

A prison without walls?: Eastern Siberian exile in the last years of tsarism

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Abstrak

This book presents a snapshot of daily life for exiles and their dependants in eastern Siberia from the 1905 revolution up until the collapse of the Tsarist regime in 1917. This was an extraordinary period in Siberias history as a place of punishment. There was an unprecedented rise of Siberias penal use in this twelve-year window, and a dramatic increase in the number of exiles punished for political offences. This work focuses on the region of eastern Siberia, taking the regions of Irkutsk and Yakutsk in north-eastern Siberia as its focal points. Siberian exile was the antithesis of Foucaults modern prison. The state did not observe, monitor, and control its exiles closely, and indeed often did not even know where exiles were. Exiles were free to govern their daily lives. They were free of fences, and free from close observation and supervision. Despite these freedoms, Siberian exile represented one of Russias most feared punishments. This book seeks to explore what the punishment of Siberian exile entailed, and to humanize the individuals who made up the mass of exiles and the men, women, and children who followed them voluntarily into exile. This book is structured in a broad narrative arc that moves from travel to exile; life and communities in exile, work, and escape; and finally illness in exile. This book gives a personal, human, empathetic insight into what exilic experience entailed, and allows us to comprehend why eastern Siberia was regarded as a terrible punishment, despite its apparent freedoms.