CHAPTER ONE

SOURCES

Tatar and Bashkir literary works constitute a particularly rich body of indigenous historical sources of Inner Asia, particularly for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Tatars and Bashkirs were directly involved in Russian economic and political expansion throughout Central Eurasia, including beyond the borders of the Russian empire proper. These sources were composed against the backdrop of a remarkable Islamic intellectual and institutional flowering directly benefiting from Russian economic expansion and policy changes regarding Muslims that Catherine II implemented in the latter half of the eighteenth century. A strong religious orientation dominated this literature down to the 1920’s, but at the same time it was written above all for an internal audience. While doctrinal, theological, and Sufi works were typically written in Arabic and Persian, historical works tended to be written in the vernacular. Our sources for the Tatar and Bashkir experience in Bukhara and Central Asia fall almost entirely within the latter category of Tatar and Bashkir historical literature. While the experience of Muslims from Russia in Bukhara can without a doubt inform our understanding of economic and cultural dynamics within the Russian empire, Russian sources per se are largely mute on the topic, and the few Russians who recorded their observations of the Tatar and Bashkir cultural and religious relationship with Bukhara generally have betrayed a sketchy and superficial understanding of these dynamics. For the Tatar and Bashkir relationship with Bukhara we must rely on Tatar and Bashkir sources.

Tatars and Bashkirs recorded their experiences in Bukhara in a broad range of literary genres, chief of which were biographical works, memoirs, and poetry. Printed media developed rather rapidly among Tatars and Bashkirs, beginning with books at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and by the beginning of the twentieth century comprising pamphlets, journals, and newspapers. Nevertheless a substantial body of literary activity remained within the manuscript medium, particularly since manuscripts themselves were believed to have religious authority and significance. Scholars today have only scratched the surface of the Tatar and Bashkir manuscript tradition, in terms of publishing catalogs of
collections; indeed, many manuscripts remain in private collections, and basically inaccessible. As a result we possess very few catalogs or even descriptions of Tatar or Bashkir manuscripts, and relatively few historians have made use of manuscripts among their sources. It is difficult to venture even an educated guess as to the proportion of manuscript material that was produced versus printed material. Nevertheless, we do know that through the 1920's the production of manuscripts was very widespread, and remained an important medium for disseminating literary works. Tatars and Bashkirs discussed their experiences in Bukhara in a broad variety of printed and manuscript literary genres. Chief among these are biographical sources that include biographical dictionaries, memoirs, stand-alone biographies, and autobiographical poetry. We also possess some histories of Bukhara and the other Central Asian khanates, composed primarily in the nineteenth century by Tatars who resided there. Let us examine these historiographical genres individually.

The biographical dictionary is strongly represented in Tatar historical literature, and all of them address numerous scholars who studied in Bukhara. The most extensive biographical information on Tatars in Bukhara is to be found in the second volume of Shihab ad-Din Marjani’s Mustafad al-akhbar fi ahwali Qazan wa Bulghar. Marjani himself studied in Bukhara from 1838 until 1849, and has left us with detailed information on Tatars and Bashkirs (or rather, “Bulghars”) who studied there, as well as on his own experiences in Central Asia. He also included in the first volume a history of the Manghit Dynasty that ruled Bukhara from the middle of the eighteenth century until 1920. These works were first published in Kazan in 1885. Riza˒ ad-Din b. Fakhr ad-Din’s biographical dictionary Asar also contains biographies of dozens of scholars who studied in Bukhara. The first two volumes, subdivided into fifteen sections, were published in Ufa and Orenburg between 1900 and 1908. Two additional volumes remain unpublished as manuscripts housed in the Bashkortostan Academy of Sciences in Ufa, and were only published in Cyrillic-script Tatar in 2010. Whereas Marjani’s and Riza˒ ad-Din’s works encompass the


2 Cf. Lilia Baibulatova, ‘Asar’ Rizy Fakhreddina, (Kazan, 2006); cf. also A.I. Kharisov, “Kolleksiia rukopisei Rizaitdina Fakhretdinova v nauchnom arkhive BFAN SSSR,”