



Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus

Nicholas B. Breyfogle

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In *Heretics and Colonizers*, Nicholas B. Breyfogle explores the dynamic intersection of Russian borderland colonization and popular religious culture. He reconstructs the story of the religious sectarians (Dukhobors, Molokans, and Subbotniks) who settled, either voluntarily or by force, in the newly conquered lands of Transcaucasia in the nineteenth century. By ordering this migration in 1830, Nicholas I attempted at once to cleanse Russian Orthodoxy of heresies and to populate the newly annexed lands with ethnic Slavs who would shoulder the burden of imperial construction.

Breyfogle focuses throughout on the lives of the peasant settlers, their interactions with the peoples and environment of the South Caucasus, and their evolving relations with Russian state power. He draws on a wide variety of archival sources, including a large collection of previously unexamined letters, memoirs, and other documents produced by the sectarians that allow him unprecedented insight into the experiences of colonization and religious life. Although the settlers suffered greatly in their early years in hostile surroundings, they in time proved to be not only model Russian colonists but also among the most prosperous of the Empire's peasants. Banished to the empire's periphery, the sectarians ironically came to play indispensable roles in the tsarist imperial agenda.

The book culminates with the dramatic events of the Dukhobor pacifist rebellion, a movement that shocked the tsarist government and received international attention. In the early twentieth century, as the Russian state sought to replace the sectarians with Orthodox settlers, thousands of Molokans and Dukhobors immigrated to North America, where their descendants remain to this day.

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