

# THE VOLGA TATARS

## A Profile in National Resilience

### AZADE-AYŞE RORLICH

HOOVER INSTITUTION



STANFORD UNIVERSITY



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# Foreword

Azade-Ayşe Rorlich is eminently qualified to write this, the second in the Hoover Institution Press's "Studies of Nationalities in the USSR." She has spent many years investigating the history of the Volga Tatars and of the Turkic and Muslim peoples of the Soviet Union. Professor Rorlich received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin and is today a member of the Department of History at the University of Southern California. She is proficient in the Turkic languages of the Soviet Union as well as Russian, and uses major European languages with ease. The excellence and thoroughness of her work is reflected by her extensive bibliography, the most complete available on Tatar history and culture, which includes sources in several languages and scripts. Although other studies have been published on various aspects of the Tatar past and present, none is so comprehensive and all-encompassing as this first Western-language study of Tatar history.

Professor Rorlich begins with the early history of the Tatars, discussing the controversies regarding their ethnogenesis, their adoption of Islam, the characteristics of their settled way of life, and the emergence and evolution of their first political entity—the Bulgar khanate. She addresses the issue of the contacts of the Bulgar khanate with the Russian principalities and comments on the nature of their relationship in the years before the Mongol conquest. Professor Rorlich's discussion of the Mongol conquest, the demise of the Bulgar khanate and emergence of its heirs, and the nature of the Kazan principality and Kazan khanate is crucial to an understanding of the roots of Tatar national resilience. She proceeds to discuss Ivan the Terrible's conquest of the Kazan khanate (1552)



and the incorporation of its territory and population into the Muscovite state. The policies of russification and forced conversion to Christianity are described, and attention is given to the different means Russian rulers employed between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries to achieve the unchanging goal of russification. The Tatars' response to these policies was translated into an even deeper commitment to their religion, language, and culture.


The fundamental changes brought about by the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 unleashed a multifaceted process of modernization and growth in Russia, widening the gap between Russian and Tatar society and thus prompting the Tatars to cast a critical eye on the reasons for their economic backwardness and stagnation. The period between 1861 and 1917 saw a revival within Tatar society precipitated by the twin stimuli of developments in Russia and the Muslim world. Professor Rorlich provides a sophisticated analysis of the evolution of the reform movement from its beginnings as a challenge to religious dogma to later stages, when the most important goals became secular education and political action. All these issues, and their relationship to the evolution of Tatar identity, Professor Rorlich analyzes with exactitude, thoroughness, and expertise.

Professor Rorlich also discusses the impact of the 1917 revolutions and civil war on the Volga Tatars, their hopes for the establishment of an Idil-Ural state, and the emergence of the Tatar autonomous republic from the broken Bolshevik promises for a Tatar-Bashkir republic (which would have encompassed virtually all the territory of the former Kazan khanate). She carefully traces the roots of national communism in Tatarstan and gives an especially fine treatment to Sultangaliev's analysis of the relationship between Islam and communism, which played an important role in the evolution of Tatar identity in the Soviet period. Tatar responses to Soviet nationality policy, and the commitment of the Tatars not only to retrieving their distinguished national heritage but also to enriching and furthering it, represent some of the major topics that Professor Rorlich addresses in her analysis of the manifestations of Tatar national resilience in the post-World War II years.

This superb work is the kind that every library will want to have on its shelf. It will have an enduring value as the principal study of the Tatars of the Volga region.

WAYNE S. VUCINICH





"Among living historians, only Rorlich has the unique combination of linguistic abilities, ethnic background, historical training and sensitivity, and materials to complete such a study . . . Her study is likely to stand for a very long time and will probably become a classic."

Professor Alexandre Bennigsen  
*Paris, France*

"Professor Rorlich's command of her research materials is extraordinary. It would appear that no source has eluded her grasp, regardless of the source's language . . . Her bibliography in its scope and inclusiveness is one of the best I have seen . . . I consider it to be the definitive work on this subject and doubt that it will be surpassed in quality or scope in the near future, if ever."

Dr. S. Enders Wimbush  
*Director, Society for Central Asian Studies  
Oxford, England*

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