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**Religious reformism and Jadidism
in the Volga-Ural region of Imperial Russia
(XIX – the beginning of XX centuries)**

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Abstract. The Authors of this article assess the phenomenon of how was perceived religious reformism and Jadidism in the public thought of Muslims who lived in the Volga-Ural region (Russian Empire). The approach to this phenomenon and its assessment differ in the pre-revolutionary Russian, Soviet and foreign historiography, which is due to the heterogeneity of the subject of research itself. By stressing the fact that in international scholarship there are different views on the formation of this phenomenon, the Authors of the article offer a more balanced approach to this phenomenon. This approach differs from that popular in historiography, labelled as "jadidocentrist". Equally, they suggest making the distinction and clear the technical terms such as "Islamic discourse", "religious revival" and "Jadidism" itself.

Keywords: Islamic discourse; religious reformism; Jadidism; revivalism; tajdid; The Volga-Ural region of Imperial Russia; usul al-jadid

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Религиозный реформизм и джадидизм в Волго-Уральском регионе Российской империи (XIX – начало XX вв.)

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Аннотация. Авторы данной статьи дают оценку феномена восприятия религиозного реформизма и джадидизма в общественной мысли мусульман, населявших Волго-Уральский регион (Российская империя). Подход к этому явлению и его оценка разнятся в российской, советской и зарубежной историографии, что обусловлено неоднородностью самого предмета исследования. Отмечая, что в науке существуют различные взгляды на формирование этого явления, авторы статьи предлагают более сбалансированный подход к этому феномену. Этот подход отличается от популярного в историографии подхода, называемого «джадидоцентристским». Равным образом, они предлагают четко обозначать различие в терминах, таких, как «исламский дискурс», «религиозное возрождение» и непосредственно «джадидизм».

Ключевые слова: дискурс, исламский; религиозный реформизм; джадидизм; ревиализм; *таджид*; Российская империя, Волго-Уральский регион; *усул ал-джадид*

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Introduction

The 18th-19th centuries became the turning point in the development of Islamic society in Imperial Russia. A formerly relatively monolithic society at this time tended to lose its homogenous character. A new national class of wealthy peo-



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ple and intellectuals emerged as a result of the accumulation of capital. Literature, art and science have advanced. Many more mosques and madrasas opened up in the cities and villages. One of the crucial events for the Muslims in Imperial Russia was the allowance of Empress Catherine II to build a stone mosque in Kazan in 1767. In 1773, she issued a decree suggesting a tolerant approach to other beliefs. As a sequence of this policy, the Ohrenbug Muslim Spiritual Assembly was founded in 1788 with the aim of regulating the relations between the State and non-Christian Orthodox confessions, including those of the Islamic creed [1, p. 55]. Another significant event in the social life of Muslims in the Volga-Ural region was the establishment of an Asiatic printing press in 1800. Within only 3 years of its operation, more than 31.000 copies of books in Tatar and Arabic languages were printed there [2, p. 56]. The year 1804 became the year of the establishment of Kazan Imperial University. This is the period of development of capitalist relations in the Kazan government (Russ.: guberniya). The trade capital triggered the process of transformation of the city into the industrial capital, especially after the vast territories of Central Asia became part of the Russian Empire. Knowledge and education gained exceptional significance in the domain of religion and philosophy in that time. The reformist tendencies in the domain of religion are reflected in the writings by Gabdrakhim Utyz Imyani (1754–1834), Abu Nasr Qursawi (1776–1812), Shihabetdin Marjani (1818–1889) etc. [3, p. 186]. In this context, the contemporary German researcher M. Kemper suggested that the particular “Islamic discourse” at this period came to fruition. He identified its chronological borders between 1789 and 1889.

Methods

Islamic discourse and its origins

The authors of this article suggest that there are both inner and outer factors, which were instrumental for the formation of this discourse. In the 18th century, the purely puritan (Salafi) movement took its origins in the Arabian Peninsula. This movement claimed to revive the initial purity of the Islamic faith and return to its origins. It aimed to purify the religious doctrine from medieval influence, scholasticism and various innovations (*bid'a*). The cradle of this ideological trend can be traced back to the Golden age of Islam and stood in close context with the Islamic pietist factions. The participants in this discourse suggested that the interpretation of the Muslim Faith should follow that of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. They familiarized with them and with the Righteous Predecessors (Arab.: *as-salaf as-salihin*) in following the religious regulations. In formulating, articulating and codifying their ideas, the Islamic scholar, theologian, thinker and jurist Ibn Taymiya (1263–1328) played a key role. The further development of puritanical ideas took place in the 18th cent [4, p. 30]. Its key representatives were Muhammad al-Murtada al-Zabidi (1732–1790), Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Shawkani (1772–1834) and Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792).

They bound the decline of the Islamic faith and the Islamic teaching with the "literal" adherence to the sayings of the religious authorities from the preceding ages. The key of this discourse were as follows: the condemnation of innovations (Arab.: *bid'a*) in what pertained to the religion, the tight adherence to the monotheism (Arab.: *tawhid*) and the literal meaning of the texts of the Holy Quran and Sunna



as well as the prohibition of free interpretation of canonical texts [5, p. 402]. Modern scholars claim that the rise of religious reformist movements in the 18th–19th centuries was a clear response to a higher level of development of western civilization. The Arabian Peninsula was the least developed area within the Ottoman Empire.

Despite the late spread of Salafi ideas in the Volga region, Tatar intellectuals accepted some Salafi ideas and approaches to interpreting religious texts. A prominent theologian and the prolific writer Rizaetdin Fakhretdin (1858–1936), noticed that the works by Ibn Taymiya (and, accordingly, the Salafi ideas) began to spread among Tatar people recently. He pointed out that the work by Shihabetdin Marjani “Aqida ‘Adudiya”, where the author refers to Ibn Taymiya in his commentaries. However, the authors of this article suggest that the Tatar intellectual elite of that period cannot be fully identified with the scholars of Salafi discourse. A Turkish scholar, a specialist on Jadidist movements A. Kanlidere highlighted that A. Qursawi, Sh. Marjani, Galimjan Barudi (1857–1921), R. Fakhretdin, Musa Bigiev (1874–1949) responded positively to the Sufi practices, in spite of the fact that the Salafi leaders considered Sufi practices as one of many types of polytheism [6, p. 148].

The natural consequence of the emergence of new religious self-consciousness in the Middle East was the «opening the gates of *ijtihad*» in theological practice, which granted the individual the opportunity to reason in the new religious paradigm without referring to the authorities. Not only established religious traditions were questioned but also some aspects of the Islamic creed. Development of individual’s initiative, striving for freedom of will and action become indispensable condition for the reforming of social life [4, p. 62].

Another factor, which greatly influenced not only the Tatar intellectuals but also the whole Islamic world was the activity of Grand Mufti of Egypt Muhammed ‘Abdo (1849–1905) as well as his works. M. ‘Abdo was the Head of the Administrative Council of al-Azhar University. He run the educational reforms at al-Azhar University. He initiated fundamental reforms in Islamic legislation and disseminated his ideas while lecturing his students. He promoted the idea of the revival of might and greatness of Islamic civilization and saw the instruments for that purpose in the returning to the purity of Islam of the times of the Prophet Muhammad. He suggested that returning to the “true Faith” should be accompanied by applying the rationalistic tradition of Islamic exegesis. He believed that Islamic reasoning had potentially indefinite abilities. Every age needed its own interpretation of the Holy Quran as applied to the age and circumstances. M. ‘Abdo contributed a lot to the revival and reform of intellectual Islamic thought in Egypt as well as in Islamic world. His writings influenced the works of a pleade of Tatar intellectuals of the late 19th – early 20th centuries. Some of them such as Ziaeddin Kamali (1873–1942) and M. Bigiev were his direct disciples and continuators of his teaching who met the great thinker during their education at the university of al-Azhar. G. Barudi met J. al-Afgani (1838–1897) and M. ‘Abdo in Cairo during performing the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1887 [7, p. 90].

The next factor, which was instrumental in the genesis of Islamic discourse and formation of the views of Tatar intellectuals was the literary legacy of the Young Ottomans movement, which embodied the ideas of the French Enlightenment. Its representatives, such as Namk Kemal (1840–1888), Ahmet Midhat (1844–1913) and Abdul Hamid Zia Pasha (1829–1880) praised free thinking, ideas of justice, as



well as those regarding the interaction between an individual and the society. These intellectuals made tremendous efforts aiming the democratization and liberalization of social and political life. They condemned the bureaucratic absolutism, tyranny and ignorance present in Ottoman society at that period. Their strive for innovations can be seen nowadays as an exaggerated projection of their aspirations for global changes. To a greater extent, it was a qualitative change rather than the quantitative advance [8].

At the beginning of the 20th century there was an intellectual who tremendously influenced the self-consciousness of Muslims. This was a Crimean Tatar intellectual, educator and publisher Ismail Gasprinskiy (1851–1914). He gained his fame as an editor of newspaper «Tarjuman», which publication began on 10th April of 1883. In many periodicals of his Gasprinskiy identified the key problems, which faced the Turkish (Islamic) society in Russia. He also suggested solutions for some acute problems like the reformation of Islamic education, enlightenment of people and education of women.

Results

Religious reformism and Jadidism

One of the most significant factors of rise of religious reformism and Jadidism is the broad interest of Tatar people in its national origins, spiritual and religious ethical traditions, which can be considered as the starting point for the national "awakening" of the peoples in Imperial Russia. Cultural and intellectual rise of Islamic people's consciousness then included almost all groups of the national elite. The Tatar nation, as one of the largest nations in Imperial Russia and its intellectual elite immediately engaged in this process and led the cultural awakening. They were actively involved in the State Duma (Parliament) elections, joined various social organizations, political parties and prepared the All-Russia Islamic congress. They established national languages media: in 1905–1907 in Tatar are known to be published 21 newspapers and 12 periodicals. Free media institutions have become the platform for discussion regarding the current problems of modernity and their meaning for the young generation. The teachers in Jadid schools and intellectuals did initiate the process of reducing the level of influence of the conservative Ulama¹. The position and role of traditional clergy in the society as a custodians and transmitters of traditional piers of Islamic society diminished due to the spread of printed press in Arabic script [7, p. 90]. Social and economic position of traditional Ulama became gradually reduced, the position of Jadid Ulama, on the contrary, became stronger because their activities were financed by wealthy patrons and charitable endowments.

At this time, it witnessed the emergence of some reformist writings. Among those is a series of essays by Rizaetdin Fakhretdin under the uniform title «Moral behaviour», which comprises several parts. They included «A Well-mannered child» [9] «A Well-mannered mother» [10], «A Well-mannered woman» [11], «Manners of students» [12], etc., which were separately republished during 1897–1903. In 1903, Tatar public leader Abdurashid Ibragimov (1857–1944) started his own series of brochures under the uniform title «A Mirror» [13]. There he pleaded for enlightenment among Islamic people. G. Barudi, the Tatar educationalist and

¹ Ulama – social class of Islamic scholars and lawyers.



founder of madrasa «Muhammadiyya», started the edition of a series of theological essays under the uniform title «The Islamic enlightenment» [14].

Tatar intellectuals, as the most progressive part of Tatar society, initiated the process of formation of national self-consciousness. Problems with constructing the national identity were given the highest priority. The modern Tatar historian A. Habutdinov, among others, has pointed out that «Russian Muslims, especially Tatar, Crimean-Tatar, Azerbaijani elites started activities which aimed at the building of the nation» [15, p. 88]. Modern English philosopher and anthropologist E. A. Gellner describes this process as an emergence of a nation where the transition from absolute domination of religion to culture takes place and the latest joins with ethnic identification markers [16, p. 159]. Ontological and socio-ethical questions are discussed in society and the religious ones have become of secondary importance. Society calls for more openness and transparency in religious aspects, the need for symbiosis of pure natural religion with a new paradigm of reasoning. As a consequence of these developments, at the beginning of the 20th century new philosophical movements emerged, such as liberalism (Sadri Maqsudy (1878–1957), Yusuf Akchura (1876–1935), Fatih Karimi (1870–1937)), theological liberalism (Musa Bigiev, Ziaeddin Kamali), socialism (Mullanur Vahitov (1885–1918), Galimdzhan Ibragimov (1887–1938)). Their development was intensified and influenced by the Russian revolution of 1905–1907 [17, p. 29].

In this historical context emerges a broad Jadid movement. It constitutes the traditions of the reformist-enlightenment movement, which was represented by Abu Nasr Qursawi, Husayn Faizhanov (1823–1866), Shihabetdin Marjani who supported liberal religious reformist ideas as well as the most progressive ideas and achievements of Russian and Western European thought. Jadidism became a result of the development of Tatar enlightenment and religious reformist movements of the 19th century. In fact, this was a complex of religious and philosophical ideas, which penetrated into various spheres of Tatar society. A. Yuzeev pointed out that at the turn of the 20th century there was a convergence of enlightenment ideas with those of religious reformism. He sees there an attempt to accommodate the Islamic creed with the new socio-cultural realities which emerged in the Volga-Ural region at the beginning of the 20th century. Rizaetdin Fakhretdin, Musa Bigiev, Gataulla Bayazitov (1846–1911), who represented this movement, put the rise of socio-economic and cultural level of the Tatar population in direct context of the achievements of Western European civilization in Russia [18]. Originally, the Jadidist movement was considered as a vehicle for reforming Islamic education. Later on, the idea of Jadidism goes beyond the borders of the movement itself and encompasses other aspects of life, such as social, cultural and political ones. The religious reformist activity of Shihabetdin Marjani together with the socio-political activity of Ismail Gasprinsky led the movement beyond the boundaries of the pure system of school education. Representatives of Jadidism demanded the adaptation of Islamic society to the realities of modern life. They advocated for revision of some Sharia regulations and adoption of the achievements of Western civilization. The opening of «the gates of ijtihad», the usage of the national language/s rather than Arabic during the Friday sermons, the allowing the Muslims to attend theatre performances are the most obvious examples. Religious consciousness of Tatar population still underwent significant transformations. This was mainly due to the population's exposure to secular sciences and popular culture. The Jadid world



outlook influenced the popular thought and thrived until the Russian Revolution of 1917. In the post-revolutionary period the circumstances have changed, which in the first instance did affect the Islamic religious philosophy.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the Tatar intellectual elite considered Jadidism as an intellectual and cultural movement, a kind of mental awakening, which was aimed to bring the Tatar population closer to European culture and, as a consequence, to reorganize and modernize public life in accordance with some European cultural patterns. However, after the 1930s, Jadidism was declared as a "bourgeois movement" and became to be considered within the Marxist categories of the "class struggle". In 1931 such scholars as Professors Arshaluis Mikhailovich Arsharuni (1896–1985) and Haji Zagidovich Gabidullin (1897–1937) identified the Jadids as a the "leading Tatar bourgeois class" and their activities as purely political [19, p. 12].

In the 1940–1950s the Soviet historiography described the phenomenon of Jadidism in such words as the «counterrevolutionary movement», the «bourgeois-nationalist movement», which bear the ideas of the Tatar nationalism, the pan-Turkism and the "class society". It was stressed that the Jadids made efforts to isolate the Tatars in order to transform them into the province of Ottoman Empire. It was implied that after the Great October Socialist revolution the Jadids became the "mercenaries" of the capitalist world, the "counter-revolutionists", who worked in harness with the "Trotskyite-Bukharin nationalist movement" [20, pp. 362–363].

The Soviet historiography of the 1950–1970s continued to describe Jadidism following the patterns and the terminology of the previous period based upon the officially expressed Communist party views. The official "History of the Autonomous Tatar SSR" identified Jadidism as a nationalist Tatar movement of the "post-reform period". The Jadids praised the "European enlightenment" and made efforts to reform the Islamic Creed, aiming to "narcotize the public consciousness". They "served the interests" of bourgeois society and strived to present Western values as a "natural development" of human history. Nevertheless, they have not achieved the goals set. Their schools taught secular subjects aiming to meet the demands of the bourgeoisie for well-educated clerks. The latter would help to increase the productivity and subsequently the profits of their employers. Further down the authors of the "History of the Autonomous Tatar SSR" summarize: «In its essence, the Jadidist movement was a pure bourgeois-nationalistic, reactionary movement closely associated with the ideas of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism» [21, p. 370]. Similar evaluations of Jadidism within the paradigm of the "class struggle" continued till the end of the 1960s.

From the 1970s there has been a tendency (Y. G. Abdullin) to consider the phenomenon of Jadidism as one of the stages of enlightenment. Later, in 1990 the scholars saw in it a public phenomenon, which reflects the "bourgeois-democratic hopes" of the Tatar people at the *fin de siècle*.

In this period, the interpretation of Jadidism covers other aspects. T. Davletshin, in his book «The Soviet Tatarstan», finds a connection between Jadidism and the reform of school education [22, pp. 46–50]. Edward J. Lazzerini, having examined the changes of approach to Jadidism in the Soviet period, considers it as one of the stages of the enlightenment movement [23, pp. 61–69]. In the preface to the book by Jamal Validi (1887–1932) it is highlighted that religious reform was a first step of the reformatory movement [24, p. 8]. The second step was a deep modernization



of traditional Islamic culture, which did include the reform of language and education [25, pp. 16–17].

Professor A.-A. Rorlich in her famous research devoted to Volga-Ural Tatars considers Jadidism within the scope of the broad Tatar reformatory movement [26, pp. 86–103]. A modern Turkish researcher, A. Kanlidere, identifies the role of Ulama in the reformatory movement of Tatars, by following E. J. Lazzarini. The Tatar scholar considers the Jadidist movement as a symbiosis of Islamic thought and modernist ideas: «Jadidists under the influence of the permeating of modern thought in the 19th century realized the necessity of selective assimilation of Western culture, intended to transform the mental stance of Muslims in relation to religious thought, education, gender sphere and policy» [27, p. 74]. He points out that religious problems dominate the activity of Tatar religious thinkers [27, p. 40].

In the 1970–1990s, the Jadidist phenomenon was thoroughly discussed. The gradual rapprochement took place with exactly those definitions which were identified by Tatar intellectuals in the 1920s. The "class approach" to the problem was abandoned and so the connections of Jadidism with the "reactionary pan-Islamism", pan-Turkism and open counterrevolutionary activities. Such an interpretation of the phenomenon of Jadidism coincides with the position of Russian and Western European researchers who consider this phenomenon as a broad reformatory movement of the Muslim population of the Russian Empire. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the subdivision of Jadidism into reformism and enlightenment is purely artificial: the whole national development of the Tatar population at that time should be identified as a reformatory with its specific closely intertwined stages.

In spite of the different approaches as above regarding the examining of this phenomenon, originally the term "Jadidism" was used to describe the method of conducting a lesson (*usul al-jadid*) in the religious school (madrasa) and also a set of reforms in the system of Islamic religious education (the second half of the 19th century). Because of this, Y. G. Abdullin, and E. J. Lazzarini thought that Jadidism started only in the 1880s [28; 29]. In fact, up to 1880 it developed as a large-scale socio-political movement of Islamic peoples of Imperial Russia. Other researchers considered Jadidism as a set of religious and philosophical regulations focused on renewal of spiritual, socio-economical and political spheres of society. One can see this as a reason why researchers suggest different dates of the origin of this movement.

Discussion

A modern American scholar D. DeWeese while criticizing the Jadidocentrist approach in researching the phenomenon of Jadidism brings forward that of his own. He goes in harness with the work by A. Bennigsen «Islam in the Soviet Union». There, the Jadidism is identified as a religious reform, which does not follow the conservative Islamic tradition although preserves of some particular fundamental settings of Islam as well as the ways of its survival in the "modern conditions of dominance of reason and spirit of criticism" [30, p. 35]. D. DeWeese suggests that here one should not stress the words «conservative» or «traditionalism» but «fundamentalism». He criticizes those who say that the religious reform would be followed by the process of "religious purification", which will keep the fundamental aspects. As characteristics of this natural process, he emphasizes the following: a language and educational reform and realization of the "national political project". His terminology includes such labels like "backward dogmatism", "obscurantism", "traditional theolo-



gy", "inconscious fidelity to traditional religious authorities" (*taqlid*), "the right of every Muslim to find answers in the canonical sources of Islam". D. DeWeese claims: «It is Ibn Taymiyya's program, of course, and contemporary Salafists', and, for that matter, Luther's as well; but what is most telling is the absence of any explanation that the important «innovation» here lay not in talking of «the right of every man», but in talking only about «the Quran and the Hadith» as the sources to be mined in seeking answers to those «religious questions» [31, pp. 77–78].

Conclusion

It should be stressed that the analysis of Islamic discourse, religious reformism of the *fin de siècle*, the phenomenon of Jadidism has its specific features as seen from the perspective of social thinking. It is connected with the periodization of national historiography, which includes such periods as the pre-revolutionary, Soviet and the post-Soviet. In pre-revolutionary Tatar historiography, Jadidism is considered as a progressive phenomenon oriented at departure from scholastic thinking and the rapprochement of Tatar culture with that of the Russian Empire and Western Europe, the modernization of social and political life in accordance with Western European principles. After the 1930s Jadidism was re-interpreted as a bourgeois, nationalistic, pan-Turkic and pan-Islamist movement. The 1970s evidence an attempt to consider it as one of the stages of the enlightenment movement. After the crucial events of the 1990s, the modern researchers of the Jadidist phenomenon re-consider it as a movement for reform, enlightenment, progress, modernization of different spheres of society. This period sees the idealization of the Jadidist image. Simultaneously, some researchers suggest a more balanced approach. They state that Jadidism was not a new phenomenon in the history of the region, the idea of Jadidism is not an equivalent of the modernism idea, since not only Jadids strived for modern sciences, technical progress, etc.

The Authors suggest that the analysis of this heterogenous phenomenon in the social life of the Tatar people should be conducted by taking into consideration its various aspects. The role of Jadids should be seen in a balance. They also acknowledge that the different approaches to this phenomenon can be explained by its various integral parts, which include religious reformatory discourse, the formation of capitalistic relations in the then Russian Empire, the emergence of the Tatar bourgeoisie and the intellectual elite, the germination and proliferation of the enlightenment ideas, the rise of Salafi movements in Islamicate world and reformatory ideas of Egyptians, Young Ottomans and Turks. The Authors also suggest that Jadidism is a new social phenomenon which blends religious and philosophical features of Islam while suggesting the renewal of different spheres of society in harness with European patterns. The name of the movement originates from "include *usul al-jadid*" (new method) in the system of Islamic education, which supersedes and overlaps religious reformatory Islamic discourse.

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