

Introduction: Semipalatinsk and the Islamic History of Imperial Russia

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1 Madrasas were without question the most prestigious of Muslim religious institutions in imperial Russia. The concentration of madrasas in rural areas tended to be relatively low, even in areas of dense Muslim settlement. While every mosque typically supported a madrasah, districts with thirty or forty mosques typically supported only a handful of madrasas, if any. In cities madrasas tended to be more numerous and permanently established. In this respect Semipalatinsk, with its nine permanently functioning madrasas, must be viewed as being on par with the largest Muslim centers of imperial Russia, including Kazan, Orenburg, and Astrakhan. Cf. Alice J. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: The Islamic World of Novgorodsk District and the Kazakh Inner Horde, 1780-1910* (Leiden, 2001), 272-255.