

## **First Russian Schools for Muslims in Tbilisi (Georgia)**

**Nani Gelovani**

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University,  
Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Oriental Studies,  
Associated professor; Georgia

### **ABSTRACT**

The city of Tbilisi (its pre-1936 international designation – Tiflis), which became a center of Russian Administration in the Caucasus region since 1801, a residence of the Caucasus Viceroy (Namestnik) since 1845 and an administrative center of Tbilisi Governorate since 1846, was gradually established as an administrative, trade and industrial center of the South Caucasus (Transcaucasia). Through Tbilisi, Russia established diplomatic and trade relations with Eastern countries.

In 1847-1849, the first Russian schools for Muslims in the South Caucasus, separately for Shiites and Sunnis, were opened in Tbilisi specifically, where the Caucasus Viceroy could closely supervise “the progress and success of this establishment”. This first experience of Muslim schools was a success: the population, who refrained from sending their children to parochial schools for religious reasons, showed sympathy to them. Opening educational establishments for Muslims controlled by the Tsarist Administration in the South Caucasus can be explained by Russia’s interest to promote the swift adaptation of the Muslims of the South Caucasus to Russian legal and cultural environment and by the need for training clerks among local residents to work at the Administration.

The present report will consider the history of the first Russian Muslim schools in the South Caucasus, in Tbilisi in particular (charter, educational program, teaching aids, pedagogical staff, privileges for the graduates, estimate, etc.) based on the materials found in the archival documents and periodicals.

**Key words:** Archival documents; Education; Russian Empire; South Caucasus; Tbilisi.

## 1. Introduction

The education of *Inorodtsy* (aliens) was allotted as an issue on its own in the state concept of the educational policy of multiethnic and multi-confession Russian Empire. The non-Slavic population subordinate to the Empire, including Muslims, fell under this category (Slocum, 1998). The “colonial acculturation” envisaged the engagement of the Muslims in the state educational system by using secular education and the Russian language. However, the first attempts of the XVIII century were not successful. The Muslims were afraid of coercive Christianization, preferred to ‘keep off’ from state schools and limit themselves with religious schools – mektebs and madrasas (Altstadt, 2016). In the XIX century, various projects to open secular schools for Muslims in Privolzhye, Ural, Caucasus and Crimea were actively considered.

In 1840, the Caucasus Committee and Special Commission were established, which were charged with developing the policy to reform the educational establishments of the region. Since this moment, the education of Muslims was mainly based on two educational systems: traditional or religious and Russian.

A new phase in the development of the Muslim education system started in the Caucasus during the times of M. Vorontsov, the Viceroy of the Caucasus (1844-1854). M. Vorontsov, who was well aware of the variance of the Islam functioning in the Caucasus, gave a special importance to organizing so called Muslim Schools in training Muslim clergy. “These schools will be very useful for us to bring up mullahs (local Islamic clerics) and qadis (judges), who will then be allotted across the region with the benefit of not only speaking Russian well, but also of being at least loyal and thankful to us for their education” (AKAK, 1885). Under Vorontsov’s leadership, a long-term preparatory works were accomplished, such as finding the suitable building, developing the educational programs and solving individual economic issues.

## 2. Shiite and Sunni Muslim schools in Tbilisi

On April 18, 1847, a charter of Shiite Muslim school (Muslim school of the Teachings of Ali) was published, which, like other deeds, bore the inscription of His Imperial Highness (Emperor of Russia Nicholas I, 1825-1855): “To be approved as for a two year trial period” (Guniava, 2013). On December 12, 1847, an official ceremony to open the first Russian Muslim school in the Caucasus was held (Caucasus, 1847).

Under the Charter (Guniava, 2013), Shiite Muslim school was established at Tbilisi mosque for Shiite Muslim children of the Transcaucasia. The school was founded under the immediate supervision of the Viceroy of the Caucasus. The Viceroy, at his discretion, used to appoint a curator out of the Russian officials working in Tbilisi. An honorable Shiite supervisor among the dignified representatives of Nobility was selected as well. The School was governed immediately by Akhund (religious leader) of Tbilisi Shiite mosque [Charter – Chapter I, article 1-6].

At the beginning, the School had two teachers: 1) one of a Muslim course and 2) another of a Russian course. The Muslim course teacher was selected by Akhund and honorable supervisors among the persons having relevant education and high morality and being proficient in teaching. The Russian course teacher was selected by the tutor immediately among the Russians speaking Tatar/Azeri language or among the Muslims fluently speaking Russian. Teachers were appointed and dismissed by the Viceroy of the Caucasus by the official application of the curator. In case the School size or courses increased, in line with the Charter, an application would be submitted to the Viceroy of the Caucasus to appoint two more teachers of a Muslim course and one teacher of a Russian course. The School had one “special servant”, who was subordinate to Akhund [Charter – Chapter I, article 7-8].

They taught the following subjects at School: 1. Tatar (Azeri) language; 2. Persian language; 3. Arabic language; 4. Russian language; 4. Short course of Geography; 6. Short course of History; 7. Arithmetic; 8. General concept of Russian judicial system; 9. Calligraphy. The first three languages were taught by the Muslim course teacher, while the Russian language and other subjects were taught by the Russian course teacher [Charter – Chapter II, article 10]. The teaching process was divided into three classes: Tatar/Azeri, Persian and Arabian, each taking 2 years. As a result, the full course took 6 years. The Russian language and other subjects were taught in each form as additional classes and were limited to maximum 1/3 of the total classes, i.e. 8 lessons a week. Each lesson lasted for an hour and a half and total 4 lessons were given a day: 2 in the morning and 2 in the afternoon, after the dinner. The teaching process took place every day except on Muslim holidays. The Viceroy of the Caucasus assigned subjects in each class and planned the holiday time at his discretion [Charter – Chapter II, article 11-16].

Children aged 8-12 went to the first, or Tatar/Azeri, class any time of the year. Pupils having finished the Tatar class with good marks in all subjects were admitted to the second, i.e. Persian,

class. Besides, the children no older than 14, who did not go to the first class, were admitted to the second. However, they had to prove at the examinations that they had sufficient knowledge to attend the second class. Only the pupils from the Persian class having passed all exams could go to their third, or Arabian, class [Charter – Chapter II, article 17-19].

The pupils did not pay for study. Cost of maintenance and educational materials were paid by the parents. Acceptance at or dismissal of the pupils from school, if their parents wished so, was decided by the curator. The examinations to check the pupils' knowledge were held twice a year: by Akhund after the first half of the academic year and before the holidays in the presence of the curator. At the end of each academic year, following the private examination, the school held a public examination. By Akhund's official application, successful pupils were awarded with books, certificates of achievements and other honorable rewards [Charter – Chapter II, article 21-28].

The Shiite Muslim School was established at Tbilisi Shiite Mosque (there was a house opposite Shah Abbas Mosque, which belonged to the same Mosque and it was possible to open a school for 50 pupils in this newly refurbished building). Consequently, the economic costs were to be covered from Mosque incomes. As for other costs, such as the compensations for Akhund, as for the school supervisor, and other staff, they were covered by Viceroy's treasury chancellery (from the extraordinary funds). At the beginning, the government allotted 500 Rubles for the School to buy books and other educational materials. Responsible for the cost estimates was Akhund [Charter – Chapter III, 29-34]. At graduation, the pupils were awarded with school certificates.

The annual maintenance costs for Tbilisi Shiite Muslim School were as follows: 1 Akhund – 200 Rubles; 2. Teacher of a Muslim course – 400 Rubles; Teacher of a Russian course – 400 Rubles; Servant – 80 Rubles; Stationery expenses – 25 Rubles. Total – 1105 Rubles (Guniava, 2013).

On May 10, 1848, a permit to establish Tbilisi Sunni Muslim School (Muslim school of the Teachings of Umar) was issued and the School Charter was approved (Guniava, 2013). However, officially, the School opened on January 15, 1849. In May of 1849, 1305 Rubles were allotted to maintain Tbilisi Sunni Muslim School. The School staff and costs of its maintenance were officially approved by Emperor Nicholas I and the deed of approval was then signed by high officials of the Empire. The annual maintenance costs for Tbilisi Sunni Muslim School were as follows: 1. Supervisor of the school, Mufti of a Sunni mosque – 200 Rubles (in addition to the basic salary); 2. Teacher of a Muslim course – 400 Rubles; 3. Teacher of a Russian course – 400 Rubles; 4. Servant

– 80 Rubles; Rent for school building, heating and lighting — 200 Rubles; 5. stationery expenses – 25 Rubles. Total – 1305 Rubles (Guniava, 2013).

Tbilisi Russian Shiite and Sunni Muslim Schools were subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and they had identical Charters. However, unlike Tbilisi Shiite Muslim School, which was managed by Akhund of Tbilisi Shiite Mosque, Tbilisi Sunni Muslim School was headed by Mufti of a Sunni Mosque. The Shiite School was financed from the treasury of Viceroy of the Caucasus and incomes received from the Mosque waqfs, while the Sunni Muslim School was financed only from the treasury of Viceroy of the Caucasus.

Until 1853, the curator of Tbilisi Muslim Schools was orientalist N. Khanikov, the eminent diplomat and high official in the Caucasian viceroyalty. There is no immediate proof of the charter of Tbilisi Muslim Schools being written by N. Khanikov, but indirect data, including the letters of his contemporaries prove his authorship.

Tbilisi Shiite and Sunni Muslim Schools had special admittance for poor Muslim children with full state finance. For example, in 1856, Tbilisi Shiite Muslim School had 4 such pupils, with 288 Roubles assigned for their study (6 Roubles a month for each pupil), while 648 Roubles were assigned for teaching 9 such pupils at Sunni Muslim School (Guniava, 2013).

The graduates of the Muslim Schools enjoyed certain advantages with their further studies and employment. If a graduate decided to continue his studies at Tbilisi Gymnasium, he had the right to refuse studying Latin, French and German languages. If he went to military service, the term to receive the first officer rank halved for him. This was strictly criticized by S.S. Uvarov, the Public Education Minister. Besides, if the graduate wished, he could use the hours allotted for the European languages to study the Sharia with mullah (Guniava, 2013; Urushadze, 2016).

The Muslim course at Tbilisi Shiite and Sunni Muslim Schools were delivered by famous teachers, who had received monetary rewards, orders and medals. For instance, Fazil Khan, a famous Persian poet and expert in oriental languages, was invited as the first teacher of the Muslim course at Shiite School (Alexidze, 2003). In 1861-1876, Akhundzade, Shaykh-ul-Islam of the Transcaucasia in 1894-1907, delivered the Muslim course. In the absence of text-books and educational materials, Akhundzade prepared the text-book of his own and delivered lessons by using his own manuscripts. Azeri religious leader and a leading teacher Hussein Efendi Gaibov, delivered a Muslim course at Tbilisi Sunni Muslim School in 1858-1884. On January 12, 1884, he was

appointed a Chairman of the Transcaucasian Sunni Muslim Religious Board (Transcaucasian Mufti) and since then, he served as a staff-inspector of the Sunni Muslim School (Caucasus Educational District, 1884).

Tbilisi Muslim schools attracted the pupils from their first days. In 1856, Shiite Muslim School had as many as 42 pupils. In 1890, Shiite Muslim School had 53 pupils, while Sunni Muslim School had 30 pupils. In 1896, 57 pupils studied at Shiite School and 40 pupils studied at Sunni School. As the archives evidence, due to the increased number of pupils in 1908, the funds to invite two more teachers were allotted to Tbilisi Sunni School. (Educational institutions, 1890; Data about non-Christian schools, 1896; The case of the release of funds, 1908).

In 1911 (following the revolutions of Iran in 1905-1911 and of Turkey in 1908-1909), I. Vorontsov-Dashkov, Viceroy of the Caucasus, put forward the question of reform of the system of education. On October 19 of the same year, at the session of the Viceroy's Council, he charged N. F. Rudolf, the curator of the educational region of the Caucasus with developing the project to transform Tbilisi Sunni and Shiite Muslim Schools. During the session, it was outlined that the "present types of Sunni and Shiite Schools fail to fully meet the requirements they were established for" (Ganich, 2011; In the Viceroy's Council, 1911). A question to transfer the given schools from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Public Education was also to consider. However, foreign and local cataclysms hampered the implementation of these plans. The archived documents make it clear that by 1916, these schools were still subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which approved their charters, staff and programs (The case of the release of funds, 2016).

## Conclusion

Tbilisi Shiite and Sunni Muslim Schools were established as early as in 1847-1848 for a trial period, but they existed to approximately 1921 and had a great influence on the Azeri population of the Caucasian region and changed their attitude to the Russian education. These schools were financed by the Caucasian Viceroyalty despite functioning at the mosques and under an immediate supervision of the highest religion persons.

Incorporation of the Azeri, Persian and Arabian languages in the curricula of the given schools, allowed the Russian Government to call them Muslim and in fact conceal the idea of the Russian education beyond this term.

The Muslims of the Caucasus were given the opportunity to give the necessary education to their children in the way not violating Islamic laws.

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