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**RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE**  
**KARACHAY PEOPLE IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup>-20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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**Abstract**

This article deals with the role of religious educational institutions in the development of the Karachay people. The authors analyze the sources on this problem and demonstrate its controversial nature. Based on some sources and archive materials we showed that the religious schools in Karachay were a major factor behind the improvement of the cultural level of the populace due to their teachers. This is especially important because until the mid-1870es there were no secular schools or teachers and the clergy were the only knowledge holders. This work rightfully notes that viewing religion as hostile towards or incompatible with enlightenment is biased and un-academic. The process of comprehensive religious education that began in the 20th century provided the Karachay with the opportunity to establish confessional educational institutions with specific structures and features. This article compares such types of Muslim educational institutions as maktab and madrasah and shows their composition and sizes in the Karachay settlements of the period. The authors acknowledge that as Russia's position in the Caucasus strengthened, the tsarist administration opted to replace maktab and madrasahs with state schools. This Russification policy of the monarchs could lead to the loss of religion by the Caucasian nations, including the Karachay, and their transformation into the nondescript mass. This research pays special attention to the new-method madrasahs or Dzhadidist schools that appeared in Karachay in the late 19th century. In conclusion, we claim that religious educational institutions had a positive effect on the spiritual development of the Karachay people.

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*Keywords:* Religious education, confessional school, creed-teaching, madrasah, maktab, Dzhadidist schools



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## 1. Introduction

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, religious education was a serious driver behind the spiritual development of the Karachay people. The comprehensive education began in the 20th century and it drew the Karachay to be a part of Islamic enlightenment. This could happen through opening Muslim educational institutions and teaching people to write in Arabic. These educational institutions were the only source of basic knowledge since secular education was inexistent. In this case, we may speak of the positive effect of these educational institutions on the overall development of the nation.

On the other hand, this problem is viewed differently in various historical works. The role of confessional educational institutions is a focus of attention of numerous researchers, who represent two opposite views. Some believe that maktab and madrasahs did not provide any deep knowledge to their students and even stultified them. These authors claim that any education was impossible since the teachers lacked a deep understanding of their subjects. Other researchers have a positive view of religious educational institutions and their role in the establishment of the nation's world-view.

Because of this, the fact-based analysis of the problem is important to understand it avoiding any biased approaches. Religious education in Karachay in the 19th – early 20th centuries was an important phenomenon. This can be proved by a number of well-known Russian social and political activists and researchers writing about the number of Muslim educational institutions in the North Caucasus. According to tsar's steward in the region, M.S. Vorontsov, “there are 700 mosques with schools and about 3000 mullahs per 500,000 of local Muslim men. They deal with the primary and proper education of the young Muslims” (as cited in Tkachenko, 2006, p. 125). Ya.M. Neverov, the curator of the Caucasian Educational District in the late 1860es, noted that the average number of students per madrasah in mountain areas was 45 thousand people. By the beginning of the 20th century, there were 1372 madrasahs and 9378 maktab in the country (Tkachenko, 2006). Sysoev (1913), in his work on Karachay's Geography, Everyday Life, and History acknowledged that auls Duut, Dzhazlyk, Mara, Tashkepyur (Kamennomost), Synty (Nizhnyaya Teberda) had 1 mosque each, and Khurzuk had 2. In Uchkulan, there were 5 working mosques, and there were 7 in Kart-Dzurt. These figures show that madrasahs and maktab were widely spread types of confessional educational institutions in the region, including the Karachay. Later on, religious education was reformed and a number of critical changes occurred.

## 2. Problem Statement

One of the key drivers behind the development of the Karachay people in the 19th – early 20th centuries was religious education, which was implemented through the Islamic educational institutions operating during the period. This type of education became comprehensive in Karachay since the 19th century. In this period, the Karachay could open confessional educational institutions. According to the classification developed by the Ministry of Public Instruction of the Russian Empire, a confessional school is an educational institution designed for students of the same creed or faith. They were divided into 3 groups: 1) purely confessional (creed) schools that only taught religious subjects. Throughout their education, students got skills in reading the texts from a specific source, minimum knowledge of dogmas,

as well as legal and household relationships based on the religious canons. Maktabas in mosques were the main type of such schools; 2) confessional and general education schools, in which other subjects necessarily complemented religious disciplines. These were the madrasahs that operated in all of the North-Caucasian republics; 3) creed schools in mosques taught future clerics or teachers (Tkachenko, 2006).

Madrasahs in Karachay were a type of secondary school or college. Their syllabuses had general education subjects related to Islam. These included philosophy, theology, logic, mathematics, as well as history, geography, medicine, and law. Madrasahs were supported by alms from individuals or the entire Muslim community.

Historical sources have been long dominated by a biased assessment of confessional educational institutions that came down to denying that their students could obtain any solid knowledge. We believe that this view is not realistic. Thus, we disagree with Biryulkin (1868), Nevskaya (1964), Uzdenova (1994) who claimed that studying there was limited to mindless rote learning. We believe that the assumption that the teachers in these schools did not know Arabic is wrong because the majority of them got their knowledge from the largest religious centers or Russia and the Eastern countries. They studied many subjects there and put great stress on Arabic. They did not bypass secular subjects as well. It is impossible to assert that religious education was impractical because the experience and the knowledge of Muslim activists were in demand. In those days, they became knowledge holders in Karachay auls.

Bittirova (1999) claims that madrasahs and maktabas were the same: “The study programs in religious schools in Karachay and Balkaria – madrasahs – are more suited to maktabas, the basic level of education. The course of study lasted 3–4 years. During the first year, students (sokhtas) got the hang of the Arabic script. If a sokhta could read Yasyn (surah 36 of Koran) by the end of the year, it was considered that he successfully completed the first year of study. Yasyn was usually published as a separate book with the Arabic alphabet in the beginning. During the second year, students covered Aptyuok, the seventh part of the Koran, which also came as a separate book. Students studied the Koran for 3–4 years, and during the last 2 years, they covered other kitabs (books), e.g. the lives of Muslim prophets or faigambar. They mostly describe Prophet Mohammed’s wars against the kuffar, the deeds and lives of his family and friends (Bittirova, 1999).

Researchers note that by the late 19th – early 19th century there were one or more primary schools in mosques in every Karachay aul. According to Tekeev (1989), all the larger settlements in Karachay and Balkaria had mosques in the post-reform period and gained prestige through them. The researcher claims that “tiyre (quarters) with mosques were especially respected, especially if mullah-efendi was born in the same tukum”. These auls “had several mosques, one of which was always central: it was a place where all the community members gathered every Friday for zhuma namaz” (Tekeev, 1989, p. 52).

Facts show that in the early 19th century, there was a popular Muslim school of Sarkit-mullah. Legend has it that there were 60 students in it. The mullah and his disciples died of the plague epidemic between 1806–1812.

In the late 19th–20th centuries, 100 mosques were built in Karachay. This is when Islam was at its highest. These mosques include the Dzhegutinskaya one, the Vekhne-Uchkulanskaya one, etc. The mosque in aul Uchkulan is a special one. Since 1909, it was run by Hajji-Myrza Erkenov. The mosque

had a madrasah, where people from Dagestan, Kabarda, and some other regions obtained an education. It taught Arabic and Koran. Its graduates could enter the largest madrasah in Temir-Khan-Shur (Buynaksk) without entrance exams. Erkenov (2005) was an expert in Muslim law. This level of knowledge can be estimated by the fact that he successfully passed the exams (imtikhan) that Arabic alims (scholars) held every 5 years.

For comparison, we should note that in 1873, there were 42 madrasahs in Kabarda and Balkaria, according to Kopachev (1964). In 1909, there were 105 of them. During this time, the number of students in these institutions increased from 430 to 1882, i.e. by almost 4.5 times (Kopachev, 1964).

On March 19th, 1909, the head of Nalchik district of Terek Oblast reported to the curator of the Caucasian Educational District that “Nalchik district has 105 mosque schools with 1882 students and 106 teachers. Mosque schools only teach Arabic (Koran), and the teachers are local mullahs. These schools are non-permanent, and local communities do not fund them, they are only supported by alms” (Public education in Kabarda and Balkaria in the 19th – early 20th centuries).

The strengthening of Russia’s positions in the Caucasus resulted in dramatic changes in the operations of religious educational institutions. The government decided to replace makhtabs and madrasahs with state schools. In March 1877, the curators of the Caucasian Educational District published a circular note “On the attitude of public school administrations to Muslim schools”, which stipulated that the administrations of public schools and district authorities must control confessional schools strictly.

The Caucasian nations did not understand and resisted the monarch’s policies. This is proved by the evidence provided by the head of the 1st section of the Batalpashinsky district of Kuban Oblast. He mentions a poll among the respected locals from all of the Karachay communities on closing madrasahs and creating state schools in their place. Its results were negative. The locals linked their hopes for the strengthening of religion with the institutions that taught Arabic and the Koran. Because of this, the Muslims opted for the establishment of new confessional schools rather than their ditching. The public opinion of the residents of Vorontsovo-Karachayevski aul was “if we do not open a madrasah, our children shall forget about religion and stall their development” (Tkachenko, 2006, p. 165).

The opening of new-method Dzhadidist schools invented by Izmailbey Gasprinsky, a Crimean Tatar educator, columnist, and reformer of the traditional way of life of Russian Muslims. This was supported by the advanced education activists who wanted to reform religious education. The famous pedagogue A.O. Chernyaevsky claimed that it was necessary to start “teaching arithmetics and, where possible, the Russian language” in makhtabs among other changes in the operation of Islamic schools (The history of North Caucasian nations ..., 1988).

In the 1880s and 1890s, I. Gasprinsky developed a program to introduce new education methods to overcome the backwardness of Muslims in the Russian Empire. Among the key principles, Gasprinsky mentioned the simplicity and availability of books, a reform of the Arabic alphabet, and the selective secularization of schools. The first new-method madrasah appeared in Bakhchisaray, Crimea, in 1883.

I. Gasprinsky educated many famous culture and education activists in North Caucasus, Volga Region, and Dagestan. Among them were such Karachay-Balkarian educators as I. Abaev, U. Aliev, S. Shakhmurzaev, etc.

The late 19th century was marked by the opening of new-method madrasahs in all the Muslim regions of Russia, including Karachay. The new method primarily stressed the changes in the study program. Instead of rote learning of Koran and mastering the Arabic graphics and grammar, a set of secular subjects were introduced. More attention was paid to natural sciences. These were complemented with history, literature, and the bases of rhetorics. Thus, the new-method madrasah teachers passed a resolution that stipulated a synthesis of Islam and sciences at their convention.

Literacy was taught through speaking in new-method schools. Koran was studied through singing. A lot of attention was paid to dramatic reading. The bases of calligraphy were also taught. Special requirements were set for the students' handwriting (khat).

After the Koran course, sokhtas (students) had to pass an exam (imtikhan) which was held by a religious teacher from another confessional school.

According to Bittirova (1999), a doctor of philology, "after the positions of new-method madrasahs in Balkaria and Karachay was strengthened, a specific system of using study books appeared in the late 19th – early 20th century. Books published mainly in Temirkhan-Shur were studied in madrasahs in the following order: Alifba (spelling book); Amisilya (Arabic grammar book); Koran; Tajund (the rules of reading Koran); Iyman-Islam (introduction to the key ideas of Islam); Shuurutis-Salyam or Nuurul-Izakh (the rules of namaz); Wikfi (the advanced ideas of Islam); Dinkuuzi (a code of rightful and sinful deeds); Kuduri (the rules of social relations); Faraiz (law). The learning of religious subjects was based on the key principles of pedagogic and moved from simple to difficult, from well-known to unknown. The study of Muslim subjects could be interrupted at any stage. If a sokhta had an opportunity to continue with the studies, he could do so at a later time, starting with the book at which his previous studies stopped (Bittirova, 1999).

The new-method Dzhadidist schools were highly appreciated by the cultural figures, including the Karachay ones. Great educator Khubiev in 1911 proved their contribution to increasing the level of people's education and culture. At the same time, he expressed his regrets that such schools were scarce in Karachay.

### **3. Research Questions**

In this research, we focussed on the following: Firstly, madrasahs and maktabas as the main types of the first confessional schools in Karachay; secondly, the analysis of the tsar administration's reforms of religious education; thirdly, the evolution of religious schools and the operation of new-method Dzhadidist madrasahs.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The goal of this research work is to analyze the functioning of religious schools in Karachay, determine their role in the spiritual development of the Karachay people, and review the policies of the Russian government concerning confessional schools.

## 5. Research Methods

In this research, we employed a systemic approach. The main principle for us was historicism. This stipulates using the chronological method, comparative method, retrospective analysis, etc. These methods help us perform a fact-based analysis of the historical material. Following the historicism principles, we reviewed the main types of religious schools in Karachay, their evolution in the 19th – 20th centuries, and the education policies of the Russian monarchy.

The systemic approach helped identify the attitude of the government to the religious education of Muslim nations, their respective policies, and the effects of Islamic schools on the level of public education.

## 6. Findings

What was the role of religious schools in the life of the Karachay people? What was their place in the social and cultural life of the region? Why did the tsar administration opt for a stricter policy towards them, as its position in the Caucasus strengthened? The authors of this article received answers to these questions through the study of the history of confessional schools and state policies concerning the Muslim nations of the Caucasus.

Since religious education was the only source of knowledge in the region where no secular schools operated, it helped increase the education level of the locals. Despite the fact that originally maktab and madrasahs did not teach secular subjects, the knowledge and skills their graduates got helped promote the distribution of religious literacy. Teachers working in these schools graduated from prestigious Islamic schools in the largest Muslim centers of Russia and other countries. Thus, they could introduce the achievement of Arabic culture to their countrymen.

The tightening of policies was aligned with the general course of the tsar administration's activities to Russify the nations of Caucasus and discriminate against Muslims. These were the ideas behind the replacement of maktab and madrasahs with state schools.

Education reforms and the establishment of new-methods Dzhadidist schools were a step forward in the improvement of religious education.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, religious education in Karachay in the 19th – early 20th centuries underwent specific changes. The first confessional schools that we spoke about in this article gave purely religious knowledge. The basic ones were maktab that provided primary education and madrasahs that provided secondary education. During the period in question, madrasahs were more widespread in Karachay. They were established in mosques in almost all large auls. They taught well-known religious activists of the time who graduated from the largest centers of religious knowledge and passed this knowledge to their countrymen. Maktab and madrasahs had a significant impact on the local's knowledge of Arabic script.

The tight policies of the tsar administration striving to ditch Muslim schools were frowned on by the locals as they saw a threat to their religion in these actions.

New-method Dzhadidist schools teaching a combination of religious and secular subjects had a great impact on the improvement of the culture and education among the graduates in Karachay.

The positive impact of the schools in question was not small, and thus, the idea that religious education was useless is false.

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