

HGGS

HEIDELBERGER  
GRADUIERTENSCHULE  
FÜR GEISTES- UND  
SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTEN



UNIVERSITÄT  
HEIDELBERG  
ZUKUNFT  
SEIT 1386

**Timur Mitrofanov**

**Philosophical Faculty**

**Peasant legal culture and volost' courts of the Russian Empire: The Case of the Kazan province (1861 – 1917)**

The research project is focused on the legal history of the peasants' rural communes in post-reform Imperial Russia. In particular, I study volost' courts ("волостные суды" in Russian, the closest translation is "township courts") intended especially for the peasantry after the abolition of the serfdom in 1861. Insofar as the greatest part of the rural population was illiterate and did not understand legislation, litigants had to apply local customary law for settling disputes. However, applying local customs raised a few legal issues. For instance, the rural composition of the Kazan province contained a few different groups: Russians, Tatars, Mari, and Chuvash. All of these groups possessed their own customs and traditions. The province was thus a unique region of the Empire and exemplified characteristic features of the complicated social and confessional structure of the Empire. In this connection, the main aim of the research is to reveal and explore legal culture and volost' justice in the Kazan province's countryside.

The second half of the 19 century was an initial period of nation-state building in Russian. Rapid transformations and modernization raised a problem

HGGS

HEIDELBERGER  
GRADUIERTENSCHULE  
FÜR GEISTES- UND  
SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTEN



UNIVERSITÄT  
HEIDELBERG  
ZUKUNFT  
SEIT 1386

of "inclusion" of the peasantry into social, economic, and legal relationships in late imperial Russia. From this perspective, in the broader context, I explore how local processes in the Kazan Province's countryside interacted with the imperial ones. I expect to provide full-scale research based on interdisciplinary approaches, a wide range of archival and ethnographic sources.

**Keywords:** Russian Empire, peasants, rural society, legal culture, customary law, local self-government, local courts