Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century Bukhara's standing among Muslims in Russia began a gradual decline. This decline was attributable in part to expanding Russian political and economic power in Central Asia, as well as the rise of Islamic reformism and modernism, which were generally critical of the Sufi practices and conceptions that formed the basis of Bukhara's sacred significance to Muslims. Tatars and Bashkirs played a key role in Russia's political and economic expansion into Inner Asia, and by the middle of the nineteenth century they had appropriated many of the roles the Bukharans had held and largely monopolized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as merchants and intermediaries. Many historical studies of this process, primarily of a Tatar modernist and nationalist orientation, have recognized the role of Russian political and economic expansion in this process, but have emphasized the rise of “Enlightenment” among the Tatars (comprising Islamic reformism, ethnic nationalism, and modernism). At the same time, they contrast Tatar “enlightenment” with Bukharan “backwardness” and “scholasticism.” In these accounts, the Bukharan madrasa and Bukharan education become symbols for this supposed “backwardness.” As commonplace as this depiction has become in Tatar historiography, and in many Western historical works, it was by no means universally accepted, or unchallenged, among Tatar and Bashkir scholars of that time.

In examining the decline of Bukhara’s economic and political status over the course of the nineteenth century, and the decline in the legal and social status of Central Asian communities within Russia, it is important to recall that during this period the political, economic, and in the case of

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1 The reformist and modernist current dominated printed Tatar historiography by the beginning of the twentieth century. Before the Second World War historians emphasizing the role of Tatar “enlighteners” include Shähär Shäräf, Gaziz Gubaidullin, Abdullah Battal-Taymas, Ali Rakhim, and Zeki Velidi Togan. These ideas regained currency in Soviet Tatarstan in the 1980’s, and have remained dominant among Tatar historians since the collapse of the Soviet Union.
the ‘ulama institutional interests of the Tatar and Bashkir merchant and religious elite became firmly tied to those of the Russian Empire and the Russian monarchy. During this era Tatar and Bashkir merchants operated throughout the Russian empire, and even beyond it, and were involved in much of the empire’s overland trade, both domestically and internationally. Tatar merchants began investing in industrial enterprises, particularly in the processing of livestock, and by the end of the nineteenth century a full-fledged Muslim industrial bourgeoisie had developed in Russia. Similarly, the religious elite, the ‘ulama, on the one hand was largely dependent upon the Tatar bourgeoisie for the support of Islamic institutions; on the other hand, the wealthiest, most prestigious, and most influential element of the ‘ulama was organized, and partially regulated around the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly, a bureaucratic structure funded and administered by the Russian state. Moreover, it was headed by a mufti who was a Russian appointee and firmly associated with the political and the economic interests of the monarchy. As we have seen, it was also in the main economic centers of the Tatar and Bashkir bourgeoisie, cities such as Kazan, Petropavlovsk, and Semipalatinsk where we find the highest proportion of bokhari among the ‘ulama.

When we speak of Bukhara’s economic decline, this should be understood as a highly relative decline. If Peter the Great’s vision was to establish forts along the Qazaq frontier to facilitate trade with the Central Asian khanates, the ultimate outcome of this policy was the political, military, and above all economic integration of the Qazaq steppe, rather than of Central Asia, into the Russian Empire. By the middle of the nineteenth century Russian imports and exports to and from the Qazaq steppe were valued at four times that of its trade with the three Central Asian khanates combined. Unlike the highly capitalized caravan trade with the khanates, trade with the Qazaqs occurred in settlements all along the frontier, including in both large cities and smaller settlements, and involved Muslims and non-Muslims, including peasants, Cossacks, itinerant peddlers, and other

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2 The social and economic foundations of the Tatar bourgeoisie are discussed in detail in Kh. Kh. Khasanov, Formirovanie tatarskoi burzhuaznoi natsii, (Kazan, 1977); cf. also Radik Salikhov, Tatarskaia burzhuaziia Kazani i natsional’nye reformy vtoroi poloviny XIX—nachala XX v. (Kazan, 2001), and Christian Noack, Muslimischer Nationalismus im russischen Reich, (Stuttgart, 2000).

3 L. M. Sverdlova, Na perekrestke torgovykh putei, (Kazan, 1991), 21-23. Sverdlova’s figures are for the period of 1849-1853: Russia’s trade with both the steppe and the Central Asian khanates was dwarfed by its trade with China, including Xinjiang and Mongolia.