

Proceedings of the XIIth Conference of the
European Society for Central Asian Studies
Central Asia: A Maturing Field



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In Memoriam C. E. Bosworth (1928 - 2015)





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Introduction

From the first half of the eighteenth until the middle of the nineteenth century, Tatars of the Volga-Ural region played an important role in the political, economic, and cultural integration of the Kazakh Steppe into the Russian Empire. They served as translators and interpreters in the negotiations between the Russian authorities and Kazakh elites, settled conflicts that arose between border residents and Kazakhs, served as official clerks for Kazakh khans and sultans, and were invited by influential Kazakh leaders to serve in their districts as spiritual leaders (mullahs) and teachers. Furthermore, Tatars were actively involved in the process of drawing Kazakhs into regional, in particular Volga-Ural, Western Siberian, and Turkestan, and subsequently, all-Russian trading spaces.

The role of the Tatars as intermediaries in the Russian empire has been discussed by the historians such as A. Vasil'ev (1898), A. Frank (1993; 1998; 2001), V. Galiev (1994), G. Sultangalieva (2000, 2012), A. Remnev (2006, 5-32) P. Werth (2002, 2012), and M. Hamamoto (2012). However, the view of Kazakhs themselves on the activity of Tatar officials has been overlooked. We need to explore this issue in greater detail in order to better understand and reconstruct the history of events in the Steppe. In the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, the Kazakh population formed their ideas about the Russian Empire and Russian legislation, their attitudes toward this new government, and their understanding of social reality through their interactions with Tatars. But how did Kazakh elites and regular nomads perceive the activities of these Tatar officials?

The way in which peoples perceive those from different economic, cultural, and linguistic systems has been thoroughly investigated in the historical literature. Researchers have used concepts such as “Other,” “Different,” or “Stranger” to discuss the systematic images, stereotypes, and perceptions one group develops about another (Erofeev 1982; Golubev 2000; Sukhikh 2007). My question, however, is as follows: How are these paradigms applicable to a case in which ethnic and religious difference are not the dominant factors in one group's perception of the other?