



# Bodies like Bright Stars: Saints and Relics in Orthodox Russia

*Robert H. Greene*

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While Russian Orthodox theologians celebrated saints as paragons of virtue and piety whose lives were to be emulated in the search for salvation, ordinary believers routinely sought the assistance of the holy dead for commonplace and earthly matters. The Orthodox faithful were more likely to pray to the saints for help in the everyday concerns of health and home than for salvation. Evidence from miracle stories, devotional literature, parish records, diocesan reports, religious newspapers and magazines, and archival documents demonstrates how Orthodox men and women cultivated direct and literally hands-on relationships with their heavenly intercessors by visiting saintly shrines, touching and kissing miracle-working relics, and making pledges to repay the saints for miracles rendered.

Exploring patterns of popular devotion to the cult of the saints in both late imperial and early Soviet Russia, Greene argues for an interpretation of Orthodoxy as a proactive faith grounded in the needs and realities of everyday life. *Bodies like Bright Stars* makes two significant contributions to the fields of Russian history and religious studies. First, it straddles the customary historiographical dividing line of 1917, illustrating how the devotional practices associated with the cult of the saints evolved from the mid-19th century to the end of the first decade of Soviet power. Greene shows that it was the adaptability of the cult of the saints that allowed Orthodoxy to remain relevant amid great political, social, and economic change. Secondly, the book underscores the role of materiality in Russian Orthodox religious practices and emphasizes what anthropologists of religion have described as the sacrality of place.

*Bodies like Bright Stars*, the first book in NIU Press's Orthodox Christian Studies Series, will be of interest to Russian historians, anthropologists, and scholars of religion. Written in a clear and lively style, the book is suitable for both survey courses and advanced courses in Russian history and will also appeal to general readers of religious studies.

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