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Policemen of the Tsar: Local Police in an Age of Upheaval.
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ounded by Peter the Great in 1718, Russia’s police were key instruments of tsarist power. In the reign of Alexander II (1855–1881), local police forces took on new importance. The liberation of 23 million serfs from landlord control, growing fear of crime, and the terrorist violence of the closing years challenged law enforcement with new tasks that made worse what was already a staggering burden.

This book describes the regime’s decades-long struggle to reform and strengthen the police. The author reviews the local police’s role and performance in the mid-nineteenth century and the implications of the largely unsuccessful effort to transform them. From a longer-term perspective, the study considers how the police’s systemic weaknesses undermined tsarist rule, impeded a range of liberalizing reforms, perpetuated reliance on the military to maintain law and order, and gave rise to vigilante justice.

While its primary focus is on European Russia, the analysis also covers much of the imperial periphery, discussing the police systems in the Baltic Provinces, Congress Poland, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Siberia.

“Policemen of the Tsar is a significant and original contribution to the history of the late imperial period and especially to our knowledge of the reign of Alexander II. The police was one of the chief institutions of the tsarist state, an essential force for fighting crime and maintaining order, one of the few government institutions that reached into the world of the peasantry and urban lower classes. But despite its importance, Western historians of Russia have failed to give the police the attention it deserved. Abbott’s book goes a long way in solving this problem.”

Richard G. Robbins, Jr., Professor Emeritus of history at the University of New Mexico, author of Famine in Russia, 1891–1892: The Imperial Government Responds to a Crisis and The Tsar’s Viceroys: Russian Provincial Governors in the Last Years of the Empire

About the Author
Robert J. Abbott has a PhD from Princeton University. He has worked as a university instructor, intelligence analyst, and consultant to US intelligence and law enforcement agencies. His previous research has focused on the history of crime and its impact on society and government.