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ЖАҢА ЖӘНЕ
ҚАЗІРГІ ЗАМАН ТАРИХЫ

NEW AND MODERN
HISTORY

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e-mail: mirzahan.egamberdiyev@gmail.com**LEGISLATIVE AND INTELLIGENCE METHODS
OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE TO SUPPRESS ISLAMIC INFLUENCE
IN TURKESTAN
(late 19th – early 20th century)**

Abstract. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the Turkestan region was a key area of the Russian Empire's colonial policy, strategically positioned between Afghanistan, Iran, and Eastern Turkestan. In addition to its geopolitical significance, it featured a complex ethnopolitical structure, inhabited by a Turkic-Muslim population with deep-rooted sedentary and nomadic traditions. These characteristics hindered the implementation of Russian administrative norms and limited the spread of imperial ideological concepts. In response, the tsarist administration developed a system of legislative and administrative measures aimed at weakening the influence of Islam and integrating the region into the imperial framework. Among the most significant measures were restrictions on the activities of madrasas and Sharia courts, increased control over the clergy, regulation of pilgrimage routes, and the introduction of mandatory registration of the Muslim population. To implement these policies, specialized governmental and intelligence agencies were established to collect statistical data, monitor religious sentiments, and conduct covert operations among the local population. However, the policy of regulating Islam failed to achieve its objectives: the imposed restrictions led to a rise in religious and national consciousness, which ultimately contributed to the growth of modernist and reformist movements in the region. This study analyzes the legal and administrative mechanisms employed by the imperial authorities to manage Islam in Turkestan, focusing on key legislative initiatives, the activities of special control bodies, and their impact on the region's socio-political processes. The research is based on the principles of historicism, retrospective analysis, and the study of normative legal acts regulating the status of Islam in the Russian Empire.

Keywords: Turkestan, Russian Empire, colonial policy, Islam, administrative control, legal regulation, intelligence operations.

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e-mail: mirzahan.egamberdiyev@gmail.com**Ресей империясының Түркістанда ислам ықпалын әлсіретуге бағытталған
заңнамалық және барлау әдістері
(XIX ғ. соңы – XX ғ. басы)**

Аңдатпа. XIX ғасырдың соңы – XX ғасырдың басында Түркістан өлкесі Ресей империясының отаршылдық саясатының негізгі аймақтарының бірі болды, оның стратегиялық маңызы Ауғанстан, Иран және Шығыс Түркістанмен шектесуінен көрінді. Геосаяси рөлінен бөлек, бұл өңір өзіндік этносаяси құрылымымен ерекшеленді, онда терең отырықшы-көшпелі дәстүрлері бар түркі-мұсылман халқы өмір сүрді. Бұл ерекшеліктер ресейлік әкімшілік нормаларын енгізуге кедергі жасап, империялық идеологиялық концепциялардың таралуын шектеді. Осыған жауап ретінде патша әкімшілігі исламның ықпалын әлсіретуге және өңірді империяның бірыңғай кеңістігіне интеграциялауға бағытталған заңнамалық және әкімшілік шаралар жүйесін әзірледі. Ең маңызды шаралар қатарында медреселер мен шариғат соттарының қызметін шектеу, діни қызметкерлерді қатаң бақылауға алу, қажылыққа баруды реттеу және мұсылман халықтың міндетті есебін енгізу болды. Бұл міндеттерді жүзеге асыру үшін статистикалық деректерді жинау, діни көңіл-күйді бақылау және жергілікті халық арасында барлау жұмыстарын жүргізумен айналысатын мамандандырылған мемлекеттік және құпия органдар құрылды. Алайда исламды реттеу саясаты өз мақсатына толық жете алмады: енгізілген шектеулер аймақта діни және ұлттық сананың күшеюіне алып келіп, нәтижесінде модернистік және реформаторлық қозғалыстардың белсенді дамуына

ықпал етті. Бұл зерттеу Ресей империясының Түркістандағы исламды басқаруға бағытталған құқықтық және әкімшілік механизмдерін талдауға арналған. Онда негізгі заңнамалық бастамалар, арнайы бақылау органдарының қызметі және олардың өңірдің әлеуметтік-саяси процестеріне әсері қарастырылады. Жұмыс тарихи әдіснамаға, ретроспективті талдауға және Ресей империясындағы ислам мәртебесін реттейтін нормативтік-құқықтық актілерді зерттеуге негізделген.

Түйін сөздер: Түркістан, Ресей империясы, отаршылдық саясат, ислам, әкімшілік бақылау, құқықтық реттеу, барлау қызметі.

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Introduction

The expansion of the Russian Empire into Turkestan in the latter half of the 19th century was driven not only by geopolitical ambitions but also by the need to impose an effective administrative framework over a predominantly Muslim population. Unlike European provinces integrated into the empire through legal and institutional continuity, Turkestan posed a distinct challenge due to its deeply rooted Islamic traditions and decentralized religious authority. Russian colonial administrators sought to implement governance strategies that would neutralize Islam's influence while consolidating imperial control. However, many of these policies remained largely theoretical or were inconsistently applied, either due to logistical difficulties in governing vast and diverse territories or because they conflicted with the shifting priorities of the tsarist administration. The challenge of religious governance became particularly pronounced as the empire struggled to reconcile its overarching colonial agenda with the complexities of Turkestan's socio-religious landscape.

By the 1860s–1890s, Russian authorities began to formalize their approach to managing Islam, recognizing that existing imperial frameworks designed for Orthodox Christian governance were ill-suited to Turkestan. The Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which oversaw religious affairs across the empire, played a nominal role in regulating Islam. However, in practice, the tsarist administration relied on a combination of ad hoc measures, legal restrictions, and intelligence operations to monitor and control Muslim institutions. Special commissions were established to oversee religious leaders, regulate madrasas, and limit Islamic judicial authority, but these interventions often provoked resistance rather than compliance. This study explores the intersection of colonial governance and religious policy in Turkestan, shedding light on the empire's

broader struggle to integrate Muslim populations while maintaining political stability in its peripheries (Svod zakonov Rossiyskoi imperii, 1857: 21–24). The administration of Muslim affairs within the Russian Empire encompassed a broad spectrum of regulatory functions, including the institutional oversight of religious communities, the authorization of mosque construction, the supervision of Islamic educational institutions, and the financial governance of the Muslim clergy, alongside the enforcement of military conscription policies for Muslim subjects (Arapov, 2001a: 19). To ensure comprehensive surveillance and policy implementation, this bureaucratic apparatus engaged in extensive coordination with both central and provincial authorities. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, jurisdictional rivalries emerged, particularly with the Military Ministry, which exercised control over the Turkestan region and directed intelligence operations concerning the transnational religious affiliations of Russian Muslims with centers in the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and British India. Simultaneously, the establishment of the Asian Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1897 (Arapov, 2004b: 56–58) underscored the imperial government's recognition of Islam as both a domestic and geopolitical concern. The entanglement of these institutions reflects the blurred distinction between internal governance and foreign policy, demonstrating the empire's strategic recalibration in response to the perceived challenges posed by Islamic networks and the broader colonial dynamics of the period.

In the late 19th century, the Russian imperial administration endeavored to codify the legal status of non-Orthodox religious communities, assigning the Ministry of the Interior the responsibility of formulating regulatory frameworks to ensure their governance and adherence to state law. However, the Holy Synod, seeking to consolidate its ecclesiastical authority, advocated for exclusive oversight of these confessions. Prominent within this debate was Synod member V.I. Shemyakin, who

proposed the establishment of a distinct administrative body within the Synod dedicated to supervising non-Orthodox faiths. He envisioned a “*Ministry of Foreign Confessions*” under the jurisdiction of the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, encompassing not only Lutheranism and Catholicism but also Islam, indigenous belief systems, and their respective educational institutions (Antonov, 1907: 499-508). This perspective found favor with Emperor Alexander II, who conveyed his concurrence to the Minister of Internal Affairs, P.A. Valuyev (Dnevnik P.A. Valueva ministra vnutrennih del, 1961: 21-34). However, P.A. Valuyev opposed such a consolidation of religious authority, arguing that the Synod’s restrictive stance on non-Christian communities was at odds with the broader imperial policy of religious accommodation and governance pragmatism. This divergence underscored a fundamental tension between the ecclesiastical ambitions of the Synod and the state’s administrative strategies for managing religious pluralism within the empire (Dnevnik P.A. Valueva ministra vnutrennih del, 1961: 48).

The administration of non-Orthodox religious communities within the Russian Empire was centralized under the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions, an institution operating within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This body was entrusted with the oversight and regulation of religious minorities, ensuring their alignment with imperial policies while systematically monitoring their activities. Led by a director and assisted by a vice-director, the department employed a specialized staff tasked with intelligence gathering and bureaucratic oversight of non-Orthodox confessions throughout the empire. To enhance its operational efficacy, the department also incorporated clergy from various religious traditions as consultants, either in permanent or temporary capacities, to provide doctrinal and administrative guidance. The internal structure of the department was organized into distinct divisions, each fulfilling specific functions crucial to the broader imperial agenda. The Secret Division played a pivotal role in intelligence operations, executing surveillance, gathering classified information, and conducting covert activities both within the empire and abroad. The Mohammedan Division was responsible for managing Islamic religious affairs, regulating Muslim institutions, and overseeing the clergy to ensure compliance with state directives. Additionally, the Statistical and Fiscal Division handled financial administration, including the allocation of salaries, pension distribution, travel re-

imbursements, and overall fiscal management of the department and its subordinate entities (Dzherasi, 2013: 104). The department’s legal framework was enshrined in the *Statutes of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions* and the *Code of Institutions and Statutes for the Administration of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions, Christian and Non-Christian*, which delineated the legal status, institutional organization, and obligations of each religious group within the Russian Empire, effectively integrating them into the imperial governance structure.

The significance of this research stems from two key considerations. First, the legislative foundation governing Islam and Muslim communities in tsarist Russia represents an extensive yet understudied legal-historical framework that necessitates a rigorous scholarly analysis. Second, the Russian Empire’s anti-Muslim policies – particularly as they pertain to regulatory mechanisms and strategies for suppressing Islamic sentiment in Turkestan – remain insufficiently explored in both historical and religious studies. This study aims to critically examine the colonial policies of the Russian Empire, focusing on the administrative techniques employed to regulate and control Muslim communities in Turkestan from the late 19th to the early 20th century. To achieve this objective, several research tasks were undertaken. First, an analysis of pre-revolutionary historiography was conducted to uncover the core principles underpinning the imperial administration’s approach to Islam, thereby elucidating the official anti-Muslim stance embedded in state policy. Second, this study examined the activities of specialized governmental bodies, including both formal and clandestine committees, that were established to monitor and regulate Muslim sentiment throughout the Russian Empire. These efforts not only reveal the systematic nature of imperial control but also underscore the broader intersection of law, governance, and religious suppression within the colonial administration of Turkestan.

Methodology and theoretical basis

Building on the theoretical foundations established by O. Spengler (Spengler 1998: 87), A. Toynbee (Toynbee 2010: 241), I. Danilevsky (Danilevsky 1995: 34), and other scholars in the field of historical methodology, the examination of state confessional relations necessitates an analytical framework grounded in the concept of civilizational development. The institutional approach facilitates

an understanding of the structural dynamics that govern social institutions, elucidating the mechanisms through which the state integrates religious and ethnic communities within its administrative and ideological apparatus. Within this framework, the historical trajectory of state confessional relations in the Russian Empire prior to 1917 is examined in relation to the broader imperial strategy of consolidating control over national peripheries. The formulation and implementation of religious policies including missionary activity, the dissemination of Orthodox Christian doctrine, policies of Russification, and the imposition of Russian language educational systems constituted essential components of imperial governance. The complex interactions between official state institutions and the Muslim population of Turkestan underscore the strategic function of confessional policies as instruments of social regulation, ideological indoctrination, and political consolidation.

The interdisciplinary dimension of this study is advanced through the application of methodological paradigms derived from historical ethnology, particularly the theoretical framework of cultural adaptation as articulated by L. White, J. Stewart (Stewart 1955: 41), and S. V. Lurie (Lurie 1997: 17 21). The adaptation paradigm, when applied to the study of imperial religious policies, provides a critical interpretive lens through which the responses of ethnic and religious communities to systemic transformations can be analyzed. This approach allows for the identification of sociocultural mechanisms that facilitated the integration, accommodation, or resistance of Muslim populations to the regulatory structures imposed by imperial authority. The administrative policies enacted in Turkestan functioned not only as instruments of state control but also as catalysts for indigenous responses that ranged from passive compliance to active resistance. The variability of these responses was contingent upon a range of factors, including the historical agency of Muslim communities, their socio-economic configurations, and the broader geopolitical conditions of the imperial periphery.

By synthesizing institutional analysis with interdisciplinary methodologies, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the Russian Empire's approach to religious governance. The intersection of legal regulatory mechanisms, confessional policies, and ethno-political strategies highlights the multifaceted nature of imperial administration in Turkestan. More broadly, this ana-

lytical framework facilitates a reassessment of the historiographical discourse on state confessional relations, shifting the focus from a monolithic narrative of imperial domination to a more nuanced examination of the reciprocal interactions between governing authorities and subject populations. In doing so, this research advances scholarly debates on the interrelationship between empire, religion, and governance, situating the Russian imperial experience within the wider context of comparative colonial administration.

Research methods

The academic study of state confessional relations in historical perspective requires a sophisticated methodological approach that synthesizes both overarching theoretical paradigms of scientific inquiry and the nuanced analytical tools specific to historical scholarship. Given the diverse and often contentious interpretations of state religious policies, the principle of objectivity emerges as a foundational methodological necessity. This principle necessitates a rigorous, empirically grounded examination of historical processes, free from ideological biases, personal convictions, or prescriptive interpretations of religious institutions. Its application is particularly vital in evaluating the regulatory frameworks and governance structures of the pre-revolutionary era, which shaped state confessional interactions within the imperial domain. Furthermore, the reassessment of Soviet historiography demands an analytical recalibration, as prior narratives were constructed within a highly centralized ideological apparatus that dictated historiographical interpretations in alignment with state-sanctioned political doctrines. A comprehensive scholarly approach must therefore strive to disentangle historical realities from retrospective ideological distortions, facilitating a more precise understanding of the evolution of state confessional policies as mechanisms of governance, integration, and sociopolitical control.

The scholarly examination of state confessional relations in historical perspective necessitates an analytical paradigm that synthesizes political, institutional, and sociocultural dimensions. A rigorous approach demands the identification of causal linkages that elucidate the structural dynamics underpinning distinct configurations of religious governance. As noted by Kazakhstani scholars in the field of religious studies, the interplay between state authority and religious institutions represents a foundational

aspect of political consolidation. Within the colonial apparatus of the Russian Empire, the systematic oversight and regulation of religious structures in peripheral territories served as a crucial mechanism for reinforcing imperial hegemony. The strategic imperatives of state confessional policy aligned seamlessly with the broader objectives of imperial statecraft, wherein religious entities were deliberately assimilated into the administrative and regulatory frameworks that underpinned mechanisms of sociopolitical control and governance.

The corpus of primary sources from the pre-revolutionary period constitutes a critical foundation for scholarly inquiry into imperial religious policy. Among the most salient documents are the *Proceedings of the Special Meeting on the Education of Eastern Aliens*, edited by A. S. Budilovich, and the legislative enactments such as the Decree of December 12, 1904, *On the Protection of Tolerance in Matters of Faith*, alongside the *Imperial Decree to the Governing Senate* issued on the same date. Furthermore, the *Journals of the Special Meeting*, subsequently published under the title *From the History of the National Policy of Tsarism*, provide essential insights into the deliberations that shaped religious policy. Additional archival materials include the *Records of the Interdepartmental Meeting of 1910 1911*, published in 2017, and excerpts from journals of the Special Meeting of 1914, compiled by S. V. Diakin. The *Journal of the Special Meeting on Muslim Affairs*, convened under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on April 29, 1914, represents another crucial source, shedding light on the bureaucratic mechanisms employed in regulating Muslim communities within the imperial domain. These documents collectively offer a substantive evidentiary basis for analyzing the evolution of state confessional policies, the administrative strategies deployed by imperial authorities, and the broader implications of religious governance in the Russian Empire's national peripheries.

Discussion

The sweeping modernization processes that permeated the Muslim world throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were not isolated phenomena but rather integral components of broader global patterns of socio-cultural transformation and economic integration. These developments, characterized by the increasing interconnectivity of societies and the diffusion of ideological and technologi-

cal innovations, have been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry. While a considerable body of literature has amassed a wealth of empirical data and analytical perspectives, divergences in interpretation have emerged due to the evolving methodological frameworks and ideological underpinnings that have shaped historical scholarship across different periods and intellectual traditions. The historiographical landscape, particularly in the context of Russian imperial and Soviet-era scholarship, reveals the extent to which state-centered narratives and political imperatives influenced representations of Islam and Muslim societies.

A prevailing tendency in pre-revolutionary Russian historiography was the portrayal of Islam as a doctrinally flawed system characterized by fanaticism, political despotism, and social immobility. This perspective aligned with broader imperial objectives, which sought to rationalize policies of strict administrative oversight and aggressive missionary activity in colonized Muslim territories. A case in point is the work of I.N. Berezin, whose writings exemplify the Orientalist biases of his era. In a polemical critique, Berezin categorically dismissed the Prophet Muhammad as a false prophet and Islam as a regressive and culturally insular doctrine, devoid of any constructive civilizational contributions (Beryozin, 1855: 107). His stance was not merely an intellectual position but functioned as a discursive tool aimed at legitimizing the Russian Empire's efforts to assert hegemony over its Muslim subjects through a combination of religious coercion and socio-political subjugation.

Similar attitudes permeated the works of V.D. Smirnov, who remained deeply skeptical of any perceived advancements within Muslim societies. He exhibited particular disdain for modernization efforts in the Ottoman Empire, viewing them as superficial attempts that failed to address what he considered to be Islam's inherent resistance to progress. His critique extended even more sharply to Russia's own Muslim communities, whom he regarded as intellectually stagnant and culturally retrograde. In stark opposition to the assessments of his contemporary, academician B.A. Dorn, who identified a discernible rise in literacy and public education among the Tatars, Smirnov dismissed these developments as illusory. He argued that the proliferation of the press under the influence of the Tatar clergy merely reinforced religious dogmatism and social conservatism, particularly in the Kazakh steppe, where Islamic educational institutions were gaining traction

(Smirnov, 1889: 103-104). Smirnov's polemics underscore the extent to which pre-revolutionary Russian scholars framed the intellectual and cultural life of Muslim communities through an exclusionary and paternalistic lens, reinforcing a discourse that justified the empire's interventionist policies.

N.A. Dingelstedt's characterization of Muslims as entrenched in intellectual stagnation and rigid dogmatism reflects a broader imperial discourse that sought to portray Islamic societies as inherently incapable of progress. He asserts that Muslims remain trapped in an ossified tradition, fostering hostility toward independent thought, and that the East, in its supposed decrepitude, lingers in a state of intellectual immaturity (Dingelstedt, 1896: 14-15). Such assessments were instrumental in constructing the ideological framework that justified Russian colonial intervention, framing the Muslim world as a civilizational anomaly requiring external guidance. The perception of Muslim societies as deficient in rationalism and adaptability aligned with the broader objectives of imperial policy, which sought to reconfigure the socio-political landscape of colonized regions through enforced integration into the Russian imperial order. Publications such as *Russky Vestnik*, a staunch proponent of imperial ideology, reinforced this narrative, asserting that the purported incapacity of Muslim populations was a question already resolved in favor of colonial administration.

Even among scholars who professed a more nuanced understanding of Islam, racial determinism remained a prevailing analytical framework. A.E. Krymsky, a leading Orientalist of his time, while ostensibly respecting Muslim culture, advanced a racialized justification for European colonialism. His analysis of the Ottoman Empire, which he condemned as a bastion of fanaticism and injustice, exemplifies the entanglement of racial theory with colonial discourse. He attributes the perceived rigidity of Turkic-Muslim societies not merely to historical contingencies but to what he describes as intrinsic racial and inherited traits – characteristics that, in his view, could only be ameliorated through the dismantling of political sovereignty and the imposition of external governance (Krymsky, 1899: 41). Krymsky's assertions regarding the supposed intellectual inertia and administrative incompetence of Turkic-Muslim peoples encapsulate a broader trend in late-nineteenth-century European and Russian thought, wherein civilizational hierarchies were framed as biologically determined rather than socially constructed. This racialized epistemology sought to

delegitimize indigenous governance structures, thereby legitimizing colonial rule as a civilizing necessity.

Christian-missionary scholars similarly advanced critiques of Muslim societies, often framing their analyses within a theological and pedagogical context. N.I. Ilminsky, who positioned himself as a meticulous observer, claimed to have identified the ideological undercurrents emerging within Muslim educational reforms as early as 1884 (Ilminsky, 1895: 24). This perspective aligned with the views of N.P. Ostroumov, who linked developments in Turkestan's Muslim communities to broader religious movements in Anatolia and South Asia, particularly in British India (Ostroumov, 1901a: 107). His assertion that Indian and Ottoman Muslims exerted a destabilizing influence on the Turkic-Muslim populations of Central Asia reflected broader anxieties about transregional Islamic solidarity, which imperial administrators feared could coalesce into political resistance. Similarly, N.F. Katanov's ethnographic studies framed the cultural evolution of Russian Turkic peoples within the broader context of Pan-Turkic intellectual exchange, noting that linguistic and literary influences emanated from the Ottoman Empire. However, unlike his contemporaries, Katanov acknowledged an increasing engagement among Turkic-Muslims with European sciences, history, and archaeology – an observation that highlighted the complexities of intellectual transformation under colonial rule (Katanov, 1894: 25). He also emphasized the profound impact of educational reforms, particularly the *usul-i-jadid* method of instruction, which catalyzed divisions within Muslim society in the late nineteenth century. This pedagogical shift, while fostering a modernized curriculum, also intensified ideological contestation, illustrating the extent to which educational policy became a battleground for competing visions of cultural and religious identity within the Russian imperial framework.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite prolonged exposure to Russian imperial rule and systematic efforts at colonial acculturation, Russian Muslims continued to identify themselves as an integral component of the broader Islamic civilizational sphere. This enduring connection to the wider Muslim world was evident in the intellectual trajectories of reformist figures such as Ismail Gasprinsky, who, during his travels to key centers of Muslim modernism – including Constantinople, Smyrna, Cairo, and Damascus in the early

1870s – witnessed firsthand the increasing European influence permeating the Middle East. Gasprinsky lamented what he perceived as the profound cultural isolation of Russian Muslims from global intellectual currents and, in his seminal work *Russian Muslimism*, articulated an aspirational vision in which Russian Muslims would serve as conduits for the transmission of European civilization into the East (Gasprinskiy, 1881: 45). His later treatise, *The Russian-Eastern Agreement*, reflected on the tangible progress made toward this goal. While in 1881 he noted the existence of only a single Turkic-language newspaper, *Ziya-i Kavkaz*, published under state supervision in Tiflis, within a decade his own publication, *Tardjeman* (1883), had cultivated a vast readership spanning Russia and beyond (Ostroumov, 1906b: 166). This expansion of Muslim intellectual print culture underscored the increasing agency of reformist thinkers in shaping discourses on modernity, identity, and political engagement among Russian Muslims.

The historiographical discourse on Muslim modernism in the early twentieth century was shaped not only by academic inquiry but also by the active participation of Muslim intellectuals engaged in political struggle. Figures such as G. Iskhaki, A. Bukeikhanov, Y. Akchura, A.-Z. Validi Togan, and A. Tsalikov played instrumental roles in articulating visions of reform that challenged both traditionalist interpretations of Islam and the constraints imposed by Russian colonial policy. These thinkers sought to reconcile Islamic intellectual heritage with contemporary political and social transformations, advocating for institutional and educational reforms that would empower Muslim communities within the imperial framework. Their contributions underscored the inherently political nature of Muslim modernism, as it emerged not merely as a cultural or theological movement but as a response to the pressures of imperial governance, socio-economic change, and global intellectual exchanges.

In Kazakhstani historiography, extensive research has been conducted on the religious policies of the Russian autocracy in South Kazakhstan, particularly concerning the so-called «Muslim question» in Turkestan. Z. Sadvakasova examines these policies in the broader context of imperial governance, elucidating the mechanisms through which Russian authorities sought to regulate Islamic institutions and practices in the region (Sadvakasova, 2002: 85-92). R.T. Aitbaeva specifically interrogates the role of the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly (OMDS) as a key instrument of state control over

the spiritual and communal life of Kazakh Muslims, highlighting its function as both a regulatory body and a mechanism for cultural assimilation (Aitbaeva, 2006: 26). Similarly, G.S. Sultangalieva offers a detailed analysis of state-confessional relations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with a particular focus on the western regions of Kazakhstan, where Russian policies toward Islam were implemented with the greatest intensity. She underscores the dual role of the OMDS and the Orenburg Boundary Commission in managing religious affairs and reinforcing imperial authority (Sultangalieva, 2001: 248). A.M. Nurgalieva further explores the institutionalization of Islam under Russian rule, examining the legislative frameworks and administrative mechanisms that structured interactions between Muslim communities and imperial governance (Nurgalieva, 2009: 135-161). Complementing these studies, P.S. Shabley investigates the legal foundations of confessional policy in the Steppe regions during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, positioning the OMDS as a pivotal institution in the broader system of colonial administration, tasked not only with religious oversight but also with integrating Muslim populations into the socio-political order of the empire (Shabley, 2007: 81-88). These scholarly contributions collectively underscore the extent to which religious governance in the Kazakh steppe was embedded within broader imperial strategies of control, accommodation, and modernization.

The historiography of state regulation and control over the Muslims of Turkestan reveals the systematic policies of the Russian Empire aimed at managing religious, social, and political structures. Key studies highlight the legal mechanisms, administrative measures, and containment strategies employed to suppress Muslim modernist movements and national-religious mobilization in the early twentieth century. As demands for self-determination, linguistic rights, and political representation in the Duma grew, the tsarist administration intensified its efforts to curtail Muslim enlightenment and reformist currents. Viewing these developments as a threat to imperial stability, the state reinforced restrictive legal frameworks and expanded bureaucratic oversight to limit the spread of progressive Islamic thought, ensuring tighter control over Muslim communities within the empire.

Results of the research

The Secret Division of the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions held a central

role in the Russian Empire's strategy to monitor and restrict the external religious affiliations of non-Orthodox communities, particularly their connections with Islamic centers abroad. By the late nineteenth century, imperial authorities intensified their oversight of Russian Muslims' interactions with Anatolia and the Middle East due to the increasing influence of modernist movements. The growing demand for Islamic education in Istanbul, Jeddah, and Cairo, along with a rising number of pilgrimages from the Kazakh steppe and Turkestan to sacred sites, prompted heightened scrutiny. The Secret Division gathered intelligence from imperial scholars and officials dispatched to study these regions under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Zagidullin 2015 16–18).

Following the Russian annexation of Turkestan, Khiva, Bukhara, and the Transcaspian region, imperial administrators sought to reinforce control over Muslim communities through institutional mechanisms. In 1881, the Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced Special Meetings as policymaking bodies composed of state officials and select representatives from society. These commissions were tasked with examining the socio-political dynamics of Russian Muslim subjects and developing strategies to mitigate potential threats to imperial governance. Their deliberations reflected broader concerns regarding the intersection of religious identity and political stability within the empire (Budilovich 1905 147).

A.P. Khoroshkhin, a military administrator and specialist in Central Asian affairs, emphasized the necessity of strengthening Russian influence over subjugated Muslim populations to ensure long-term stability. He viewed Islamic proselytization among nomadic groups as a major challenge, aligning with the assessments of M.N. Galkin, a diplomatic official in Orenburg and Samara. In his memorandum titled *Some Remarks on the Kirghiz in Their Relation to Russia*, Galkin observed that Kazakh nomads, while identifying as Muslims, possessed only a rudimentary understanding of Islamic doctrine. Despite this limited religious knowledge, their symbolic allegiance to the Emir of Bukhara, whom imperial officials regarded as a center of Islamic resistance, posed a direct challenge to Russian rule. Galkin considered the deepening Islamic consciousness among the nomadic population a significant risk to the empire's authority and urged greater vigilance in managing religious influences in the region (Galkin 1868 38). These perspectives informed broader imperial policies aimed at restricting reli-

gious networks and reinforcing administrative control over Muslim communities.

Governor-General N.O. von Rosenbach (1884–1889) prioritized efforts to curtail the expansion of Islamic influence among the nomadic populations of Turkestan. In July 1884, he established a specialized commission under the leadership of Major-General N.I. Grodekov, a recognized authority on the region's nomadic communities. While the commission developed several strategic recommendations, their implementation remained largely unfulfilled. In 1886, under Rosenbach's administration, the *Regulations on the Governance of the Turkestan Territory* were enacted, significantly altering land ownership structures. This policy facilitated the expropriation of extensive tracts of land from indigenous nomadic groups to create a redistribution fund designated for Russian settlers, reinforcing imperial demographic and economic interests in the region (Mamayev 2019 388–406).

The subsequent tenure of Governor-General A.B. Vrevsky (1889–1898) marked a period of escalating tensions with the Muslim clergy, particularly following his mandate for the inclusion of a *prayer for the tsar* during daily prayers (*namaz*). The text, drafted by F.M. Kerensky, the chief school inspector of Turkestan, provoked significant resistance from the local religious elite, exacerbating existing discontent. This policy, alongside broader imperial efforts to assert control over religious life, contributed to the outbreak of the Andijan uprising in 1898. In its aftermath, Governor-General S.M. Dukhovskoy (1898–1901) conducted a comprehensive assessment of imperial religious policies, submitting his findings in the report *Islam in Turkestan*. He characterized Islam as fundamentally antagonistic to Christian civilization and concluded that continued neglect of Muslim affairs posed a direct challenge to Russian authority. Consequently, he proposed a radical restructuring of religious governance, advocating for the dissolution of all existing Muslim spiritual administrations and their replacement with a centralized state-controlled system (Dukhovskoy 1899 20).

In response, Dukhovskoy's commission recommended the establishment of a *mufiat* in Turkestan to oversee religious affairs, a proposal that gained support from Military Minister A.N. Kuropatkin. However, bureaucratic inertia and conflicting institutional priorities obstructed these plans. The Turkestan administration viewed the potential mufiat as a conduit for pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic ideologies,

while the Ministry of Internal Affairs insisted on maintaining Turkestan's subordination to broader imperial governance structures. Simultaneously, the Military Ministry sought to preserve the region's distinct administrative framework, wary of losing its strategic autonomy. These competing agendas culminated in St. Petersburg's refusal to sanction the creation of a regional muftiat. As a result, imperial policy in Turkestan remained defined by a doctrine of religious disengagement, wherein Islam was systematically disregarded as a factor in governance, perpetuating administrative inefficacy in managing Muslim communities (Samatova 2008 334–336).

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the Russian imperial administration convened a series of high-level deliberations aimed at addressing pressing governance challenges, including policies concerning the Muslim population. Five key special commissions were established to navigate these complex issues. Among them was a Special Meeting under the Ministry of Public Education, chaired by Privy Councilor A.S. Budilovich, which examined strategies for integrating Eastern non-Russians into the imperial educational framework. Additionally, Adjutant General Count A.P. Ignatiev led an extra-departmental Special Meeting on matters of faith, which sought to formalize religious governance policies. Another significant initiative, convened under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, aimed to counteract perceived Tatar-Muslim influence in the Volga region. Alongside these efforts, an interdepartmental meeting was held to evaluate approaches to schooling for non-Russian, non-Orthodox, and non-Christian populations. Finally, the Ministry of Internal Affairs oversaw a Special Meeting on Muslim Affairs, which sought to consolidate imperial oversight of Muslim institutions and religious practices (Trudy osobogo soveshania po voprosam vostochnyh inorodtsev 1905 322–327).

This period was characterized by heightened political and religious turbulence, prompting the imperial administration to adopt increasingly interventionist measures in Turkestan and other Muslim-majority regions. While the composition of these meetings evolved over time, they remained dominated by senior figures within the imperial bureaucracy, most notably statesmen such as S.Y. Witte and P.A. Stolypin. The overarching objective across all deliberations was the preservation of imperial unity and the consolidation of state power. Notably absent from these discussions were direct representatives of the Muslim community. Instead, the perspectives

of kadi judges, akhuns, imams, and mudarris – figures of considerable religious and social standing – were mediated through the official structures of the Russian state. These Muslim leaders often operated within a dual framework: on one hand, they navigated the policies dictated by the authorities, while on the other, they informally represented the collective interests of their communities. However, within the imperial framework, Muslim perspectives were frequently subordinated to state prerogatives, with official discourse serving as the foundational matrix to which Muslim leaders were expected to conform (Dyakin 1998 37–41).

The imperial stance on the so-called «Islamic question» was codified in the April 17, 1905, law on the reinforcement of religious tolerance, reflecting a temporary liberalization within governmental circles. This shift led to the establishment of the Special Extra-Departmental Conference on the Affairs of Faith, which was tasked with formulating policies related to Islamic institutions. Its mandate included regulating the construction of Muslim prayer houses, determining the procedures for appointing religious officials, and addressing exemptions from military service for certain categories of the Muslim clergy. Additionally, the commission deliberated on the governance of Muslim educational institutions such as *maktabs* and *madrasahs* and the potential establishment of spiritual administrations for Muslim communities in key regions, including the Kazakh steppe provinces of Akmola, Semipalatinsk, Ural, and Turgai, as well as the North Caucasus, Stavropol Province, Turkestan, and the Transcaspiian region. One of the more contentious debates concerned the possibility of permitting abandoned children to be raised within the religious traditions of non-Muslim foster families, a policy that underscored the broader imperial ambition of integrating or, more accurately, assimilating – Muslim subjects into the broader framework of Russian governance and cultural norms (Trudy osobogo soveshania po voprosam vostochnyh inorodtsev 1905 347).

On February 8, 1908, the Ministry of Internal Affairs formalized a directive titled *On the Assistance of Gendarmerie Departments to Military District Authorities in Intelligence Operations*, thereby institutionalizing the collaboration between military intelligence, the Police Department, and the Okhrana branches. This initiative was driven, in part, by the escalating geopolitical tensions with foreign powers, particularly the Ottoman Empire. An extensive analysis of intelligence reports, primarily

conducted within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, identified Kazan province as a focal point of political volatility within the Russian Muslim sphere. This perspective became a recurring theme in imperial assessments of the so-called «Muslim question». Officials contended that Kazan province was not only demographically significant due to its large Muslim population but also intellectually influential, given the prominence of the Tatar intelligentsia in shaping nationalist currents among Russian Muslims (*Trudy osobogo soveshania po voprosam vostochnyh inorodtsev* 1905 352–354).

Concerns over the education of Russia's Muslim youth persisted at the highest levels of government. Following the 1905 Special Meeting chaired by A.S. Budilovich, an Interdepartmental Meeting was convened between 1910 and 1911 to evaluate schooling policies for non-Russian, non-Orthodox, and non-Christian populations. This initiative, spearheaded by Prime Minister P.A. Stolypin, brought together key figures such as N.I. Pavlov, M.A. Lyubich-Yarmolovich-Lozina-Lozinsky, E.G. Weydenbaum, and E.V. Menkin (*Trudy osobogo soveshania po voprosam vostochnyh inorodtsev* 1905 360–364). By that time, significant empirical data had been compiled on Muslim education, largely through the efforts of the Ministry of Public Education, the Education Department of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Department of Agriculture under the Main Directorate of Agriculture and Land Management. However, despite the public availability of these reports and statistical digests, the government's data collection remained fragmented. This deficiency became evident when the meeting's participants realized that existing information was insufficient for policymaking, necessitating additional requests to educational district trustees. The lack of a systematic approach to educational oversight underscored the broader inefficiencies in the imperial administration's governance of Muslim affairs.

A review of the meeting's proceedings reveals that the discourse on religious education was still embedded within broader discussions of non-Russian and non-Orthodox schooling policies. Nevertheless, the Muslim dimension was beginning to take on a distinct character. The political lexicon of the era was dominated by terms such as «pan-Islamism» and «pan-Turkism,» reflecting the imperial authorities' prevailing anxieties about transnational Muslim solidarity. The Special Meeting's journal entry of April 29, 1914, explicitly defined these concepts: «pan-Islamism» was described as the as-

piration to unite Muslims worldwide under religious principles, while «pan-Turkism» was framed as an effort to bring all Turkic-speaking Muslims under Ottoman political hegemony. At that time, officials believed that these ideological movements had not yet fully penetrated Russia's Muslim communities. However, within the broader framework of «cultural and political» concerns, strategies to reinforce administrative control over the Muslim population were actively discussed.

Provincial governors were instructed to convene regular consultations with local officials and influential figures to cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of Muslim sociopolitical dynamics. Concurrently, central government agencies were urged to organize annual interdepartmental meetings to coordinate policy responses. One of the most striking revelations was the imperial administration's limited engagement with the Tatar press and its failure to monitor the evolution of public opinion within Muslim communities. Acknowledging this oversight, officials advocated for increased scrutiny of Muslim periodicals and clerical activities. In particular, the government sought to regulate the jurisdiction of Islamic religious courts by compiling and publishing an official digest of Muslim jurisprudence, which would delineate the specific legal matters that fell under the authority of clerics and those that required adjudication in state courts. Additionally, the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly (OMDS) was singled out as a destabilizing force, accused of «fostering and endorsing anti-state sentiments within the Muslim populace» (Zagidullin 2015 118).

These developments underscore the Russian Empire's persistent struggle to reconcile its administrative structures with the complexities of governing a diverse and politically conscious Muslim population. Rather than fostering genuine integration, the state's policies remained predominantly reactive, shaped by a preoccupation with perceived threats of religious and nationalist mobilization.

A series of regulatory mechanisms was instituted to oversee the operations of Muslim religious communities. Authorities deemed it imperative to uphold the 1911 directive issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which prohibited Russian nationals who had pursued religious instruction in Muslim-majority countries from assuming clerical positions. Furthermore, it was advised that a standardized requirement be established mandating proficiency in spoken Russian for all candidates aspiring to serve

as mullahs in both urban and rural congregations. However, the Minister of Internal Affairs retained discretionary authority to designate specific regions where, contingent upon local circumstances, individuals lacking command of the state language might still be appointed to religious offices.

The deliberations of the Meeting underscored the necessity of an in-depth examination of the so-called «Muslim question» within the empire, coupled with systematic surveillance of sociopolitical sentiments among Muslim communities. To enhance governmental intelligence on these dynamics, the administration resolved to introduce specialized educational initiatives. These included the establishment of advanced training programs in Islamic studies for state officials at the capital, as well as structured linguistic courses on the vernaculars of Muslim populations, to be integrated into the curriculum of pedagogical institutions specializing in «foreign» instruction. Additionally, in provinces and administrative districts characterized by a substantial Muslim demographic, it was determined that provincial boards would incorporate the position of a designated adviser. This official would be entrusted with consolidating all matters pertinent to Muslim affairs, thereby centralizing oversight and ensuring a more coordinated bureaucratic approach.

Conclusion

Beyond its geostrategic imperatives and territorial acquisitions in Turkestan, the Russian Empire's expansion marked its first substantial engagement with the Islamic world. Whereas previous encounters had been largely confined to the periphery of the Muslim ummah, Russia now interfaced directly with the intellectual and spiritual heartlands where Islam's doctrinal and cultural identity was actively shaped. This encounter inevitably influenced Russian intellectual currents, particularly in the realms of religious philosophy, comparative theology, and imperial governance. Notably, this period catalyzed

the formalization of Oriental Studies as an academic discipline, fostering a systematic approach to the study of Islamic civilization. Russian scholars of the period curated extensive collections of Islamic manuscripts and undertook rigorous philological and ethnographic research, positioning Russia at the forefront of Islamic studies by the early twentieth century.

Contrary to narratives of forced assimilation, the imperial administration in Turkestan did not pursue an overtly Russificationist religious policy. Islam, rather than being actively suppressed, was largely insulated from the interventions of certain military and bureaucratic factions. The state's strategy relied not on coercive suppression but on a subtler mode of engagement – one that facilitated an organic transformation of Muslim consciousness within the framework of traditional religious institutions. While certain officials sought to curtail the influence of Islamic jurisprudence and doctrinal orthodoxy, the overarching administrative ethos favored institutional standardization across the empire rather than ideological confrontation. Consequently, Russian governance in the region exhibited a pragmatic tolerance toward indigenous religious structures, minimizing direct interference in theological affairs and ensuring that religious considerations remained secondary to broader political objectives.

The case of Turkestan offers a compelling historical precedent for examining the dynamics of interreligious coexistence within a multiethnic polity. The region initially exemplified a relatively stable *modus vivendi* between Orthodox Christian and Muslim populations. However, it simultaneously underscores the precarious nature of religious equilibrium under imperial rule, demonstrating how policy miscalculations and bureaucratic overreach can catalyze sectarian tensions. A critical reassessment of these historical interactions provides valuable insights for contemporary governance, particularly in the management of religious pluralism and the mitigation of ethno-religious friction within heterogeneous societies.

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