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Bashkirii v Rossiiskoi imperii: mestnye osobennosti, regional'nye sravneniia, i obshcheimperskie praktiki, 1552-1917

A new appreciation for the development of regional studies has been one very promising aspects of historical writing since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Volga-Urals region has benefitted from strong work by scholars from each of these parts of the world. In developing our understanding of the region, however, we need more systematic and self-conscious attempts 1) to break the region down into its constituent parts in order to assess their connections with one another; and 2) compare the region as a whole with other regions of the empire. These tasks are both large, of course. I do not claim to analyze the region in all its dimensions, nor can I hope to compare it to all other regions of the empire. Rather, first I will look within the region and compare one part of this region, Bashkiriia with Ufa province at its core, with Kazan—the intellectual and administrative center of the region. Then I will look out from the Volga-Urals region to situate Volga-Urals region in the broader pattern of imperial expansion. What made the region similar to or different from other parts of the empire?

With respect to the first question, I will examine in particular how the expansion of the empire placed neighboring provinces Kazan and Bashkiriia in different positions. First, I will consider the implications of the very different ways the two areas entered the empire: Kazan by violent conquest and Bashkiriia by the local elites' swearing of allegiance to the tsar. Second, I will examine the different policies of land tenure for native peoples and the importance of Bashkir landholding. Third, I will discuss the relative weakness of the Church and of missionary activity in Ufa compared to that of Kazan. Fourth, I will assess the role of non-Russian elites in the institutional development of the two provinces to explain how Ufa acquired a reputation as a “red” zemstvo and Kazan a “black” or clerical one. I conclude this portion of my paper by arguing that generalizations drawn from one place cannot be applied to the Volga-Ural region as a whole.

With respect to the second question, I will examine what distinguishes both the Volga-Urals region and Bashkiriia from other parts of the empire. Since collapse of the Soviet Union, the western and southern borderlands of the Russian Empire have received the greatest attention as regions where diverse populations were “homogenized” through political violence and deportations and where tensions between Orthodox Christian and Muslim peoples were most acute and destructive in the twentieth century. Yet, the relative lack of violence in Bashkiriia and the Volga-Urals region bear greater scrutiny beyond simple acknowledgment of the great importance of the Western and southern borderlands' proximity to international boundaries in Europe's war-torn twentieth century. I will examine the timing of the Volga-Urals region's entry into the empire and the role of the

nobility in multiethnic or multinational institutions in the imperial period. I will conclude by arguing that the Volga-Urals region is an important counter-model to the pattern of ethnic and interconfessional relations in the Western and southern borderlands, and that its distinctiveness is, to a great extent, a legacy of its development during the imperial period.