim, and Il'minskii a devout Christian, yet the two shared a passion for developing a unique Kazakh language, exempt from the influence of Tatar, and worked

⁴⁷ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 48

⁴⁸ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 61, quoting Il'minskii.

⁴⁹ Isabelle Kreindler, "A Neglected Source of Lenin's Nationality Policy," *Slavic Review* 36, no. 1 (1977): 97

⁵⁰ Tuna, "Gaspirali V. Il'minskii," 269

⁵¹ Kreindler, "A Neglected Source," 97

⁵² Dowler, 138-139

together until Altynsarin died in 1889.⁵³ Il'minskii still aspired to convert the Kazakhs to Orthodoxy through his educational system. However, he worked with Altynsarin as their shared knowledge and experiences complimented each other and provided the mechanisms to create a literary Kazakh language.⁵⁴ Together, they worked on creating schools for the Kazakh populations, and in 1864 the first school following their methods was opened, marking the beginnings of the Russian-Kazakh schools.⁵⁵ Altynsarin was later named "senior assistant of the district's director of schools."⁵⁶

One of the main challenges of educating these students in Kazakh was the need for a standardized Kazakh alphabet and grammar. The two worked together to create several textbooks and literary material outlining the rules of the language. However, a topic of major conflict between the two was the letter basis to incorporate for the Kazakhs. Il'minskii was a strong supporter of employing the use of Cyrillic, the letters of the Russian alphabet. On the other hand, Altynsarin was hesitant and had a preference for Arabic letters, the same used in Islamic religious texts and content.⁵⁷ Altynsarin understood the use of Cyrillic would further aid efforts of eliminating Tatar culture in the lives of the Kazakhs; however, he believed the familiarity of the Arabic letters would encourage and ease the learning process.⁵⁸ Cyrillic was inevitably decided as the alphabet of Kazakh, pushed forward with the help of support from Dmitrii A. Tolstoi and Vasilii Vasil'evich Grigor'ev, both leaders within the Russian government as the head of the Ministry of Education and Chairman of the Orenburg Borderland Commission

⁵³ Dowler, 139-142; Kreindler, "Language Planning," 17

⁵⁴ Kreindler, "Language Planning," 17

⁵⁵ Dowler, 139

⁵⁶ Dowler, 139

⁵⁷ Kreindler, "Language Planning," 18; Dowler, 140

⁵⁸ Dowler, 140

of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs respectively.⁵⁹ Altynsarin continued to oppose the use of Cyrillic to Il'minskii but remained supportive of his school methods among the Kazakh and held a leadership position in the administrative and political roles of the Russian-Kazakh schools till he died.⁶⁰ Altynsarin is still considered one of the key Kazakh leaders in Kazakh education and academic advancement.

Much of Il'minskii and Altynsarin's progress with the Russian-Kazakh schools would not have been possible without Grigor'ev and Tolstoi. Vasilii Vasil'evich Grigor'ev was an Orientalist and Russian statesman with a passion for developing the Steppe populations.⁶¹ He was first a mentor but later became a colleague and admirer of Il'minskii and his work. Grigor'ev focused his studies in the Oriental Faculty at St. Petersburg University before moving to the steppe after unsuccessful and unsatisfactory job opportunities in academia in St. Petersburg.⁶² Grigor'ev is most known for his role as Chairman of the Orenburg Borderland Commission, an official branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁶³ As chairman, maintaining and improving Russian relations with the Kazakhs and other steppe populations fell under his jurisdiction.⁶⁴ When Il'minskii traveled to the steppe from 1858-1862 to observe and learn about the Kazakhs, he worked under Grigor'ev's leadership.⁶⁵ The two closely became friends and exchanged ideas and strategies on the Russification and education of the Kazakh populations. Even after Il'minskii left his post among the Kazakhs to return to the Kazan Theological Academy, the two continued to correspond and participated in the interchanging of beliefs and

⁵⁹ Dowler, 137-138; Geraci, *Window on the East*, 67; Knight, 85

⁶⁰ Dowler, 142

⁶¹ Knight

⁶² Knight, 74

⁶³ Knight, 85; Dowler, 138

⁶⁴ Knight, 85

⁶⁵ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 59

philosophies about the Kazakhs. Both were avid believers in using the Kazakh native language to educate and Russify these populations.⁶⁶ Grigor'ev was responsible for the Russian approval and creation of many educational instruments for the Kazakhs, including the creation of the first schools to which Altynsarin was named Senior Assistant of the district's director of schools.⁶⁷ Additionally, he helped encourage the creation of Kazakh textbooks by requesting Il'minskii write a textbook of Russian grammar for the Kazakh in 1860, which would later be published as a small dictionary of grammar and titled *Materials for the Study of Kirgiz* [Kazakh].⁶⁸ While Grigor'ev strongly supported and encouraged Kazakh language development and "indirect" Russian rule over the Kazakhs, he was not immune to an arrogance of Russian superiority over the Kazakhs.⁶⁹ Knight and Morrison define Grigor'ev's view of the Kazakhs as "separate individuals from a lower, immature race that could be raised up to the Russian level."⁷⁰ Grigor'ev believed that Kazakhs should have their own language and "rediscover" their "national" traditions out of fear of Tatarization and Islamization. He felt the Il'minskii method, with roots in Orthodox enlightenment with additional help from Russians teaching the Kazakhs by example, was the only way for Kazakhs to be drawn to Russian civilization.⁷¹

Dmitrii A. Tolstoi was an equally important believer in Il'minskii's work with the Kazakhs. He acted as one of the leading supporters and impactful helpers regarding Il'minskii's methods in the political and Russian government world. Dmitrii A. Tolstoi was both the *ober procurator* of the Holy Synod and the Head of the Ministry of Education from 1866-1880.⁷²

⁶⁶ Knight, 94

⁶⁷ Dowler, 139

⁶⁸ Dowler, 139

⁶⁹ Morrison, 629

⁷⁰ Morrison, 628, partially quoting Knight.

⁷¹ Knight, 94; Morrison, 628

⁷² Allen Sinel, "Educating the Russian Peasantry: The Elementary School Reforms of Count Dmitrii Tolstoi." *Slavic Review* 27, no. 1 (1968): 49; Geraci, *Window on the East*, 64; Dowler 137

Both of these positions made Tolstoi a vital friend for Il'minskii to have, as Il'minskii juggled the interconnection of religion and education in his schooling system. Tolstoi became a fervent supporter of employing Kazakh language amongst the Kazakh population instead of Tatar and helped Il'minskii find funding support for his schools from the Holy Synod and the Ministry of Education.⁷³ Besides financially, Tolstoi's support of Il'minskii became a valuable resource for Il'minskii in 1864 when the Ministry of Education ruled that "all schooling in the empire must be conducted in Russian."⁷⁴ With Tolstoi's help, by 1870, the Ministry had reverted its decree in favor of the Il'minskii. Further specifying that non-Russian languages could be employed in Russian schools in the borderlands regions, this amendment remained in effect till the end of the Tsarist era.⁷⁵ Additionally the Ministry, under Tolstoi, adopted Il'minskii's schools into their education system among the borderlands and *inorodtsy* populations, "making Il'minskii's missionary revival more lasting than any of the century's earlier efforts," argues Geraci.⁷⁶ Tolstoi's assistance and support of Il'minskii and his educational methods represent an area of state-sponsored aid of practices that would, ideally, result in Russification via Orthodox conversions of the Kazakhs. While these efforts of state-sanctioned support primarily came from the voice of one man, Dmitrii Tolstoi, his beliefs echoed those of the people surrounding him. Il'minskii and Tolstoi were able to garner additional support by "couching" Il'minskii's argument by "stressing his immediate concern was for the strength and integrity of Orthodox religion" and that "Orthodoxy was necessary for the strength and integrity of Russian nationality."⁷⁷ Tolstoi's position as Holy Synod *ober procurator* and Head of the Ministry of

⁷³ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 68

⁷⁴ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 76

⁷⁵ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 76

⁷⁶ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 64

⁷⁷ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 79

Education and his backing of Il'minskii gave Il'minskii's system the stage it needed to garner the support of the Russian empire and its political systems to create effective and tangible action among the *inorodtsy*. However, this also demonstrates the state's and Russian elite's affiliation and importance of Orthodoxy and national identity held as an institutional pairing and a means of Russification.

Fear of Tatarization and its Role in Education

Il'minskii and his supporters created and implemented schooling systems that provided a means for the Kazakhs to acquire a national identity by legitimizing their language. While this benefited their people and culture in some ways, it was not done by altruistic means. Il'minskii, Altynsarin, Grigor'ev, Tolstoi, and many others involved in the Russification and education of the *inorodtsy* fueled their efforts due to fear of Tatarization. Tatarization was a significant fear that dictated much of the conversations surrounding the implementation of Il'minskii methods.⁷⁸ This fear continued past Il'minskii's death, as we have seen in Chapter 1 regarding Merkur'ev's writings warning of the Tatars' influence on the Kazakhs.⁷⁹ Tatarization, throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, to the Russian elites represented a type of Islamophobia that provided the Russian elites with a population of people to blame for the popularization of Islam, among other *inorodtsy*. Tatars were seen as the “carriers” and “transmitters” of a “fanatic” and dangerous religion to the “unsuspecting” Kazakhs.⁸⁰ The Tatars' access to the Kazakhs and other nomadic peoples was heavily due to Catherine the Great's policies in the late eighteenth century and the Russian government continuing to “employ[ing]

⁷⁸ Dowler, 137-144

⁷⁹ Morrison, 634-636

⁸⁰ Dowler, 17; Morrison, 631

Tatar as the administrative language” among Kazakhs.⁸¹ While the increase in Tatar presence did not cause the Islamicization of the Kazakhs, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, it did bring an acceleration of Tatar culture and language.

Il'minskii, in developing the Kazakh language, was made aware of the extent to which Tatar influence had infiltrated the Kazakhs. After years of studying, he created the first Kazakh-Russian dictionary, the first Kazakh work in print. Altynsarin described the dictionary's publication in 1860-1861 as “both strange and pleasant for the Kirgiz [Kazakh] to see their language in print for the first time.”⁸² While the creation of this book demonstrates the benefit of the implementation and emphasis on the Kazakhs' native language among Russians, the means continued to be shadowed by the fear of Tatarization and Islamophobia. Tolstoi was an avid opposer of Tatarization and did all he could to eliminate the Tatars' influence and impact on the steppe. He and Altynsarin wished to train and educate Kazakhs so that Tatars could be eliminated from their posts along the steppe.⁸³ Tolstoi continued his efforts in eliminating Tatar by spearheading efforts to “half the practice of printing government regulations for Kazakhs in Tatar.”⁸⁴ This fear in Tatarization, which can be read closer as a fear of Islam, represents the insecurity Imperial Russia and its regional statesmen felt concerning their abilities to control its borderland populations.

They wished to divide and isolate the Muslim populations by implementing native languages.⁸⁵ This would leave assimilation to Russian culture and Orthodoxy as their only way to unify with other groups.⁸⁶ Many of Il'minskii's opposers preferred the sole implementation of

⁸¹ Dowler, 137

⁸² Kreindler, “Language Planning,” 8

⁸³ Dowler, 138

⁸⁴ Dowler, 139

⁸⁵ Tuna, “Gaspirali V. Il'minskii,” 266

⁸⁶ Tuna, “Gaspirali V. Il'minskii,” 270, 281

the Russian language in all schools throughout the empire. To his opposers, Il'minskii defended using native languages among the nomads by stating that if the government were to force Russian only, then "native languages and nationality would disappear, and the peoples would adopt Tatar language and identity."⁸⁷ He followed this by saying, "Or the government could permit the use of native languages in schools and churches [...] developing a sense of native nationality. But would it be easier for the Russian government to confront small and weak nationalities rather than a unified Tatar nation?"⁸⁸ Further demonstrating that the use of native languages held ulterior motives than the elevation and modernization of Kazakh culture. Tatarization and Il'minskii's method of using native languages justified and disguised the attempts to isolate these populations from their fellow Muslim communities and push them towards Russian loyalty and Russian nationality through Orthodoxy. Russians tried to impose their perceived superiority over Islamic societies through education methods and systems while simultaneously attempting to weaken and divide them.

Results of the System

Il'minskii organized his system via native language instruction. The end goal was communities with a personal connection and affinity for Russia, Russian nationalism, and, therefore, Orthodoxy, ideally abandoning their perceived superficial Islam in the process. However, Il'minskii failed to realize the Kazakhs' advancement in their Muslim convictions and sense of native nationality. Those who initially opposed Il'minskii's method of native languages because of the feeling of "nationalism and separatism" it might cause quickly pushed it aside because statesmen "considered ethnic distinction harmless in the East, the peoples of which

⁸⁷ McCarthy, 317

⁸⁸ McCarthy, 317

presumably had not reached the age of nations.”⁸⁹ The underestimation of the Kazakhs led to the inevitable downfall of Russia’s hopes to Russify and assimilate these populations. The efforts of the Russian elites “capitalized on confidence in the polemical method of missionizing and the still considerably wide-spread belief in the ultimate inevitability of russification”⁹⁰ because “they must save these people before they would be spoiled by Islam.”⁹¹ The Imperial administration, in their efforts to maintain and strengthen their power over the Kazakhs, saw their tasks as: “establish and maintain order on the steppes, clarify and reinforce the allegiances of the Kazakhs to the empire, expand trade relations between Russia and Central Asia, and reduce the perceived threat posed by the independent khanates.”⁹² Many saw the answer to these means through the education methods and Russification processes articulated by the Il’minskii system. Thus, Grigor’ev, through Knight, saw the tasks of the Russian administration as “twofold – first, to uphold and advance Russian interests, and second, to protect subject peoples, increase their material prosperity and create conditions that would make possible their cultural advancement.”⁹³ This description of the role of the administration displays the core of how many orientalist, missionaries, and Russian elites saw their relationship with the Kazakhs: “as one of tutelage, patronage, and protection.”⁹⁴ This blurred sense of superiority over the Kazakh population created a volatile hierarchy of power that was bound to tumble.

Over the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century, Kazakhs continued to follow their religious and cultural convictions.⁹⁵ The fear of Tatarization had ended up harming the

⁸⁹ McCarthy, 317; Geraci, *Window on the East*, 80

⁹⁰ Geraci, “Going Abroad or Going to Russia,” 282

⁹¹ Geraci, “Going Abroad or Going to Russia,” 283

⁹² Knight, 83

⁹³ Knight, 90

⁹⁴ Knight, 90

⁹⁵ Kreindler, “Language Planning,” 18

Russian elite's vision of a unified Russian empire more than it benefitted. Kreindler notes, "Kazakh national self-consciousness in fact developed not only *vis-a-vis* the Tatars but also by the Russians."⁹⁴ The creation of literary Kazakh languages throughout the populations allowed for more extensive communications. One of Il'minskii's biggest fears was the development of a "Muslim intelligentsia."⁹⁶ However, by the turn of the century, his biggest fear appeared to have been realized. An educated elite of Muslim *inorodtsy* established themselves as Jadids and promoted a "cultural regeneration of their society."⁹⁷ The Jadids spearheaded initiatives of cultural reform, one of the biggest examples being the creation of publications such as *Terciman* and *Perevodchik*, the same newspaper but published bilingually.⁹⁸ There are several arguments regarding whether the overhaul of the traditional Islamic institutions of the Muslim populations for a "modernized" version promoted by the Jadids was necessary; it does not discredit the immense publicity, momentum, and nationalistic noise that occurred.⁹⁹ Among the Kazakhs, "voices of incipient nationalism were already speaking out in the eastern and southern border region, and the potential of the East for autonomous national movements was already clear."¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Albeit not direct pedagogical conversion, Il'minskii and his supporters wished to instill the values, morals, and faith in Orthodoxy among the Kazakhs. Their perceived sense of superiority that Russian elites held regarding the nomadic populations of the steppe gave them,

⁹⁶ Dowler, 152

⁹⁷ Adeeb Khalid, "A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003): 575

⁹⁸ Khalid, 575; Tuna, "Gaspirali V. Il'minskii," 272

⁹⁹ Allen Frank "Muslim Cultural Decline in Imperial Russia: A Manufactured Crisis," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59, no 1/2 (2016). Allen Frank is a large opponent of the current rhetoric surrounding the Jadids and the "cultural crisis" of the turn of the century. For more information see his article "Muslim Cultural Decline in Imperial Russia: A Manufactured Crisis."

¹⁰⁰ Dowler, 154

what they believed, was the necessary justification to instill their methods of education and Russification in the Kazakh population. Where they failed was in their belief that they could continue to control the developments of the Kazakhs throughout the entire process. Il'minskii wanted to maintain Russian supervision and direction over the native schools and their curriculum.¹⁰¹ However, this proved impossible. Instead, his schools and the use of native languages provided a means for the Kazakhs to better evolve as their own unified people outside of the Russian conquest. Il'minskii, Tolstoi, Grigor'ev, and other Russian orientalists discounted Islam's roots among the Kazakh peoples, which in many ways became their fatal flaw. Their desire to civilize and Russify clouded their ability to understand and acknowledge the strength of culture, tradition, and Islam that flowed through the Kazakhs. However, the Russians did not learn from their mistake and continued underestimating the Kazakhs and pushing them towards Orthodox conversion.

¹⁰¹ Kreindler, "Neglected Source," 97

Chapter 3:

The Misinformed Realities of Kazakh Muslims formed to benefit Orthodoxy and Russian Expansion

“Totalizing statements about Islam [...] grossly misrepresent this reality. Characterizations that present Islam simply as wicked or tolerant are equally incorrect. Muslims can draw any number of lessons from Islam. The tradition is much too rich and diverse to be reduced to a single evaluative adjective.”

- Adeeb Khalid¹

Introduction

The Russian empire’s official annexation of and expansion into the Kazakh Steppe solidified in the mid-nineteenth century.² During this time, many efforts were made to Russify the region; however, little was known about the nomadic population. With scholars' and missionaries' help, the Russian government made efforts to observe, understand, and form a plan of action to envelop these communities into the Russian sphere. However, the Russian elites charged with aiding in this process possessed predisposed beliefs and ideas regarding the Kazakhs, Islam, and the relationship/origin of Islam among the Kazakhs. The fear of Tatarization and its influence on the Kazakhs regarding Kazakh Islamicization discounted the historical

¹ Khalid, Abeer (2007): *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. London: University of California Press as quoted in Kathrin Lenz-Raymann, “Features of Central Asian Folk Islam,” in *Securitization of Islam: A Vicious Circle: Counter-Terrorism and Freedom of Religion in Central Asia*, (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 45

² Hofmeister, 411

presence of Islam among the nomads. This perception of reliance on the Tatars for leadership and cultural stimulation perpetuated a belief that the Kazakhs needed Russian enlightenment, as Russian elites believed their nomadic lifestyle had left them behind the virtues of modernity. During this time, Russia was in the throes of Imperial competition with the European West as they colonized areas of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. Russia was still competing to be seen as a comparative nation and utilized its ability to expand eastward to its benefit.³ In combination with the desire to create a unified Russian identity and as Orthodoxy lost power in regions such as Kazan, there was an invigorated effort among Russian elites, particularly the Orthodox Church, to Russify the nomadic *inorodtsy* by way of Orthodoxy. Through discussing the assumptions made by the Russian elites surrounding the Muslimness of the Kazakhs, including Russian elite beliefs about the Kazakh's nomadic culture and women among the Kazakhs, it will demonstrate how the historical foundations created in the eighteenth century enabled the continuation of these postulations that further clouded by concerns of the late nineteenth century regarding Orthodoxy and Russification of the Kazakhs. These previously developed interpretations, combined with the efforts of Russian imperial expansion and the heightened need to develop a Russian identity to unify the new members of the empire, created a misconstrued reality regarding the Kazakhs and their own religious identity as Muslims. Through the use of Merkur'ev's paper, in which he dives deep into his knowledge and opinions on the history and culture of the Kazakh steppes, I aim to demonstrate how these predisposed notions towards the Russian empire's newly acquired population incorrectly impacted and affected the views of the Russian elite and their policies towards the Kazakhs.

³ Hofmeister, 411

The make-Up of Islam along the Kazakh Steppe

Contrary to the beliefs of Russian Orthodox missionaries and other Russian elites, Islam had a long and rich history along the Steppe region. By the eighth century, within a century after the death of the Prophet Muhammed, Islam had become the dominant religion among Central Asian elites.⁴ While Islam did retain more growth and popularity among the sedentarized populations of Central Asia, the nomadic tribes, including the Kazakhs, who, it is important to note, were still a part of the Golden Horde until the 15th century, due to the merchant travels and interactions, particularly from the Tajiks, had an established knowledge and following of Islam by the 12th century.⁵

To better understand the role Islam played in the lives of the Kazakhs and the perspective from which the Russian elites approached the Kazakh populations, it is important to examine better the structure that defines the Kazakhs' philosophy and approach to Islam. Historically, Islam's practice and theology in the Steppes have been categorized as a combination of Sunni Islam and Sufism. Sufism, also known as *tasawwuf* or Islamic Mysticism⁶, played an enormous role in the longevity and growth of Islam throughout the Steppe region through the eighteenth century.⁷ Sufism has a long and deep history in Central Asia, including it being the origin story for many Sufi Orders. One of the most significant and predominant Sufi Orders in Islamic history, the Naqshbandiyyah, had a strong presence in the region until the 19th century when

⁴ Jeremy T. Gunn, "Shaping an Islamic Identity: Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia," *Sociology of Religion* 64, no. 3 (2003): 389

⁵ Gunn, 398-399; Kathrin Lenz-Raymann, "History of Politics and Islam in Central Asia," in *Securitization of Islam: A Vicious Circle: Counter-Terrorism and Freedom of Religion in Central Asia* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 118

⁶ Tanvir Anjum, "Sufism in History and Its Relationship with Power," *Islamic Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006); I will be using the term Sufism throughout this piece to identify this dimension of Islam.

⁷ Lenz-Raymann, "History of Politics in Central Asia," 118-119

they relocated their intellectual and organizational center to India.⁸ John Schoeberlein states that “Central Asia was ‘one of the key regions from which Sufism spread widely in the Islamic world.’”⁹

The Kazakhs, as mentioned, had a long history of Islam in their culture. However, the manner in which they practiced contributed to the Russian elites’ dissuasion of the Kazakhs’ Islamic conviction. “The Kazakh nomadic society at this time was certainly an Islamic society, albeit of a very special sort.”¹⁰ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the same period in which Russia became more interested in the Kazakhs, several examples of Islamic institutions and systems among the nomadic population helped discredit the idea that the Kazakhs were superficial Muslims and further discredit the idea that trended among Russian elites that the Islamization of Kazakhs was due to the Russian government’s encouragement of Tatar interaction with the Kazakhs. One of the clearest examples of pre-existing and the Kazakhs’ independent development of Islam is in the reign of Jahāngīr Khan (r. 1824-1845).¹¹ Under his rule as Khan, Jahāngīr was able to promote and establish the growth of Islamic institutions across the steppe. Jahāngīr made vast strides in replacing all Tatars in Muslim leadership roles with native Kazakhs by supporting the creation of several Islamic schools to educate the nomads.¹² “The growth of Islamic education among the steppe nomads resulted from the initiative and efforts of nomads themselves.”¹³ It was the drive of the Kazakhs themselves and their independent religious convictions that cemented Islam in the culture and traditions of the

⁸ Lenz-Raymann, 58; Tuna, *Imperial Russia’s Muslims*, 32

⁹ Schoeberlein, John (2009): *Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus*. In: Esposito, John L. (ed.) (2009): *The Oxford Encyclopædia of the Islamic World*. New York: Oxford University Press. Vol 3, p. 98-107 as quoted in Lenz-Raymann, “Features of Central Folk Islam,” 58

¹⁰ Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions,” 278

¹¹ Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions,” 283

¹² Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions,” 288, 295

¹³ Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions,” 292

nomads, not the imposed influence of others, such as the Tatars. The Kazakhs maintained their nomadic practices but evolved their pastoral nomadism with Islamic traditions and customs.

“Despite the special circumstances of being pastoral nomads, most of the Kazakhs nevertheless came in regularly for Friday prayers and were especially diligent about performing the i’tikāf during Ramadan.”¹⁴ In many ways, the Kazakhs maintained a Muslim moral consciousness far more than the Tatar merchants whom they interacted with.¹⁵ Despite this evidence of Kazakh fervor as Muslims, the Russian elites ignored the signs and evidence, blindly convincing themselves that “Kazakhs were not ‘really’ Muslims” and were instead “noble savages” desperately in need of Orthodox and Russian enlightenment.¹⁶

History of Imperial Russia’s Relationship with the Kazakh Muslim Population

Starting in the early 1700s was the beginning of Russia’s contact and communication with the Kazakh populations in a more official status.¹⁷ Their communications progressed, and Russia gained significant interest in imperial rule over the Steppe region under Catherine the Great.¹⁸ However, under Catherine the Great, the Kazakh populations retained much of their pre-existing traditions and religious practices and were subjugated to Russification that would later take place in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ This half-century gap between Catherine the Great’s interest in the Kazakhs and actual Russification efforts of the mid-late nineteenth century can be attributed to the creation of the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly,

¹⁴ Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions,” 310

¹⁵ Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions,” 313

¹⁶ Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions,” 275

¹⁷ Ross

¹⁸ Ross

¹⁹ Ross

also known as the Orenburg Muhammadan Ecclesiastical Assembly, in 1788.²⁰ The purpose behind its creation was to create an institution that would enable the freedom of religious practice but would still bind and hold Muslim subjects to the administrative and authoritative oversight of the Tsarist Russian government.²¹ Danielle Ross characterizes the goals of the Russian state for the OMSA to be “to shape Islamic legal culture and Muslim social hierarchies;” Robert Crews further confers, stating, “it aimed at both the regulation of a clergy and its separation from laypeople.”²² The OMSA encompassed the Muslim subjects of the Russian empire in the southern and eastern borderlands, including the Kazakhs, but was headed by Kazan Tatar *ulamas*, or Muslim scholars.²³

At the head of the OMSA was a mufti, who was “the highest Muslim authority in Russia.”²⁴ Muftis were provided a state-sponsored salary, directly integrating them into the Russian government and state.²⁵ In theory, the OMSA could’ve been an effective “instrument of the empire;” however, in practice, the OMSA did not achieve the success it was intended to have as an administrative tool for the Muslim populations of the Russian empire primarily due to the incorrect and often chaotic intrusion of Russian Officials in the organizational hierarchy of the OMSA.²⁶ There is no designated and outlined hierarchical structure among Islam’s of leadership roles; rather, characteristics like age and number of students are prioritized among Muslims. However, in creating the OMSA, the Russian state appointed scholars the Russian government

²⁰ Robert Crews, “Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 1 (2003): 56; I will be referring to this institution as the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly or the OMSA

²¹ Crews, “Empire and the Confessional State,” 56; Campbell, 35;

²² Ross, 52; Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar*, 94

²³ Ross, 3

²⁴ Ross, 44

²⁵ Victoria Clement, “Review: *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia*,” *The Russian Review* 67, no. 2 (2008): 339

²⁶ Ross, 4; Ross 52-67

perceived as prominent and left future appointments to rely on approval from the Orenburg governor and the community members.²⁷ The ambiguous and imprecise hierarchical structure of the OMSA, in tandem with the instilled influence of the Russian government, left the OMSA in a volatile position. “The vulnerability of official clerics, in the face of both the Russian state and Muslim patrons and activists, set the stage for intense conflicts about religious authority.”²⁸ Another contributing factor to the decline of the OMSA was that Russian Officials, by charging the Kazan Tatars with the leadership roles in the OMSA, heavily contributed to their fears of the Tatarization of the Kazakhs. By the turn of the century, Russian opinions towards Islam had also begun to change as the policy of Catherine the Great on religious toleration began to be overshadowed by the Russian elite’s desire to form a strong and expansive empire rooted in loyalty to Russia and Russian identity.

Merkur’ev lays the blame for Islam’s growth and ability to “poison the nomads”²⁸ on the Russian government and Tsarina Catherine the Great. In his paper, he dives deep into outlining the policies of the “liberal times of Catherine the Great,” such as the religious tolerance act of 1773, her decrees allowing local administration to govern independently, the decrees of 1773 and 1779 that prohibited the state from getting involved in the faith and religious practices of newly annexed members of the empire, and the legitimation of Islam by allowing the construction and development of two Islamic Muftis in Orenburg.²⁹ The ladder of the three, while not explicitly said in his paper, can be inferred to reference the OMSA and Catherine’s role in legitimizing Islam as an acceptable Russian. Merkur’ev continues to display his dissatisfaction and blatant disagreement with Catherine the Great and her policies, particularly by referencing the OMSA.

²⁷ Tuna *Imperial Russia’s Muslims*, 37-38; Crews, *Prophet and Tsar*, 94

²⁸ Merkur’ev, 33

²⁹ Merkur’ev, 33

Merkur'ev summarizes his thoughts on the OMSA and the consequences of its establishment, and how it was ruled as follows:

The government of Catherine the Great, establishing Muftis for Muslims living in Russia, was guided by the best intentions. It wanted to situate them in its favor, attract them to Russia in the hope of instilling Russian culture and citizenship and making them worthy nationals of the Russian government. That's why it has installed muftis. However, the expected results were not achieved; Islam could not serve as a transitional step to the assimilation of its representatives into Russianism. On the contrary, the Tartars, having acquired the right to practice their religion legally, began to spread it among other Russian foreigners.³⁰

Merkur'ev, in this statement, demonstrates how he is part of a broader and more deeply ingrained historical discourse on the Islamicization of the Kazakhs that far precedes his academic career. The placing of blame for Islamicization on the Tatars and Catherine the Great's policies as tsarina is a sentiment that has echoed through the Kazan Theological Academy since its opening.³¹ He acknowledges what he believes to be the good intentions of Catherine the Great; however, he correctly attributes much of the chaos regarding the OMSA and Muslim life in the region to Russia's intervening in the Assembly's and Islam's hierarchical structure of influence, scholarship, and religiosity. In Merkur'ev's statement, it is important to note the last sentence whereby Merkur'ev demonstrates the fear of Tatarization that had plagued many of the Russian elites throughout the nineteenth century, but also displays misinformation on the relationship between Islam, the Tatars, and "other Russian foreigners." Merkur'ev is not alone in these beliefs. Many of the Russian elites attributed the Islamicization of the Kazakhs strictly to the efforts of the Kazan Tatars. They did not acknowledge the rich history of Islam among the nomads, which had started in the 10th century and had continued to develop long before Russia acquired and came in contact with the Kazakh populations. This theory has sustained into the

³⁰ Merkur'ev, 37

³¹ Geraci, *Window on the East*

modern day with historians and scholars continuing to place reasoning for the Islamicization of the Kazakhs upon Catherine the Great and the employment of the Tatars as mediaries, which Allen Frank denotes as “fake charges.”³² This concept will be further discussed and elaborated on in later sections of this chapter.

Merkur’ev does represent a common thread of beliefs within the Russian elites, particularly among Orthodox missionaries, on the lack of efficacy concerning the OMSA as an institution for Muslim subjects to meld their Islamic beliefs with the Russian authority. Many Russian orientalist and scholars at the time spent the better course of the late nineteenth century devising plans and systems that would create a more robust and deeper bond between Russian culture and the Muslim population outside of the administrative duties of both the Russian government and Islam.³³ Merkur’ev continues emphasizing his strong disdain for the clerical roles within Islam and the Tsarist Russian government's role in sanctioning them. Other such roles he singled out in his paper were Imams, whom he described as “real ulcer for the nomads in economic, political, and religious relations.”³⁴ Imams in Islam are often assigned to a mosque and are the leaders of worship and act as guiding figures for fellow Muslims in their designated area.³⁵ They were seen as the administrative tools for the regulation and policing of the people in their “parish”³⁶ by the OMSA.³⁷ However, Merkur’ev describes them as part of a “lawless clergy” and continues by stating that “the irreparable error of our [Russian] government was also the fact that it recognized and made the priesthood/Imam official, contrary to the teachings of the

³² Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions,” 275-276

³³ Tolz; Geraci, *Window on the East*

³⁴ Merkur’ev, 53

³⁵ Ross

³⁶ Not sure if this is an appropriate term as it normally is used to determine Catholic and Orthodox regions of authority.

³⁷ Crews, *Prophet and Tsar*, 84

Qur'an, which it should not have.”³⁸ Russian government actors such as Tolstoi believed that the religious leaders of the Muslims were responsible for causing mass defiance among the Muslims of Russian Russification efforts.³⁹ Throughout this section of his paper, Merkur’ev promotes an idea of evil and maliciousness in the intentions and foundations of the Islamic faith. He believes that Islam is one of the main reasons the people of the Kazakh steppe are incapable of Russifying. He attributes this not only to the religious beliefs and traditions of Islam but to the clerical structure and governance embedded in the religion that has grown into the Kazakh communities.

The OMSA and its act as a means of Russia’s governing and policing of the Kazakh populations were rendered relatively obsolete in 1824 after the fear of Tatarization and imperial efforts continued to grow. In 1824, the “Statute on the Siberian Kazakhs” created a new form of imperial rule over the Kazakh populations that eliminated the Kazan Tatars' mediatory role and promoted direct engagement between Russian officials and Kazakh elites.⁴⁰ This statute redefined the relationship between these two domains. It began the efforts of direct Russification by “gradually socializing” Kazakh elites “into the new Russian-built administrative hierarchies through rituals of submission, contact with imperial officials, and receipt of state decorations and pensions.”⁴¹ The Russian state went so far as to attempt to eliminate Tatar influence among the Kazakh populations that in 1866, Tatars were prohibited from purchasing land along the Steppe.⁴² This increase in dramatic action was no doubt the result of the Great Apostasy in Kazan during the 1860s in conjunction with Kazan’s growing affluence due to its trade and

³⁸ Merkur’ev, 38

³⁹ Tuna, *Imperial Russia’s Muslims*, 86

⁴⁰ Ross, 89

⁴¹ Ross, 89

⁴² Geraci, *Window on the East*, 27

commercial successes. Starting in the early mid-nineteenth century and peaking in the late nineteenth century, the Russian empire began interacting with and attempting to shape the Kazakh populations into their ideal Russian subjects through direct communication and Russification efforts without the help of Kazan Tatar intermediaries.

Interpretations and Realities of Kazakh Muslims

As the Russian empire amassed large Muslim populations within their southern and eastern borderlands, and the Muslims of the Volga-Ural and Kazakh Steppe region demonstrated more public displays of their religion, opinions among Russian elites changed towards Islam and the Muslim populations. This led to the emergence and usage of “fanaticism” among Russian elites to define and categorize the coreligionists of the empire, particularly the Muslim populations.⁴³ The term “fanaticism” holds with it extreme negative connotations and is often used to describe “extremes in beliefs, feelings, and actions...[where] such enthusiasm is excessive to the point of creating an intellectual deficit.”⁴⁴ The usage of “fanaticism” helped perpetuate a negative feeling towards Islam and its followers. This further allowed for justification to eliminate Islam and instead encouraged conversion and enlightenment of Orthodox beliefs among the newly annexed Muslim populations. Moreover, using such a term perpetuated feelings of “imperial anxiety” that Islam and enmity towards the Russian empire were intrinsically connected.⁴⁵ The term became a staple in vocabulary among Russian elites set with the goal of Russifying Muslims. Right out of the gates, within the first chapter, Merkur’ev describes the features of Islam being “intolerance, fanaticism, and a controlling influence on the

⁴³ Ross, 88

⁴⁴ Stanley Milgram, “The Social Meaning of Fanaticism.” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 34, no. 1 (1977): 58

⁴⁵ Tuna, *Imperial Russia’s Muslims*, 221, 77

mind of its followers.”⁴⁶ Again, Merkur’ev reiterates the commonality of the usage of “fanaticism.” Still, here he also highlights a belief that Islam and being a Muslim is not a conscious decision made by its followers but instead an imposed point of view that eliminates personal morals, choice, and a person's individuality.

Merkur’ev not only uses notable vocabulary surrounding Islam, but that which he uses to describe the Kazakh people raises red flags, demonstrating his lack of complete comprehension of the Kazakh populations, beliefs, and cultures, which he instead writes about with defiant confidence. A way of thinking compliant with Edward Said’s views on all writers of the Orient: “Every writer of the Orient assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies.”⁴⁷ This theory demonstrates the point of view from which Merkur’ev, and many other Russian orientalists approached the Kazakhs. They took their preconceived notions and devised a story of the Kazakhs that fit their precedent, including the need to save, civilize, and convert them. Throughout his writings, Merkur’ev refers to the Kazakhs as uncivilized and intellectually handicapped people. “It is imperative to build a strong missionary community due to the militant spirit of Islam, which is conducted in the Kyrgyz steppe by the Tatars, seducing under its crescent prophet the gullible and trusting nomads.”⁴⁸ Merkur’ev, here, not only highlights the perceived evil of Islam but also emphasizes the supposed naivety of the Kazakhs. Merkur’ev attributes the Kazakhs’ adoption of Islam to the Prophet Mohammed’s life as a nomad and the relatability it creates between Islam’s founder and the nomadic principles and culture of the Kazakhs. Merkur’ev, therefore, believes that the

⁴⁶ Merkur’ev, 1

⁴⁷ Said, 42

⁴⁸ Merkur’ev, 12

Kazakh's commitment to the religion is superficial and not a deep, soulful commitment of faith and values.⁴⁹

Of course, the dogmatic intricacies of Islam are inaccessible to Kazakhs. He [Kazakhs] is utterly unfamiliar with the tenets of Islam. He [Kazakhs] knows only the ritual and moral aspects of Islam. The first is the presence of the inner prayer mood, although without any understanding of the meaning and significance of the rituals performed, the second, as satisfying his sensual desires. He [Kazakhs] looks at the former as a known necessity, a prayer service, and the latter as his personal nature's need to manifest crude instincts...He [Kazakh] lives more of a fantasy than cold reasoning. Therefore, to Kazakhs, religion, which requires rational thinking, is a secondary part of their life.⁵⁰

Not only does this undermine the religiosity of the Kazakh but undermines their capability to think deeply and meaningfully outside of their reality.

A significant aspect of the Russian's attitudes towards the Kazakhs is not only due to their perceived Islamic beliefs but also regarding their tradition and way of life as a nomadic population. The crux of the Kazakh peoples' history is their nomadic lifestyle, pasture-based economy, and tribal socio-political organization.⁵¹ Before the popularization of Islam within the Kazakh Steppes, the Kazakhs followed various animistic traditions and faiths. Their religious practices were oriented around their lifestyle and held deep ancestral roots among the different Kazakh clans.⁵² Russian elites viewed the Kazakh's nomadic way of life as proof of barbarism. They denoted it as a lack of civility, which further enabled and justified the Russians' efforts to Russify them.⁵³ This idea of the Kazakh population still in a backward environment contributed to Russian beliefs that the Kazakhs were not committed to the Islamic faith and could be easily convinced if not converted to the beliefs of Russian culture and Russian Orthodoxy.⁵⁴ Another

⁴⁹ Merkur'ev, 41-44

⁵⁰ Merkur'ev, 85-86

⁵¹ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 185-186

⁵² Geraci, *Window on the East*, 186

⁵³ Hofmeister, 411

⁵⁴ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 125; Hofmeister, 428

reason behind discounting the faithfulness of the Kazakh Muslims, which also contributed to their nomadic society, was how they practiced Islam. Russians had witnessed what, in their eyes, was organized, pious religion in their own cities and towns with Orthodoxy and also Islam in the sedentarized cities of the Kazan and Orenburg provinces. There were many different and often inaccurate opinions on the religious abilities of the Kazakhs and their understanding of organized religion. Yet, the Kazakhs were accepted among other Islamic institutions and societies as Muslim. *Imam* al-Īlmīnī writes that “the Kazakhs' devotion to the region's Sufis and healers, and their generous offerings” were seen “as an acceptable and sanctioned expression of Islamic consciousness.”⁵⁵ The Kazakhs incorporated Islam and its traditions into their nomadic lifestyle and culture, fusing the two, a concept which the Russian elites did not and refused to understand⁵⁶

Merkur'ev expounds on this belief in the lack of connection and piety to Islam by addressing the clerical structure of Islam, in which the Russian government intervened extensively during the era of the OMSA. “The most evil existence to Orthodox Russia was the Muftis. Islam is nothing more than clericalism, as it remains today in Muslim states and our Central Asian territories.”⁵⁷ Merkur'ev confidently believed that the Kazakhs held no dedicated connection or belief system regarding Islam; it only acted as a mechanism of oversight and regulation for the communities. He described the history of the religious faith of the Kazakhs as being more of a “pagan”⁵⁸ character, and Muhammed's prophecies were only practiced by a few. He continues to emphasize his beliefs in the “questionable” commitment the Kazakhs held for Islam by referencing the chief of Orenburg who wrote: “The Kazakhs have faith like other

⁵⁵ Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions,” 313

⁵⁶ Lenz-Raymann, 119; Frank, “Muslim Religious Institutions”

⁵⁷ Merkur'ev, 38

⁵⁸ Pagan was the word he used in writing, but more appropriate to use term *animist*.

Tatars, Muhammed's, but there are few literates among them, and they follow it not consistently, and there are no mosques in their horde."⁵⁹ Lenz-Raymann, quoting Schoeberlein, states that "No consistent relationship can be observed anywhere in the Islamic world between high levels of literacy and devotion to Islam, and [...] right from its beginnings in the core of the Arab world, Islam has found strong adherents among nomads." This quote, used in the discussion of Islam among nomads of Central Asia, including the Kazakhs, helps demonstrate the diversity of practice that encompasses the evolution and spread of Islam outside of the Arab world.⁶⁰ She further supports her statement by acknowledging the lack of historical Islamic buildings "in the lands of the nomads," arguing this was not due to a lack of faith but rather the concept that the "Central Asian peoples depended on their way of life" and that it "influenced how the new religion was practiced."⁶¹ In another portion, she states, "these many local forms of Islam are themselves not homogenous but internally diverse, a fact which all too often goes unnoticed."⁶² These local forms of Islam, particularly concerning the region of Central Asia, have been coined as "folk Islam." This term references "the invocation of ancestors and the visitation of holy shrines are traditional practices...and are accepted as part of their Islamic beliefs."⁶³ This demonstrates the legitimization of the resulting Muslim practices that have evolved from incorporating Islam into ancestral nomadic traditions and practices. As the Muslim traders, Sufi Shaykhs, and others sharing Islam traveled into the Steppe, the Kazakh's animistic traditions blended with Islam, adapting, and evolving to combine these new domains. Therefore, the

⁵⁹ Merkur'ev, 31

⁶⁰ Lenz-Raymann, "Features of Central Asian Folk Islam," 45

⁶¹ Lenz-Raymann, "History of Politics and Islam in Central Asia," 119

⁶² Lenz-Raymann, "Features of Central Asian Folk Islam," 45

⁶³ Kathrin Lenz-Raymann, "Typology of Islamic Groups," in *Securitization of Islam: A Vicious Circle: Counter-Terrorism and Freedom of Religion in Central Asia*, 109–14. Transcript Verlag, 2014.

Orthodox missionaries and Russian elites did not have the information nor the understanding to dictate one's level of piety regarding Islam.

Merkur'ev does not just examine the Kazakh traditions and cultures that have evolved with or been influenced by Islam; he also spends a great deal of his paper discussing the animistic traditions of the Kazakh population. He goes into great detail on what he calls “the Kazakhs propensity for superstitions and witchcraft”⁶⁴ Merkur'ev believes that these animistic traditions are just “remnants of their former religious beliefs before converting to Islam.”⁶⁵ As mentioned, the Kazakhs practiced animistic, ancestral cultural traditions until roughly the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, incorporating Islamic culture and traditions into their own as Islam grew in popularity.⁶⁶ Merkur'ev attributes this animistic behavior to senselessness and irrational behavior, claiming that by being nomadic, the Kazakhs have an “inclination to superstition, worshiping of dark personalities, and believing in the powers of sorcerers.”⁶⁷ Merkur'ev, through his words, makes several remarks that infer his belief in the Kazakh's barbarity and inferior belief systems.

A section of Merkur'ev's paper is written as if it were an instruction manual for those who come after him on how to understand and undermine the Kazakh animistic and spiritual beliefs and traditions, arguing again that only Orthodox Christianity can bring worthiness to these populations.⁶⁸ The following passage on the Kazakhs' beliefs in the role and power of stars serves as an example of how Merkur'ev dictated the tradition to provide useful information for other Orthodox scholars of the Kazakh communities:

⁶⁴ Merkur'ev, 114

⁶⁵ Merkur'ev, 113

⁶⁶ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 187-188

⁶⁷ Merkur'ev, 114

⁶⁸ Merkur'ev, 113-128

Constantly living in the open air, the attention of the nomad was attracted by the star's bright shine and golden twinkling. Amazed by their beauty and grandeur, Kyrgyz considered them a birthplace of souls. From the stars, pure, luminous, and radiant, as a star, the soul descends upon the earth and inhabits man. Stars played a huge role in the nomadic life - on a dark night they shed light on the steppe, illuminated the road, and, therefore, the Kyrgyz felt reverence. They divided them into happy and unfortunate and, according to this, made a notion about man's fate.⁶⁹

This concept of learning the intricacies of non-Orthodox populations' faiths and traditions to understand better and comprehend how to convert them later on was one of the priorities of Il'minskii, which he instilled into the Kazan Theological Academy in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷⁰ This thought process that Merkur'ev has used in referencing the Kazakh populations and their culture and traditions can be speculated, also due to the significance of Il'minskii, as the same mentality in which the Kazan Theological School and others focused on the Russification of the Kazakhs approached them. Rather than learning their practices for the sake of understanding a group of people who had become part of their empire, they observed and analyzed them with the mindset of Russifying the Kazakhs and their culture, which held rich history and importance to them.

He continues his perpetuation of a combined "evil" Islam and "uncivilized" Kazakh population by stating that the Kazakhs maintained their Muslim identity because the "immoral doctrine" of Islam fits the "moral provisions" of the Kazakhs.⁷¹ Merkur'ev states that the points of the "immoral doctrine" that appeal to the Kazakhs are: it allows robbery; it allows polygamy, "which is especially pleasing and attractive for Kazakhs; and, while consecrated by the example of the prophet himself, gives total freedom to their animal urges...it became embedded in the

⁶⁹ Merkur'ev, 115

⁷⁰ Kreindler, "Educational Policies Toward the Eastern Nationalities in Tsarist Russia: A Study of Il'minskii's System," 52-43

⁷¹ Merkur'ev, 41

morals of Kazakhs, and to this day, polygamy is considered a pleasure of youth, entirely legitimate and justified by their religion;” and it commands a holy war against the infidels as a moral obligation.⁷² Thus, further emphasizing the “barbarity” in which he viewed both Muslims and Kazakhs. Throughout this paper, Merkur’ev equates Islam with evil and Orthodoxy as the Kazakhs' sole option for a moral and righteous life. By pushing the necessity of Orthodox conversions, he also attributes Orthodoxy with the key to bringing the Kazakh populations into what Merkur’ev considered the Russian core and creating loyal subjects to the Russian tsar and a tie to the Russian identity. From this perspective, it is quite clear that this paper, as a small glimpse into the institution, represents an incredibly biased and generalist point of view towards the Kazakhs, with a view clouded by the superiority of Orthodoxy and Russia.

Imperial and Orthodox Justification

Merkur’ev not only discusses his views on Islam and the Kazakhs' relationship with Islam but also on the history, culture, and traditions of the Kazakh population and how Islam has influenced or not influenced these areas. Not only does Merkur’ev, therefore, reflect how the Orthodox missionaries perceived these populations and their “uncivilized cultures” in relation to the Russian state, but also these portions of Merkur’ev’s paper reflect an imperialist view, blinded with the goals of expansion and “moral obligation” to bring “‘progress’ and ‘enlightenment’ into an isolated and backward region.”⁷³

In particular, he focuses on the need to convert the Kazakhs to Orthodoxy and to Russify their culture as justification for “saving” the Kazakh Muslim woman and creating a virtuous and moral lifestyle among the Kazakhs. However, the role of Kazakh women did not differ far from

⁷² Merkur’ev, 42

⁷³ Hofmeister, 411

the traditional female roles in Russia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She was seen as the lady of the house, a caregiver, and responsible for the children. They were known and revered as educators, both scholarly and spiritually.⁷⁴ Merkur'ev echoes that notion by claiming that missionaries might have better luck with the conversion of the Kazakhs by going through the females due to their "strict moral spirit" and because they "will conduct Russian beliefs and customs" due to their "respect as hostesses [landlady]."⁷⁵ Merkur'ev continues his justification for prioritizing the conversion of Kazakh women because "they are the first teachers to humankind."⁷⁶ He further supports this belief in the importance of Kazakh women as educators and targets for Russian enlightenment by quoting Orthodox Archimandrite Makary Glukharev, a leader in the translation of the Old Testament from Church Slavonic to Russian:⁷⁷ "According to Makary Glukharev - women develop the first concepts in our souls, and they throw the first seeds of good and evil into the virgin land of the child's heart."⁷⁸ (It is important to note that Merkur'ev's quotes, emphasizing the crucial role that women, specifically Kazakh women, play in the education and instilling of values in populations, were written in the introduction of the paper.) Merkur'ev and his peers weren't the sole observers of the importance of Kazakh women. Count K.K. Pahlen, a member of the Imperial Russian government, in his journeys through the steppes in the 1908-1909s, wrote, "a nomadic life of wandering across the desert made the woman so important to the welfare of the household that her position as mistress and mother of the children, whom she and not the father reared, was firmly assured."⁷⁹ Pahlen

⁷⁴ Dowler, *Classroom and Empire*, 77

⁷⁵ Merkur'ev, 18

⁷⁶ Merkur'ev, 18

⁷⁷ Paul Valliere. "Russian Orthodoxy and the challenge of modernity: the case of Archimandrite Makary," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 22 no. 1 (1978): 3, 5

⁷⁸ Merkur'ev, 18

⁷⁹ Count K.K. Pahlen, "Samarkand," in *Mission to Turkestan*, ed. Richard A. Pierce (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 60

recognized the benefits Kazakh women played in the cultural traditions and lives of the Kazakhs. He further attributed the “conclusion, adoption, or avoidance” of “agreements, measures, disputes and decisions” between the Kazakhs and the Russians to the influence of Kazakh women.”⁸⁰ This demonstrates how Russians acknowledge the inherent importance of Kazakh women; however, Kazakh women did not receive the same respectful rhetoric as Muslims.

However, only 100 pages later, he creates a vision of a Kazakh *Muslim* woman as a “slave” to her husband.⁸¹ “Being married as a Kazakh woman is far from being in esteem and respect. The husband looks at his wife as if she bought into full ownership. The position of a woman in the Kyrgyz family is downgraded to a slave.”⁸² This statement entirely contradicts those that he stated in his introduction, referencing the respect that Kazakh women hold among their community as leaders and revered educators. This example of discrepancy in his work leads one to believe that he is altering his interpretation and observations, whether subconsciously or consciously, as he writes to help justify and support his claim that the Kazakh populations need Orthodoxy and Russian “help.”

This particular sentiment regarding the Kazakh Muslim wife is a discourse seen throughout European and Western imperialism as their duty to “save” Muslim women from oppression, which continues to this day. Many Western nations promoted their own beliefs and culture at the expense of Muslim society. Leila Ahmed dives deep into the historical discourse surrounding Muslim women and the various discourses surrounding their roles and rights. She explores and critiques the inaccuracies and the centuries of consequences in misinformation surrounding Western Christian nations’ thoughts and studies of Islam and Muslim women. “All

⁸⁰ Pahlen, 60-61

⁸¹ Merkur’ev, 102-103

⁸² Merkur’ev, 103

[colonial patriarchs, missionaries, or feminists] assumed their right to denounce native ways [...] to set about undermining the culture in the name of civilizing the society, or Christianizing it, or saving women from their odious culture and religion.”⁸³ This principle is reflected in the narrative that Merkur’ev provides of Kazakh Muslim women that many scholars, such as Ahmed, have dedicated their work to disproving and correcting.⁸⁴

This isn’t the only instance of contradiction or incorrect interpretation of Kazakh Muslim women that appears in his paper. In the second chapter, Merkur’ev discusses Islam’s influence on marriages among the Kazakhs. He continues to observe how Islamic practices have influenced the traditional culture of the nomads: “Contrary to the Kazakh custom, women begin to take advantage of the Koran’s instructions and hide from men, and the men put on Tatar skullcaps and shave their heads.”⁸⁵ This demonstrates Merkur’ev’s observations of the Kazakhs following the Islamic practice of covering one’s hair in public. He continues describing his observed influence of Islam among the Kazakhs by stating, "nowadays, however, it is very rare that a Kazakh man may have several wives. Usually, there is one wife... and only the wealthy may have not more than two or three wives.”⁸⁶ While he does not explicitly reference Islam in this statement, he has made it clear throughout the rest of the paper and his previous statement on the influence of Islam in the lives of the Kazakhs that the Kazakhs following Islam practices during the time in which he is writing, therefore equating “nowadays” to a time when the Kazakhs had majority Muslim populations.

⁸³ Leila Ahmed, “Discourse of the veil,” in *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 154

⁸⁴ Leila Ahmed, “Discourse of the veil”

⁸⁵ Merkur’ev, 66

⁸⁶ Merkur’ev, 99

The contradiction to this statement occurs a few pages later when Merkur'ev writes: "Kazakhs [men] have the possibility of several wives. As a purely civil bargain, marriage does not have the moral character that holds the husband accountable to his wife. In this tradition, only Christianity can shed a beneficial light on the horde and elevate the wife to a corresponding moral height."⁸⁷ Merkur'ev claims that Orthodox Christianity is the only way for monogamy, and to his perception, a righteous marriage, to occur among the Kazakhs, as well as being the only way for Kazakh women to be treated with the same rights as Kazakh men. Yet, previously Merkur'ev had written how, currently, most Kazakh men have only one wife. This contradicts his statement on monogamy among Kazakh populations and further negates his comment on attempting conversion methods through Kazakh women because of the respect they hold among their communities. Once again, these contradictions represent a desire by Merkur'ev, which can be speculated to reflect that of the Theological Academy as well, to express the Kazakhs as an "uncivilized," "gullible" people that are in desperate need of Orthodox presence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Russian elites held concerns about the success and persistence of the Russian empire, Orthodoxy, and nationality distorted the views of the Russian elites on the realities of the Kazakh Muslim experience. One sees the biases surrounding Imperial expansion through Merkur'ev's interpretations of Islam and Kazakhs. Ignoring the history and disregarding the deep-rooted connection with which the Kazakhs held with their culture and beliefs, the Russian elites built a foundation to Russify the population that was destined to crumble. By orienting their views on the Kazakh population through predisposed beliefs and superficial

⁸⁷ Merkur'ev, 104

understandings of the Kazakh culture and the role of Islam in their traditions, Russian elites entered their efforts of Russification without the knowledge necessary to fulfill their vision of a unified Russian empire. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, until the 1917 revolution, Russia enacted several policies of Russification aimed towards the Kazakh population. Overall, the systems put into place did little to convert the Muslim populations of the Kazakh Steppes towards acceptance of Russian authority and even less towards Orthodoxy.

Conclusion/Epilogue

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Russian empire's ruling elites aspired to create a unified polity, instilled with the beliefs, language, and culture of what they believed to define a truly Russian identity. Religion, or more precisely Orthodox Christianity, was a vital component of how they envisioned this identity. The Russian elites engaged in the Russification of the newly conquered populations defined the Russian identity in terms of Orthodoxy and were guided by a belief in their religion and culture's superiority. These elites brought Russian and Orthodox enlightenment to what they perceived as the backward, uncivilized peoples of the empire's eastern borderlands.

Specifically, as Russia integrated the Kazakh people, this ingrained relationship between the church and the Russian leaders informed the actions of the Russian elites and clouded their perceptions of these populations. Their deeply held convictions that the Kazakhs were a backward, uncivilized people, superficially practicing Islam and needing Russian enlightenment defined the Russian approach. Institutions such as the Kazan Theological Academy, sponsored and created through state support, further promulgated this concept of Orthodoxy as synonymous with Russian national identity.

Orientalists, missionaries, and statesmen such as Nikolai Il'minskii, Vasilii Vasil'evich Grigor'ev, and Dmitrii A. Tolstoi, and following in their footsteps, Ilya Merkur'ev, represent a cast of people who aimed to impose upon the Kazakhs an Orthodox-based Russian identity. Il'minskii, with the support of Grigor'ev and Tolstoi, used the Kazakhs' native language in his educational approach but encouraged a curriculum of Orthodox and moral enlightenment to

promote Russian culture and, subsequently, loyalty to the empire. Il'minskii's educational system marked a revolutionary approach to the Kazakh population which continued long past his death and influenced other scholars and future administrators well into the Soviet period.

Russia's limited understanding of the culture and practices of the Kazakh people and the scholars' refusal to see them as anything other than a backward people hindered the success of the Russian elites' Russification approaches. The Kazakhs were primarily pastoral nomads who had adopted Islam as part of their life and culture over the centuries. The traditions and lifestyle of the Kazakhs were unfamiliar to the Russian elites and differed from what the Russians had seen regarding the practice of Islam in the sedentarized regions of the empire, such as Kazan. This led them to believe the Kazakhs were savages incapable of having truly adopted Islamic convictions. As a result, these elites felt justified in their desire to Russify the Kazakhs, imposing Orthodoxy on a population they perceived as receptive to Christianity and a broader assimilation of Russian culture and practices. This inaccurate assessment about the place of Islam among the Kazakhs' way of life clouded the interactions between the two groups and hindered Russia's ability to instill a Russian identity, rooted in Orthodoxy, in this region.

The term paper of Ilya Merkur'ev, a student at the Kazan Theological Academy in 1916, echoes this rhetoric of civilizing and saving the Kazakhs. It serves as an excellent example of the continued inability of the Russian elites to see the Kazakhs' Muslim identity and way of life as strong and valid. Instead, the Russian elites only regard them as people in need of religious and cultural conversion. As we see in Merkur'ev's paper and the work of other scholars at that time, their one-sidedness and sense of cultural and religious superiority cast a shadow over Russian interactions with the populations to the East as a whole.

The late Tsarist period of empire building was marked by an attempt to impose Russian nationalism and Russian religion on the populations of the East, which were anything but uniform in their culture and way of life. The Russian elites embarked on this process of Russification with blind confidence, emboldened by the perceived superiority of the Orthodox church and larger Russian identity. The analysis of these missteps with the Kazakhs demonstrates how inaccurate assumptions and religious fervor colored the Russian empire's interactions with its neighbors to the East, which it aspired to absorb and assimilate.

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