

# Islam and the Russian Empire: A Journey through History

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## ***Abstract:***

*Religion, particularly Islam is playing a very significant role in the society, polity, culture and security dynamics of the present-day Russia. Islam, though in minority, is the second major traditional religion in Russia. Consequently, it becomes important to analyse the historical interaction between Islam and Russia. This article provides a historical sketch of Russia's earliest interaction with Islam and how Islam became prominent in the cultural and socio-religious landscape of the Russian empire. It also maps how the expanding Russian empire annexed the large geographical territory dominated by Muslims, including the Caucasus and Central Asia, under its imperial expansionist policy. The article focusses on the state policies of the Russian empire regarding Islam and its Muslim subjects. This article has focused on a particular time period from the Russia's encounter with Islam in mid seventh century to the formation of Soviet Union in early twentieth century.*

**Key words:** Religion, Islam, Russian empire, Muslims

## **Introduction**

Islam first appeared around 1,300 years ago in the territory of the Russian Federation. With the conquest of Derbent in Dagestan in 642 AD, the Islamic caliphate entered the Caucasus at the middle of the seventh century. Later on in history, these areas were incorporated within the borders of the Russian empire. The relationship with this region, as well as the rest of the Muslim world, is primarily responsible for the origin of Islam in the Volga region. The Proto-Russians inhabited the region between the Oka and Volga Rivers, and Volzhkasaya Bulgharia in the Volga region is where they had their first recorded encounter with Islam (Pogadaev 2012: 175). Between the Volga and Kara rivers, there were clashes between proto-Russians and the Muslim Bulgars (Smirnov 1956: 6). It is significant that Islam arrived from Central Asia and Khazaria in Volga Bulgharia. Nonetheless, merchants were extensively involved in the city's grassroots Islamisation

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