

# ИСЛАМСКИЕ УЧЕНЫЕ КАК СВЯЗУЮЩЕЕ ЗВЕНО МЕЖДУ ВОЛГО-УРАЛЬСКИМИ МУСУЛЬМАНАМИ В РОССИЙСКОЙ ИМПЕРИИ

**Мустафа Туна**  
mustafa.tuna@duke.edu

*После российского завоевания Волго-Уральского региона в XVI веке местная мусульманская элита была практически уничтожена. В условиях отсутствия политически активной элиты исламские ученые стали фактором, объединяющим мусульманское население региона. В отличие от крестьян и сезонных кочевников, редко выходявших за пределы собственных деревень или торговых городов, ученые в поисках знаний много путешествовали. Во время своих путешествий они устанавливали прочные связи с другими студентами и учеными. Расселившись после окончания учебы по региону и занимая должности деревенских имамов, они поддерживали сложившиеся контакты благодаря родственным узам, переписке, суфийским братствам и богословским дискуссиям. Некоторые ученые также участвовали в более масштабных мусульманских ученых сетях, как правило, охватывавших территорию от Мавераннахра до Османской империи. Таким образом, исламские ученые стали социальным слоем, связующим между собой волго-уральских мусульман на уровне регионального мусульманского домена, одновременно интегрируя это региональное сообщество в трансрегиональный мусульманский домен.*

**Ключевые слова:** волго-уральские мусульмане, татары, башикры, ислам, улемы/ученые, Российская империя, Ризаэддин Фахреддин, Асар.

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Университет Дьюка,  
факультет славянских  
и евразийских исследований  
и истории  
Мустафа Туна

# ISLAMIC SCHOLARS: THE GLUE THAT HELD VOLGA-URAL MUSLIMS TOGETHER IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE\*

**Mustafa Tuna**  
mustafa.tuna@duke.edu

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*When Russian forces occupied the Volga-Ural region in the sixteenth century, they nearly eliminated the local Muslim nobility. In the absence of a politically active nobility, Islamic scholars kept the region's Muslim inhabitants connected as a larger community. This population of agricultural peasants and seasonal nomads rarely ventured beyond the vicinity of their villages or market towns,*

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**Mustafa Tuna**

*Duke University,  
Slavic & Eurasian  
Studies and History*

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*but scholars traveled extensively to pursue knowledge. As they traveled, they forged lasting connections with other students and scholars. When they graduated and dispersed through the region as village imams, they maintained these connections through kinship ties, letters, Sufi associations, and theological debates. Some of them also engaged in a broader network of Islamic scholars that extended primarily from Transoxiana to the Ottoman territories. As such, they served as the glue that held Volga-Ural Muslims together in a shared world, a regional Muslim domain, and they integrated this regional community of believers further into a transregional Muslim domain.*

**Keywords:** *Volga-Ural Muslims, Tatars, Bashkirs, Islam, ulama/scholars, imperial Russia, Rızâeddin bin Fahreddin, Asar.*

The Muscovite state occupied the Volga-Ural region in the sixteenth century, subjugated its Muslim population, and eliminated most of their nobility. Under Russian rule, Islamic scholars kept Volga-Ural Muslims connected to one another in a shared world, a regional “Muslim domain”, until other societal agents, such as intellectuals and a burgeoning mercantile class, started to claim this role in the late-nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>. The Volga-Ural Muslims predominantly lived in the countryside as agricultural peasants or seasonal nomads in this period, and they rarely ventured beyond the surrounding area of their villages or market towns. Islamic scholars, on the other hand, traveled extensively, especially during their years of education as madrasa students. Mobility and the long years of camaraderie in madrasa hostels enabled them to forge lasting connections with each other. They weaved these connections into scholarly networks through kinship ties, letters, Sufi associations, and debates over the controversial issues of religion. And they tapped into a broader,

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\* This article is adapted from (Tuna, 2015, pp. 18–36).

1. On “domain” as a category of historical analysis, see (Tuna, 2015, pp.10–14).

transregional network of Islamic scholars that extended primarily to Transoxiana but also to Daghestan, Afghanistan, India, and, increasingly in the late nineteenth century, to the Ottoman territories and Egypt. It was mainly the Islamic scholars who reached beyond local Muslim communities in the Volga-Ural region, and the extent of their reach played a decisive role in shaping the way Volga-Ural Muslims interpreted and responded to the larger world until the Soviet regime liquidated Islamic scholars in the 1930s. As such, Islamic scholars both provided the glue that held Muslim villagers together in a regional Muslim domain and linked them to the larger world: especially to broader, transregional Muslim networks from Central Asia to the Ottoman territories and to the Russian state<sup>2</sup>.

Because of this crucial role that Islamic scholars played among Volga-Ural Muslims, their stories can open invaluable windows into the experience and imaginaries of the region's Muslim communities, and a truly remarkable source for such stories is Rızâeddin bin Fahreddin's (1858–1936) biographical dictionary, *Âsar*. Fahreddin himself was a scholar as well as a prolific writer, a civil servant, and a communal leader. In the 1890s, he served as a high-ranking official at the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly, the main institution through which the Russian state governed its Muslim subjects in the Volga-Ural region<sup>3</sup>. The writings and official records of thousands of scholars had accumulated at the assembly building in Ufa since its foundation in 1788. Fahreddin organized this material into a proper archive and library, and in 1900, he published some of the information he had gathered there as a pamphlet with thirty biographical entries. He considered this to be the first fascicule of a series he called “*Âsar*,” meaning “traces.”

Shortly after the appearance of this fascicule in the bookstores and market stalls of the Volga-Ural region, Fahreddin started receiving letters from Muslims in various parts of the Russian empire with further information and documents about other scholars to be included in the following fascicules of his dictionary. As a result, what started as Fahreddin's personal project turned into a collective effort among Volga-Ural Muslims to document the lives of their past scholars and, occasionally, a few prominent laypersons too. Fahreddin painstakingly compiled and published his fascicules for eight years. He organized the entries according to the death dates of each scholar. By 1908, he had published 565 entries and reached the 1870s. Many of his entries included copies of personal letters, notes, or legal opinions (*fatwas*) written by various scholars, in addition to biographical information about their genealogies, marriages, children, teachers, students, and places of study or residence (Baibulatova, 2006)<sup>4</sup>. This article will tap into this rich material to show how Islamic scholars held together and shaped the Volga-Ural Muslim domain from the mid-eighteenth to the late-nineteenth centuries. A single article cannot do justice to the individual experiences of millions of Muslims who lived and died in that shared world, but it provides a look, albeit a telescopic one, into the contours of their collective experience<sup>5</sup>.

2. On the Soviet liquidation of Islamic scholars in the Volga-Ural region, see (Alov, Vladimirov, 1996; Minnullin, 2007). For Central Asia (Keller, 2001, 224, 241).

3. On the assembly, see (Fisher, 1968; Azamatov, 1999; Crews, 2006). Later, in the Soviet period, Fahreddin would serve as the head (*mufiti*) of this assembly too.

4. Baibulatova, 2006 is a useful introduction to *Âsar*. 260 more biographical entries that Fahreddin wrote after 1908 remained unpublished. The manuscripts of these entries are preserved at the Scientific Archive of the Ufa Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Ufa. An earlier biographical dictionary by Şihâbuddin Mercâni is also worth mentioning here: (Mercani, 1900). In this article, I relied primarily on *Âsar* because of the collective effort involved in its production and because Fahreddin had partly incorporated Mustafâd al-akhbâr in *Âsar*.

5. For helpful ethnographic descriptions of Volga-Ural Muslims, see (Frank, 2001; Kefeli, 2014, pp. 60–160). For major issues of debate among the region's Islamic scholars, see (Kemper, 1998).

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF STUDYING

As among most other Muslim peoples, Muslims of the Volga-Ural region had a widespread system of elementary religious education. Mullahs taught the boys in their neighborhood while their wives taught the girls. If the children were young enough, either the mullah or his wife could teach both sexes too. Sometimes, the parents constructed a separate building to serve as a maktab, but in many cases, instruction took place in the mosque or the mullah's house. Almost all Muslim children studied subjects such as the basics of Islam and Qur'anic recitation for a few years in these maktabas. Then, a small number of male students who wanted to acquire a degree of knowledge that would entitle them to recognition as scholars continued their studies for approximately fifteen to twenty years in higher educational institutions called madrasas<sup>6</sup>.

Madrasas of the Volga-Ural region were often small, poor, and short-lived. In Muslim-ruled countries, such as the Ottoman Empire or the Bukharan Emirate, charitable endowments protected by law (*waqfs*) provided stable income and organizational continuity to the madrasas<sup>7</sup>. The Russian administration, however, destroyed the Volga-Ural Muslims' charitable endowments following the Muscovite invasion of the region in the mid-sixteenth century<sup>8</sup>. One could still endow the building of a village mosque, a few shops, some land, or even books, but these small endowments were not protected by law, and they did not compare with the large, income-producing endowments of the Muslim-ruled countries<sup>9</sup>. Only in the nineteenth century, registering charitable endowments officially became possible in the Volga-Ural region and, paralleling the improvements in the Muslim population's economic conditions, only in the last decades of the imperial regime, wealthy Muslims started to create large endowments (Azamatov, 2000, pp. 4–24; Azamatov, 2004). Until then, a madrasa in the Volga-Ural region usually comprised a scholar who offered regular instruction at the madrasa level and, perhaps, some boarding arrangements for the students. Only rarely did the continuing support of a village congregation or wealthy family provide some sort of organizational continuity to the Volga-Ural madrasas<sup>10</sup>.

Madrasas of the Volga-Ural region followed a curriculum common among scholars of the Hanafi legal school (Muzafferof, 1912; Kemper, 1998, pp. 215–217; Frank, 2001, pp. 243–46). While the institutionalized madrasas in Muslim-ruled countries could employ several instructors and offer advanced courses for the entirety of this curriculum, or at least for a majority of its subjects, most of the madrasas in the Volga-Ural region had only one instructor. No matter how erudite this single scholar was, it was practically impossible for him to provide training in all fields of Islamic scholarship. Each scholar specialized in teaching one or a few subjects and, sometimes, just a single book<sup>11</sup>. Some scholars did not hold classes at all. They

6. For a short description of Volga-Ural maktabas and madrasas, see NART, f. 142, op. 1, d. 39. Also see (Koblov, 1916).

7. On the role of charitable endowments in Muslim-ruled countries, see (Berkey, 1992, pp. 6–9, 44–94; Akgündüz, 1997, pp. 349–350, 471–474, 479–492; Khalid, 1998, pp. 31–32).

8. See (Fahreiddin, 1908; Emirhan, 1997, pp. 17–26; McCarthy, 1973, 311; Khodarkovsky, 1996; Türkoğlu, 2000, pp. 26–30; Frank, 2001, pp. 165–176).

9. For examples of such small endowments, see (Fahreiddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 298–309, vol. 2, pp. 47–49, 457–459, 494–495; Noack, 2000, pp. 75–76; Frank, 2001, pp. 232–236; Sverdlova, 2011, pp. 276–278).

10. For helpful descriptions of Volga-Ural madrasas, see (NART, f. 92, op. 1, d. 10464, ll. 16–22; İbrāhîmof, pp. 4–15). For the makeshift nature of Muslim educational institutions in the Volga-Ural region, see (NART, f. 92, op. 1, d. 10464, ll. 4–9, 16–22, 51–59; NART, f. 322, o. 1, d. 46). For two examples of scholars opening their madrasas, see (Fahreiddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 330–331, vol. 2, pp. 72–74). On three major villages with a tradition of scholarship, see (Tuqayef, 1899; Zäynullin, 1992; Mutahhir ibn Mulla Mir Haydar, 1911, pp. 17–21, 41–42; Lotfi, 1992; İbrāhîmof, pp. 11–15).

11. For examples of scholars specializing in the instruction of specific texts or topics, see (Fahreiddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 272–275, vol. 2, pp. 41–42, 313, 400–402). İsterlibaş Madrasa provided comprehensive instruction in the Hanafi curriculum, but this was one of the exceptions that proved the rule. See (Tuqayef, 1899, pp. 10–11).

assigned books to their students, the students read these books on their own or with other students, and the scholar reviewed the progress of each student on the assigned book from time to time (İbrâhîmof, pp.11–15). An ambitious student who wanted to excel in one of the fields not offered at the advanced level at his current madrasa would have to find the specialist of that field and move on to *his* madrasa.

The need to seek different instructors in order to cover all fields of study required students to move from one madrasa to another as they advanced in their studies. Cârullah bin Bikmuhammed (1796–1869), for instance, changed locations seven times before he finished studying and found a job as a village mullah (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 2, pp. 488–489). Sometimes, a student could finish his studies without changing madrasas so frequently, especially if he entered the madrasa of a relatively more knowledgeable scholar early in his educational career. Rîzâeddin bin Fahreddin, for instance, never switched madrasas (Türkoğlu, 2000, pp. 26–30; Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 2, pp. 229–230), but in general, students traveled as they studied. While most of them circulated among Volga-Ural madrasas, a small group of students who could afford long-distance travel went to major centers of Islamic scholarship outside of the Russian empire too.

The Bukharan Emirate in Transoxiana was the most familiar and preferred destination for students from the Volga-Ural region until the late nineteenth century. They went to other Transoxianian cities like Samarqand and Khiva too, but Bukhara was a more prominent and revered center of scholarship, and Russia's Muslims used its name to refer to the Transoxianian scholarly traditions in general (Frank, 2012, pp. 27–75). The descendants of a seventeenth-century scholar, Yûnus bin İvanay (b. 1636), claimed that their ancestor was the first scholar from the Volga-Ural region who had studied in Bukhara. Since the Russian invasions following the fall of Kazan in 1552 seem to have interrupted the transmission of knowledge among the Volga-Ural ulama, it is possible for scholars like Yûnus bin İvanay to have revived Islamic scholarship in the region after an interlude, and the madrasas, libraries, and traditions of Bukhara are likely to have guided them in this restoration (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 38–40, vol. 2, pp. 479–481)<sup>12</sup>.

Yet, going to Bukhara was a demanding enterprise. One had to cross the Qizilqum Desert. Every year, merchants organized caravans between Bukhara and major cities in eastern Russia, such as Petropavl, Troitsk, and Orenburg. Nizhny Novgorod's large trade fair, located about 250 miles to the east of Moscow, was also connected to Bukhara through caravans<sup>13</sup>. Students from the Volga-Ural region had to wait for the travel season and join a caravan in order to go to Bukhara or return from it. The journey from Orenburg to Bukhara took one to two months. Therefore, depending on where a student started his journey, he would have to travel up to several months in order to reach Bukhara. This was an expensive trip. One had to save money for the road and the expenses in Bukhara or else find support from a benefactor. Many of the scholars who studied in Bukhara initially worked as village mullahs and saved some money before they could take the long journey<sup>14</sup>.

12. For other examples of the scholars who studied in Bukhara, see (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 32, 38–40, 44, 249, 250, 258–260, 272, 414–415, 458–469, 471–472, vol. 2, pp. 7, 105, 114–115, 120, 162–163, 177–179, 192, 203, 209–210, 216–217, 218–220, 236, 239–240, 248–249, 254–256, 258–259, 265–266, 290, 312, 326, 333–335, 393, 397, 402–404, 443, 450, 461).

13. On Bukharan merchants at the Nizhny Novgorod Fair, see (Mekerye, 1883). For trade between Transoxiana and Russian towns in general, see (Velidi Togan, 1942, pp. 212–213; Burton, 1993, pp. 6–8, 66–85).

14. For a detailed account of the Volga-Ural Muslims' relations with Bukhara, see (Frank, 2012, pp. 95–150). For examples of individual scholars traveling to Bukhara, see (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 453–456, vol. 2, pp. 497–502; İsmâ il Seyahati, 1903; İbrâhîmof, Tercüme-yi Hâlim). The Transcaspian railway, constructed in the 1880s, shortened the travel time to Bukhara from Russia, but it was mainly used for state purposes. See (Becker, 1968, pp. 125–28, 188–91).



Once in Bukhara, students needed to find connections and settle in one of the madrasas of this town. Many of them earned their livelihood by working at ad hoc jobs as they studied. Additionally, local rulers and notables offered scholarships and charity money. From the late eighteenth century on, the cells that students could rent or purchase in Bukharan madrasas entitled them to a share of the institution's endowment income too (Khalid, 1998, pp. 31–32; Aini, 1958, pp. 29–66). Yet, finding a cell was not easy, even if one had the money to rent or purchase it. Typically, students who traveled to Bukhara from Russia would first need to find an acquaintance who had come earlier. This acquaintance would then help them locate a cell and join the classes of a madrasa instructor (Fahreiddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 453–455).

Since Islamic scholarship in the Volga-Ural region was modeled after Bukharan scholarship, education in the madrasas of Bukhara was not too different from that of the Volga-Ural madrasas. The books used in Islamic education were predominantly in Arabic, both in Russia and in Transoxiana, and the Turkic dialects spoken in both places were mutually intelligible to their speakers although not identical. Students in Transoxiana had to familiarize themselves with Persian too since this was the predominant language in the urban centers of the region. Some madrasa instructors gave regular lectures, that is, one of the students read from a book, and the instructor commented as he deemed necessary or supervised a discussion of the topic by the students. Other instructors did not give lectures but only assigned books to the students and coached them as they read through those books. Students progressed at their own pace. Attendance was not required, and students could attend the lectures of any instructor who accepted them to his class, often in return for a small gift (Khalid, 1998, pp. 39–31; Aini, 1958, p. 12). However, Bukhara also offered opportunities that were not available in the Volga-Ural region such as the agglomeration of several madrasas and instructors in a single city and the availability of a large collection of books in the libraries, private collections, and markets of the emirate for reading, copying, and purchasing. The gathering of several instructors and a high number of students in the same location created an environment of scholarship that encouraged the students to study intensively and allowed them to follow the lectures of different instructors without having to move locations. The availability of a variety of books was also crucial for the scholarly development of a student at a time when copying by hand was the only way to reproduce books. The task of obtaining books attracted both students and older scholars to Bukhara<sup>15</sup>. Books printed in Egyptian and Ottoman print houses as well as in Kazan and St. Petersburg became increasingly more available in the Russian empire throughout the nineteenth century and changed the intellectual scope of its Muslims, but copying by hand never lost its scholarly importance (Fahreiddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, p. 300, vol. 2, pp. 375–378, 440–443, 457–459; Frank, 2012, p. 8)<sup>16</sup>.

Afghanistan and India were also within the geographical scope of the Volga-Ural Muslims. A significant number of students either studied in Kabul or spent some time there while studying in Bukhara. It seems that the Sufi circles of Afghanistan, especially the famous Naqshbandi Shaykh Fayḍhan bin Hidrkhān of Kabul (d. 1802), attracted Muslims from the Russian empire in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries<sup>17</sup>. The relations between

15. For the availability of books in Bukhara, see (Fahreiddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 453–55, vol. 2, pp. 457–459). For the scholarly environment of Bukhara, see (Yusupov, 2003, pp. 34–43). For the importance and difficulty of copying and collecting books, see (Fahreiddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 267–268, 279–281, 294–295, vol. 2, pp. 255, 64–65, 443).

16. On the development of a Muslim print media and the circulation of Ottoman and Egyptian publications in the Volga-Ural region, see (Gainullin, 1983; Karimullin, 1992; Türkoğlu, 2000, pp. 41–42; Safiullina, 2003).

17. For examples of Volga-Ural Islamic scholars with Sufi connections to Afghanistan, see (Fahreiddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 67, 140, 146–149, 177–179, 183–184, 207–208, 219, 272–275, 317, 327–328, 471–72, vol. 2, pp. 203, 344, 389–392; Kemper, 1998, pp. 92–97; Crews, 2006, pp. 32–33).

Bukharan and Indian Muslims were crucial in connecting the Islamic scholars of the Volga-Ural region to India. Indian Muslim students came to Bukhara to study, as caravans regularly traveled between India and Transoxiana, and Russian Muslims organized caravans to trade with India, too (İbrâhîmof, *Tercüme-yi Hâlim*; Velidi Togan, 1942, pp. 110–113, 223–224)<sup>18</sup>. Some students who went to Bukhara from the Russian empire in order to study continued on to India mostly to seek Sufi guidance or to travel further to Hijaz via the sea (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 178–179, 272–275, vol. 2, pp. 267–279, 393–395, 487; İbrâhîmof, *Tercüme-yi Hâlim*, 68–69; Velidi Togan, 1942, pp. 223–224). The number of students from the Volga-Ural region recorded in *Âsar* as having studied in India is low (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 178–179, 272–275, vol. 2, 267–279, 393–395, 487)<sup>19</sup>. However, even though a small number of Islamic scholars from the Volga-Ural region seem to have maintained direct contact with India in the nineteenth century, the Indian-origin Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order spread prominently among Volga-Ural Muslims. Therefore, the influence of India's Muslim traditions in the Volga-Ural region can hardly be exaggerated (Kemper, 1998, pp. 81–212).

Daghestan was another well-known center of scholarship for Islamic scholars from the Volga-Ural region. At least one Daghestani scholar, Muhammed bin 'Ali el-Daghestani (d. 1795), settled in Orenburg in the early nineteenth century and taught in what Fahreddin calls the "Daghestani way" (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 66–68). Fahreddin also records five Volga-Ural scholars who had traveled to Daghestan in the early nineteenth century to study. Interestingly, four of them continued further after Daghestan to the Ottoman territories (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 226, 231–233, 238–240, 337–338, 412). The Daghestani scholar Nadhîr al-Durgilî (1891–1935) mentions three more scholars from the Volga-Ural region in his biographical dictionary of Daghestan, and he explains that students from the Volga-Ural region went to Daghestan especially to improve their Arabic-language skills (Kemper, 1998, pp. 34–35). Finally, the Russian state exiled a number of Daghestani Sufi *shaykhs* to the Volga-Ural region in the late nineteenth century, which also fostered connections between the Islamic scholars of the Volga-Ural region and Daghestan (Frank, 2001, pp. 156–157; Kemper, 2006).

The Ottoman territories were a part of the Volga-Ural Muslims' geographical imagination as well. Hijaz was definitely their most important destination in the Ottoman Empire. Muslims from all over the world, including Russia, went to Hijaz in the Arabian Peninsula to perform the Hajj in Mecca and visit the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. Many scholars whose biographies are recorded in Fahreddin's *Âsar* had taken this journey<sup>20</sup>. However, before at least the second half of the nineteenth century the Hajj journey or going to the Ottoman territories to study were even more arduous and expensive enterprises than traveling to Bukhara. As scholars and lay Muslims who performed the Hajj related their experience back in Russia, Ottoman madrasas entered within the range of options for Muslim students from the Volga-Ural region, but few students actually traveled there to study until the late nineteenth century.

By the late 1800s, steamboats carrying passengers between the Russian port cities and Istanbul or even Jeddah made traveling to the Ottoman territories significantly easier for

18. Levi, 2002 is an informative work on Indian merchants in Transoxiana.

19. This might partly be due to the weakening of trade relations between India and Transoxiana after the conquest of Transoxiana by the Russian empire. See (Levi, 2002, pp. 223–260).

20. For some examples, see (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 26, 31, 33–36, 38–40, 89, 150, 200–201, 213–214, 297, 299, 334–335, 414–415, vol. 2, pp. 119–120, 143–144, 175–176, 179, 218–219, 222, 239–240, 252, 254, 326, 344, 393–395, 397, 399–400, 404–405, 410–412, 461).

Russia's Muslims. This increased the number of students and Hajj travelers from the Volga-Ural region who traveled to the Ottoman Empire so much that special hostels were opened for them in Istanbul, Mecca, and Medina. While going to Medina in 1879, as a young and poor student, Ğabdurreşid İbrâhîm (1857–1944), who would later become a prominent political activist among Russia's Muslims, stayed in one of these hostels for about fifty days. He did not have to pay for his room. The caretaker of the hostel, Muhammed Efendi from Kazan, even provided him with food and clothing (İbrâhîmof, *Tercüme-yi Hâlim*, pp. 56–59)<sup>21</sup>. When Ğabdurreşid İbrâhîm arrived in Medina, there were four hostels for Russian Muslims in the city, and İbrâhîm wrote that there were hostels located in Mecca as well. The hostels in Medina filled during the Hajj season, but when the Hajj travelers left, only four married Russian Muslims and fourteen single students, including Ğabdurreşid İbrâhîm, remained behind (İbrâhîmof, *Tercüme-yi Hâlim*, pp. 68–69, 95; Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 2, p. 247).

Students coming from the Russian empire could study in a variety of places in the Ottoman territories. One early example, Ğabdulhâliq bin Ğabdulkerîm (1771–1844) from the Ufa Gubernia, went to Istanbul in 1798. His plan was to perform the Hajj and then stay in the Ottoman Empire to study in a Muslim-ruled country. From Istanbul, he wrote to his relatives that he considered the options for a long time and decided to go to the famous Hâdim Madrasa in Konya to study with the city's mufti, Muhammed Emin Hâdimî. After studying there for six years and also receiving initiation into the Naqshbandi Sufi order, he continued on to Mecca for Hajj. He did not leave the city right away though. He remained there for a while to study. Following this, he traveled to Medina, Cairo, Jerusalem, and Damascus, studying further with the scholars of these cities too. Finally, he returned to Ufa in 1808 and opened his own madrasa (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 2, pp. 96–102). The cities that Ğabdulhâliq bin Ğabdulkerîm visited, as well as some others like Diyarbakır and Baghdad, in the Ottoman territories, were all common destinations for Muslim students from the Volga-Ural region<sup>22</sup>.

## ULAMA AS NETWORK

Traveling was only one of the ways in which Islamic scholars covered a wide geography and connected their fellow Muslims to the larger world. Once students finished studying and settled in particular locations as scholars, they traveled significantly less, and some of them did not travel at all. But they still remained connected beyond their local communities through kinship ties, letters, Sufi associations, and debates over the controversial issues of religion both within Volga-Ural scholarly networks and beyond, extending to a broader area that paralleled the students' geographical range of study<sup>23</sup>. While the mobility of scholars, especially in their student years, was crucial in determining the scope of their geographic reach, their participation in scholarly networks gave permanence to their connectivity.

When a madrasa student finished his studies, he would typically start looking for a position as the mullah of a mosque. Graduates of Bukhara and other prominent centers of Islamic scholarship often found good jobs in mosques with wealthy congregations. Those with better qualifications could open madrasas and start training students in addition to serving as mul-

21. While Ğabdurreşid İbrâhîm stayed in this tekke, a wealthy businessman from Kazan, İshaq Hacı Apanayef, came to Istanbul and bought another building to endow as a hostel for Russian Muslims. For information about another tekke purchased in Istanbul in 1877 for Russian Muslims, see (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 2, pp. 319–320).

22. For other examples, some of which are from later dates, see (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 226, 292, 412, 448–453, 455–456, 476–478, vol. 2, pp. 96–102, 163–175, 188, 213, 267–279, 389–392, 457–459, 461).

23. (Crews, 2006, pp. 105–106) examines some of these connections among the ulama too.



lahs, and those with the best credentials could even forego the position of mullah and focus on teaching alone<sup>24</sup>. Those who left their education at a relatively early stage could still take up positions as adhan callers (Frank, 2001, pp. 146–51; Mutahhir ibn Mulla Mir Haydar, 1911, pp. 40–43). And finally, since the region had more madrasa graduates than needed, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some students could never find religious positions upon finishing their studies (Koblov, 1907, p. 6; Mullalikhdan, 1914). They would continue their lives as clerks, peasants, merchants, or something else that the possibilities of the region allowed<sup>25</sup>.

Regardless of the position that a madrasa graduate took, the knowledge that he accumulated provided him with a distinctive and respected status in the Muslim community<sup>26</sup>. He became a “scholar”, or “*‘ālim*” in Arabic, which literally means “one who knows.” “*Ulama*” (*‘ulamā*) is the plural of “*‘ālim*,” but it implies more than “scholars” in the plural. It is a collective name for the network that the Islamic scholars constituted — not only at a given time and place, through personal connections, as we shall see below, but also across time and space, through the transmission of knowledge. Thus, by becoming an Islamic scholar, the madrasa graduates would acquire the authority of both the knowledge that they had accumulated and of the “*ulama*” as an influential and respected segment of the Muslim Ummah.

Several factors forged the aggregate of individual Islamic scholars into a cohesive network in the Russian empire. The mobility of madrasa students helped them meet many other students and scholars. When they switched to a more stable way of life upon finishing their studies, they continued to communicate with some of their acquaintances through occasional visits and letters. For instance, İbrâhîm bin Hocaş (d. 1825) had studied in Daghestan and Anatolia before settling in Bugulma. As a scholar, he continued to communicate with other scholars in these two regions and asked their opinions about controversial issues of religion, such as the performance of night prayers in northern territories where the sun did not set during summer nights (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 227). In a society where functional literacy was a rarity, the ability to read and, more importantly, to write was a distinguishing quality. It helped members of the *ulama* to keep in touch with the wider world, especially with other scholars in distant locations, through letters<sup>27</sup>.

Until the end of the nineteenth century most of these scholars relied on the services of occasional travelers rather than the imperial postal system to convey their letters<sup>28</sup>. It seems that there were enough travelers among Russia’s Muslims to enable the emergence of reliable communication patterns as early as the beginnings of the eighteenth century. The letters that a scholar from Kazan, Seyfeddin bin Ebubekir, exchanged during his Hajj journey in 1824 with Ercümenî Kirmanî of Ufa are revealing in this respect. According to the arrangement between Seyfeddin and Kirmanî, Kirmanî would move to Kazan and maintain Seyfeddin’s madrasa during the latter’s Hajj journey. Seyfeddin started his journey from the city of Kazan. When he arrived in Astrakhan, he received a letter from Kirmanî. Seyfeddin did not have an address in Astrakhan, but

24. Most scholars mentioned in *Âsar* opened their own madrasas.

25. For examples of a few scholars who chose not to take religious positions, see (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 422–424, vol. 2, pp. 189–190, 204, 331–332).

26. İsmuhammed bin Zâhid’s story is an illustrative example of how knowledge earned respect and status (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 448–453).

27. For sample letters or information about letters, see (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 34–35, 140, 224–225, 268, 375–420, vol. 2, pp. 96–102, 339–343, 472–478). For an explanation of functional literacy and how it could be separate from the ability to write, see (Khalid, 1998, pp. 24–25).

28. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian state permitted Islamic scholars to use the imperial postage system free of charge in their official correspondence (Sbornik, 1902, p. 62).

apparently, a contact person in this city received letters and parcels coming from other parts of the Volga-Ural region. Travelers would go to this person in order to check if there was anything sent in their name. Seyfeddin responded to Kirmani's letter from Astrakhan and instructed him to send his next letter to Anapa with other Hajj travelers. It seems that these patterns were so reliable that Seyfeddin could comfortably expect to receive in another city on his route a letter that Kirmani would give to Hajj travelers from Ufa or Kazan (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 224–225). Similarly, hostels that Volga-Ural Muslims maintained in Istanbul, as well as a few individual Volga-Ural Muslims who resided in this city, facilitated communication for travelers. For instance a certain Muhammed Kerim from Kazan, who had settled in Istanbul in the 1850s, served as the contact person for the Volga-Ural Muslims who traveled to Istanbul in the 1860s (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 2, pp. 410–412, 462–469).

Kinship was another factor that contributed to the existence of an ulama network. The sons of scholars often adopted the profession of their fathers<sup>29</sup>. This was such a common practice that the inability of a scholar's son to become a scholar as well or his choice not to become one would trouble the father (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 2, pp. 104–107, 219–220). Moreover, many scholars arranged marriages between their daughters and promising students<sup>30</sup>. While these kinship connections did not grow into a caste system and scholarship remained open to all who were willing and able to acquire knowledge, they did create an environment where a scholar was very likely to have other scholars among his relatives. As a result, the familial relations of these scholar relatives simultaneously intensified interactions among the ulama.

Sufism also played a significant role in weaving scholarly networks in the Volga-Ural region. The practice of Sufism, by nature, connects individuals through submission to a shaykh and membership in a brotherhood. Until the utilization of printed and audiovisual mass media in the twentieth century, personal training for initiation into an order and visits thereafter were the essential forms of relations between Sufi shaykhs and their followers<sup>31</sup>. Not all scholars were Sufis, but many were, and they kept traveling to visit their shaykhs. Sufism connected scholars of the same Sufi order closely to one another as well as to the lay affiliates of that order since lay Muslims could also partake in the Sufi practice.

The Naqshbandi Sufi order had an especially noticeable presence among the scholars of the Volga-Ural region in the nineteenth century. It is difficult to estimate when and how this order entered the region, but Fahreddin records several Volga-Ural scholars as having received initiation into the Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order from Faydhan bin Hidrkhan of Kabul or Shaykh Niyazqul el-Türkmâni of Bukhara (d. 1820) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This, it seems, was key in the evolution of the Volga-Ural region's Sufi networks in the early nineteenth century<sup>32</sup>. Then, a new branch of the

29. For some examples see (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 161–173, 252–255, 262, 297, 427–429, 448–453, 458–469, 469–470, vol. 2, pp. 72–74, 108–109, 121, 152, 162–163, 175–176, 203, 205–206, 221–222, 226, 235–236, 310, 312, 334–335, 337–338, 345, 405–407, 431–432, 478).

30. See (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 275, 327–329, 458–469, vol. 2, pp. 72–74, 121, 146, 152, 205–206, 312, 337–338, 396, 402, 406, 471).

31. This was the situation for the many scholars who are recorded to have Sufi connections in Fahreddin's *Âsar*. Zeki Velidi Togan relates his father's annual visits to his shaykhs too (Velidi Togan, 1999, pp. 30–31).

32. For disciples of Niyazqul el-Türkmâni, see (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 124, 280–291, 476–478, vol. 2, pp. 77–93, 108–109, 140–142, 180–181, 250, 264, 333–334). Especially Devletşah bin Ğadilşah (d. 1812), one of Türkmâni's disciples, became very famous in the Volga-Ural region and initiated many other disciples (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 280–91, vol. 2, pp. 176–177, 211–212). For other Russian Muslim scholars who entered Sufism in Bukhara, see (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, p. 295, vol. 2, pp. 114, 162–163, 203–204, 266–267, 326). For disciples of Faydhan bin Hidrkhan, see (Fahreddin, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 67, 140, 177–179, 183–184, 207–208, 219, 272–275, 317, 327–328, 471–472, vol. 2, pp. 203, 344, 389–92).

Naqshbandi Sufi order, the Khalidiyya, also entered the region in the second part of the nineteenth century. The first Khalidis came from Daghestan, but it was the disciples of Ahmed Ziyaiddin Gümüshânevi from Istanbul (1819–99) who really made a significant impact<sup>33</sup>. One of Gümüshânevi's disciples in particular, Shaykh Zeynullah Rasûli of Troitsk (1835–1917), gathered a huge following; three thousand of his disciples were reported to have assembled in Troitsk to see him in one event. Fearing the size of his following, imperial authorities exiled Rasûli to Siberia in 1873. But when he ultimately returned to Troitsk in the 1880s, the number of his disciples grew still higher, and he became one of the most popular Sufi shaykhs in the region (Algar, 1992; Sheikh Zeinulla Rasuli, 2001)<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, debates over controversial religious questions, especially theological problems, also helped coalesce Russia's Islamic scholars – both as allies and opponents. Some issues of controversy were the necessity of performing night prayers during the short summer nights, the relation of God's attributes to God's entity (*zât*), the possibility of considering the Russian empire as “land of Islam” (*dâr al-islâm*), and related to this last question, the conditions of performing the congregational Friday prayers (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 261–262, 305–316, 331, 467, vol. 2, pp. 72, 193–194, 234, 267–268, 479–481). Some scholars, such as Ebunnasr Ğabdunnasîr el-Qursâvi (1776–1812) and Ğabdurrahîm bin Ğusman Utîz İmenî (1754–1835), were so forceful in their treatment of these issues that whether a scholar supported or opposed their views came to clarify that scholar's position among the ulama of the Volga-Ural region (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 95–130, 300–316; Kemper, 1996; Kemper, 1998, pp. 172–212, 225–313). Qursâvi especially, who criticized the theologians of Bukhara and wrote a number of thought-provoking treatises, inspired many scholars among Volga-Ural Muslims. His ideas would have a strong influence on the proponents of renovation in religious thinking in the latter part of the nineteenth century too<sup>35</sup>. Utîz İmenî was also proficient at writing and distributing short but compelling pamphlets about controversial subjects<sup>36</sup>. Throughout the nineteenth century many other scholars wrote treatises on these issues. Their works circulated in the region mostly in handwritten manuscripts and helped the members of the ulama to engage in a regional debate<sup>37</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

In his memoirs, the famous Tatar activist and Islamic scholar from Siberia Ğabdürreşîd İbrâhîm (1857–1944) narrates how in his youth he saw a camel for the first time while traveling south in the snow-covered Kazakh Steppe on a moony night and how he was awed thinking that this was a genie. Then, he comments that had he had access to books with pictures, he could have recognized the camel (İbrâhîmof, *Tercüme-yi Hâlim*, pp. 35–36). Maps, pictures, photographs, and journalistic descriptions of different phenomena from around the globe became available in mass print to the Volga-Ural Muslims at the turn of the twentieth century, and the popularization of this material continued into the Soviet period. Until then, the region's Muslims imagined the larger world based on the oral traditions of

33. On Gümüshânevi's impact in the Volga-Ural region, see (Kara, 1992; Frank, 2001, pp. 152–153).

34. For examples of other Sufi shaykhs with a considerable following in the Volga-Ural region, see (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 177–181, 249–250, 280–291, 335–336, vol. 2, pp. 180–181, 389–392, 487; Frank, 2001, pp. 153–157).

35. For scholars who supported Ebunnasr el-Qursâvi's ideas, see (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, pp. 290, 469–470, 476–478, vol. 2, 75, 105, 146–151, 218, 267–279, 320, 341, 432, 461, 471), and for his opponents, see (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 2, pp. 15–16, 72, 234, 393–395, 407–408).

36. Fahredden gives a list of Utîz İmenî's supporters (Fahredden, 1900–1908, vol. 1, p. 331).

37. For two very good analyses of these debates, see (Kemper, 1998; Maraş, 2002).

past generations, the narratives of those who traveled and actually saw far-away places, and occasionally, on a limited number of mostly religious texts. Typically, Muslim communities in the Volga-Ural region turned to Islamic scholars for the transmission and interpretation of those narrations and texts. The Islamic scholars were literate, they had the skills and privilege to authorize Islamic traditions, and they were actually connected beyond their local Muslim communities. All of these distinctions located them at the center of an exchange of ideas and influence among Volga-Ural Muslims. From that exchange emerged a regional Muslim domain: a metaspace belonging primarily to Volga-Ural Muslims within the Russian empire: a world where Volga-Ural Muslims felt familiar and comfortable.

One can find parallels to the above-explained patterns of travel, communication, and interconnectivity among the Muslims of other regions around the world. And Islamic scholars connected Volga-Ural Muslims to those networks, to a transregional Muslim domain that transcended the borders of the Russian Empire too. Neither the Volga-Ural Muslim domain nor the broader, transregional Muslim domain that it was involved in owed their existence to the Russian empire. However, the Volga-Ural Muslim domain existed within the Russian empire, and therefore, it was connected to and partly shaped by the Russian state. At least since the late sixteenth century, the mosques in which the Islamic scholars of the Volga-Ural region served as mullahs existed under the jurisdiction of Russian imperial laws or they were destroyed as a result of the decisions of Russian imperial authorities. Imperial authorities did not establish or control Sufi networks, but they still influenced them by measures such as exiling Daghestani Sufi shaykhs to the Volga-Ural region. It was the Russian state that destroyed income-producing charitable endowments in the Volga-Ural region. The steamboats that carried Hajj travelers and students from Russian Black Sea ports to Istanbul and Jeddah belonged to companies that were incorporated according to Russian imperial laws (Kane, 2015). And finally, aside from these limited and indirect sources of influence, imperial authorities directly contacted and tried to regulate Islamic scholars with the purpose of benefiting from their services in the administration of the empire's Muslim communities. The single most important Muslim institution that mediated between those communities and the Russian state, the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly, emerged from the efforts of Russian statesmen to incorporate Islamic scholars into the administration of the empire's Muslim subjects. Therefore, until the late-nineteenth century, in the absence or paucity of other agents who could join in the tasks of holding Muslim communities together in the Russian empire and mediating their interactions with the larger world, it was the Islamic scholars who fulfilled these functions among Volga-Ural Muslims and defined the contours of their collective experience.

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