

Cossacks and the Russian Empire, 1598–1725

Manipulation, rebellion and
expansion into Siberia

Christoph Witzenrath

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This book explores the ways in which the Russians governed their empire in Siberia from 1598 to 1725. Russian control over Siberia was extraordinary, dependent on a handful of men at a vast distance from the centre of imperial power, with no regular armed force and a cash-starved economy. It raises important questions concerning the nature of the Russian autocracy in the early modern period, investigating the hitherto neglected relations of a vital part of the empire with the metropolitan centre, and examining how the Russian authorities were able to control such a vast and distant frontier given the limited means at their disposal. It is argued that, despite this great physical distance, the representations of the tsar's rule in the symbols, texts and gestures that permeated Siberian institutions were close at hand, thus allowing the promotion of political stability and favourable terms of trade. Particular attention is paid to investigating the role of the Siberian Cossacks, and explaining how the institutions of empire facilitated their position as traders via the sharing of cultural practices, attitudes and expectations of behaviour across vast distances among the members of organizations or personal networks. Overall, this book is a thorough appraisal of how the institutions of Russian imperial government functioned in seventeenth century Siberia.

Christoph Witzenrath is Assistant Lecturer at Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany. His research interests include medieval, early modern European, Russian and Soviet history.

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