

## History of study of public Islam and Muslim education during pre-revolutionary period of Kazakhs

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**Abstract.** The article also presents the results of a wide variety of sources and literature, especially in the study of pre-revolutionary period literature in the second half of XIX – beginning of XX centuries. New ethnographic materials can extend the idea of the nature of everyday Islam of Kazakh people. In the history of the Kazakhs canons of Islam closely intertwined with shamanism, magic, animism.

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### Introduction

Relevancy of research of the study of Muslim education arises from deficiency of firmly established, one-dimensional simplified approach to confessional issues during the Soviet period. Islam since its distribution in Kazakhstan plays a crucial role in the formation of ethnic identity and culture of Kazakh people. In the absence of state institutions in the XIX - early XX centuries, Islam was a key factor in preserving ethnic and confessional identity, the development of spiritual culture and national revival.

Pre-revolutionary historical literature represents rich bank of factual material on the history of Muslim education. Study of Russian researchers in Kazakhstan related to the tasks of economic and cultural development of the region. A great part of the works belonged to the participants of the diplomatic missions, military people and officials. Despite tendentious character of some general provisions of research and descriptions, they contain a wealth of historical, statistical and ethnographic material. Researchers began working on ethnographic study of Islam and Muslim education among Kazakhs in the region in the second half of XIX century.

Works of the pre-revolutionary researchers of the first half and the middle of the XIX century are of the utmost interest for determining the cause-and-effect relations in the development of public Islam and Muslim education system in the late XIX - early XX centuries. Among the works of that period I.G. Andreev's work [1] is especially valuable, particularly Chapter V consists of a wealth of material about rituals, prayer and fasting, manners and behavior, the birth of babies, circumcision, shamans and etc. A.I. Levshin's work "The description of Kyrgyz-Cossack or Kyrgyz-Kaisak hordes and steppes" which reveals the belief and superstitions, customs, upbringing and literacy of Kazakh people was involved into the study of the issue. A.I. Levshin comparing Kazakhs with

"northern" and "southern" nations noted their following features: in comparison with the first "they have neither activity nor the courage, nor the spirit of conquest", with the second – "they are not coddled, not weak and do not know not only slavery, but also citizenship. They are the middle class between the two previous" [2]. On the pages of numerous papers and documents of representatives of the Russian administration in Kazakhstan there was a view that Kazakhs were not sufficiently saturated with Islam, such as Tatars and Uzbek. It was expressed quite clearly in the collection of materials on Islam compiled by order of the Governor-General of Turkestan Territory S.M. Dukhovskiy: "Out of all the Muslim peoples dependent on Russia, our Kyrgyz people [Kazakhs. – R.G.] should be recognized as the worst Islamists" [3].

Works of Russian turcologist, academician V.V. Radlov are of the utmost interest; he paying a great tribute to Islam considered it as benefits of culture to the steppe nomads. "There is no doubt - he wrote – that thanks to the influence of the Muslim religion Kyrgyz inherent great order in clothing and home organization, cleanliness, harmonized family relationships and better ethical principles". [4]

The same idea was noted by ethnographer Grigoriy Potanin, one of the founders of the "Siberian regionalism". His works on the history and ethnography of the Kazakh people still have not lost their scholarly importance. G.N. Potanin made several trips to poorly explored areas of Siberia and Central Asia. He wrote more than 50 articles, notes and books on the history and ethnography of the Kazakh people. [5]

A. Alektorov, graduate of Orenburg Teacher Training Institute, who spoke fluent Kazakh language, knew life of the local population, and worked as a teacher for many years in Kazakhstan, published more than 200 works on history, ethnography and folklore of Kazakh people. [6] He

also compiled “Kyrgyz chrestomathy” for Kazakh children (Omsk, 1907).

Tatar educator I. Gasprinsky, author of the idea to introduce the basics of the secular sciences at Madrasseh, expressed the following thoughts: “If you add teaching of elementary science in the Tatar language in the core curriculum of Muslim Madrasseh it will facilitate access of knowledge into Muslim environment without any harm to the State and will quickly raise intellectual level of the clergy and the middle class and will dispel many bad prejudices” [7].

Russian scientists’ interest to Kazakhstan led to the study of samples of oral folk arts and religious beliefs of the Kazakhs. Outstanding representative of one of such schools was a scholar Sh. Walikhanov. Such works as “Tenkry”, “Traces of shamanism among the Kyrgyz people”, “Arvakhy or Ongony, spirits of dead ancestors”, “About the animals sacrificed”, “Cosmological concepts of Kyrgyz people” reflect a picture of religious beliefs of Kazakhs, in which Muslim and pagan traditions are closely intertwined. [8] It should be noted that the socio-political views of Sh. Walikhanov were aimed at educating of Kazakh people.

Ybyrai Altynsarin played a major role in the educating of Kazakh people [9]. Talking about him it can be mentioned that his main objectives were the establishment and organization of the first Russian-Kazakh national schools and educating activities as a poet, a writer, a propagandist of scientific knowledge, as well as a teacher and an author of the first textbook in the Kazakh language. He also was a publicist and an ethnographer, and a collector of folklore.

General Staff Officer M. Krasovskiy, compiler of materials for geography and statistics of Siberian Kyrgyz area, performed the research of household and life of Kazakhs and immigrants from Russia, said that “Kyrgyz are distinguished by complete indifferentism in the religious way”. The chapters on religious and intellectual education of Kazakhs in his work “The area of the Siberian Kyrgyz people” are of the utmost interest. [10]

Books of Christian missionary Yakov Koblov are historical documents about the social and everyday life of the Muslim clergy. [11] In our view, these important aspects of Y.D. Koblov’s books serve as a specific reference point for the development of principles in solving actual problems of interfaith relations.

V. von Gern’s work “Character and temper Kyrgyz-Cossacks” contains interesting facts about the customs, superstitions of Kazakhs, Tatar mullahs. [12]

The book of N. Yadrintsev describes a variety of ways of assimilation; the question about

education caused particular criticism: “Give him [foreigner], he says, first of all the description of his life, his nomadic ground, his folk, his morals and his story, let him see himself and something that is closer, let him know that his tribe has committed and that he should make” [13].

Ethnographer R.M. Mustafina fairly notes: “... material about the peculiarities of religious beliefs of Kazakhs..... is reflected in a number of ethnographic works, although many of them were written by non-specialists” [14]. A great number of works published in the pre-revolutionary period, characterized by fragmentariness that shows its dual character. On the one hand, pre-revolutionary materials contain a large supply of information material. On the other hand, most of the pre-revolutionary sources lost scientific systematization and require further processing.

Kazakhs in the second half of XIX - early XX century officially professed Islam. The fate of Islam in Kazakhstan is linked with major religious centers of Central Asia and the Volga region. Islam expressed spiritual needs of the Kazakh society. In accordance with opinion of S. Checherina, Islam attracted by trappings of “his ablution, decorum in worship, religious legends, external godlikeness in manners and speech” [15, p. 239]. Being “the northern outpost of Islamic civilization” [16, p.128], Kazakh Muslimism had its own peculiarities. This specific character to some extent led to the spread of ideas about Kazakhs distant from the norms of Islam.

Imperial officials and researcher observed and described life of Kazakh people generally emphasized that Islam was superficially adopted by Kazakhs, gave an accent to their indifferentism.

Minister of Public Education, inspecting schools of Orenburg region, wrote to Governor-General in December 1877: “The Kyrgyz, despite they call themselves Mohammedans, in their private life both in a religious and civil and moral way, they are guided by neither Quran nor Shariah, nor any other regulations of the Mohammedan religion” [17].

S.B. Bronevsky thought: “Despite Kirghiz-Kaisak people profess the law of Mohammed, they are ignorant in one; there are akhoonds, mullahs and khojas in the district, but they have neither mosques nor rites of faith constantly held” [18]. Military official F. Usov wrote: “Although the entire Kyrgyz people consider themselves and are officially recognized professing Islam, but great amount of Kyrgyz people are distinguished by indifferentism; all their concepts of God and religion are limited by different beliefs, and in the event of important occasions of their life (birth, death, etc.) by some rituals, more pagan than Mohammedan” [19].

Ethnographer N. Zeland concluded that “Kyrgyz consider themselves Sunni Mohammedans, but generally they are indifferent to the dogmatic issues and little familiar with it. However, they perform major ceremonies, pray under Muslim rule and observe great fasts, but not always in a proper way, there are mullahs in the steppes, but there are few of them and they are not literate” [20, p. 31-32].

The numerous witnesses say about weak influence of Islam on the Kazakhs: according to the stories of K. Gubarev, Kazakh “mullahs and akhoonds have no that holiness and infallibility, which are attributed to these people by Tatars” [21]. In “Notes on Kyrgyz Religion” it is stated that “Kyrgyz are distinguished by complete indifferentism in the religious way. Kyrgyz dogmatic side of the Mohammedan religion is developed very weakly: very vague and undefined concept of a Supreme Being who created the world (Allah) and his Prophet Mohammed. This vague concept of Allah and his Prophet learned during the initial adoption of the Mohammedan religion frozen on the first stage among Kyrgyz people. It might be due to the fact that literacy spread in the weakest power among them: it is uncommon to meet Alcorn in yurts of rich Kyrgyz people” [22]. “True religious conviction is undistinguished among them” written in the article “Kyrgyz” [23]. A. Levshin told about this peculiarity. According to his words, among Kazakhs “some people do not perform any rites of the religion” [24]. M. Krassovsky wrote: only “bigotry Kirghiz having wealth, willingly perform Mohammedan rites for boredom”. Further, he admitted that “Mohammedanism, so closely fitting for the sight of ignorant Asians, so easy-to-understand for their lazy mind ... after all gradually spread in the steppes, in the prejudice of opportunities to get there the light of Christian teaching” [25].

Detailed study of the various pre-revolutionary sources allows questioning the opinion that Islam among Kazakhs in that period had superficial character. For example, orientalist V.V. Radlov argued that Kyrgyz people converted to Islam centuries ago [26, p. 323]. Ethnographer R. Karutts agreeing with him argued that the Kazakhs “have a right to recognize themselves as strict Mohammedans. They shave their heads, remove body hair, trim mustache which should not cover the lips, and leave the rest beard untouched, pulling out hair only on the chin, they arrange doors towards Mecca, perform prescribed prayers and follow some rules even stricter than I saw in what place soever” [27, p. 96].

“If Kyrgyz, as in the past, so also in the present century, is not so outwardly religious as Tatars, it does not mean that they were not

Mohammedans” - wrote a prominent historian E. Bekmakhanov [28].

Nomadic way of life did not create any obstacles to fulfill the Shariah law or to spread educating. Yurt could serve as a temple or as a mobile school. By the XIX century, according to Sh. Walikhanov, there already was a mullah in each village; the entire adult population of thirty years old observed thirty-day sawm and five-time namaz-prayer.

As the study showed by the end of XIX - beginning of XX century Kazakhs were not only familiar with the basics of Islamic teachings and followed its laws, but also taught their children at Muslim schools, visited mosques, therefore they were Muslims, without any doubt, with a pretty interesting religious life which was supported by the activities of the Muslim clergy. [29] Researchers in religious studies have shown that Islam in Central Asia focused in everyday life, rather, poured in it and they called it “everyday Islam”. Everyday Islam or “public Islam” is the Islam highly “diluted” with pre-Islamic beliefs. These are customs and rules of behavior in everyday life prescribed by Islam, rather, Shariah law which writes a “script” of human life from his/her birth to his/her burial, and even sets his/her “afterlife” program. In ordinary consciousness a Muslim person is, primarily, one who lives according to this scenario. Based on this, one may assume that religiosity of Central Asian population is expressed mainly at compliance with the rules of everyday Islam. At that, compliance with any particular rule can serve (of course, to a variable degree) as an indicator of religiosity. Limited by everyday routine of forms and rituals of Muslims, Islam is characterized by mixing of pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions in the national consciousness. Traditional beliefs and rituals combined with Muslim ones during the Islamization period. The rest of archaic beliefs were especially firmly fixed in everyday life of Kazakhs, and of course, it affected appearance of everyday Islam. Peculiarities of everyday lifestyle (nomadic life in yurts) caused a kind of unique Islam among Kazakhs. Nomadic life made incredible complexity for religion which rituals were complex and required the presence of various religious paraphernalia. Islam, which arose in a similar nomadic socio-economic base, was best adapted to local conditions, so it is quite organically entered the lives of the population. Joining of “normative” Islam with local religious substrate led to the formation of such a phenomenon which some studies called “steppe Islam” or a variant of the Kazakh “public” Islam.

Joining with pre-Islamic beliefs, Islam was well established in Kazakhstan in the XIX century. In

“Works of the Orenburg scientific archival committee” said: “Islam by vast wave is coming to the Kyrgyz steppe. With all that, Muslim rites and customs, in many cases, are still mixed with the remnants of paganism” [30, c.34]. About preservation of pagan predilections among Kazakhs against the backdrop of the spread of Islam is reported in many pre-revolutionary studies.

In the article “Kyrgyz” it is reported that “Kyrgyz people, though considered of Mohammedan confession, but they have the religion of Mohammed mixed with various pagan rites” [23]. S. Checherina wrote: “The mass of the people was only considered to be Mohammedans, but they lived according to a pagan faith. That ancient pagan belief, undoubtedly, was the foundation of the world view and lifestyle of Kyrgyz people” [16, p.238]. Well-known ethnographer A. Levshin thought: “They all have the concept of the highest being created the world, but they worship him under the laws of the Quran, others mix Islamic teachings with the remains of ancient idolatry, the rest think that in addition to the good divine who concerns about happiness of the people and called Qudai, there is an evil spirit, or Shaitan, the source of evil”. [24] In “Tobolsk diocesan statements”, there is the following information: “In ancient times Kyrgyz were converted to Mohammedanism, but since then so many pagan superstitions were brought into their beliefs that one does not know who they are - pagans or Mohammedans. They recognize the God, but also believe that there are two spirits in the world: good and evil (Shaitan); that souls of the dead people come upon the stars; that every day they are under the auspices of a special star, happy or unhappy, that is why days themselves are happy or unhappy” [31].

Kazakh people kept the religious rites of their ancestors for long time. “In the XIX - early XX centuries historical and ideological picture of the region was a complex interweaving of shamanistic religious views with the increasingly growing official Islamic ideology. Adapting their religion to ethnic culture, official and unofficial Muslim clergy perceived many local cults, resulting in the religious consciousness of the people has obtained syncretistic, polystructural character.” - wrote ethnographer A.T. Toleubaev [32].

Thus, an extensive study of the sources proves the illegality of judgments about Kazakhs' indifference to Islam. Nomadic way of life was not a barrier to the spreading of Islam among Kazakhs. As it is known, Islam arose among nomadic Bedouin-Arabs. Paganism with many gods was replaced by Islam with monotheism and simple ceremonial rituals. Adapting of Islam was clearly seen even in the steppe environment; there was a lack of water that

is why sand ablution was allowed. Islam has taken roots in minds of the most Kazakhs. In the second half of XIX - early XX century in the Steppe region there was fairly interesting religious life with the rules of everyday Islam. Religiosity of Kazakhs was characterized by bright syncretism. Islam absorbed archaic cults: animism, magic, totemism, fetishism, and shamanism. The same can be said about many folk traditions and rituals. In many cases, it can be said that the ancient traditions obtained a new life, as a result of the fact that Islam dedicated them as worthy of existence.

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