Aufsatz

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Military Elites as Pillars of Empire

General Abd-al-Aziz Davletshin and Islam Policies in the Russian Empire

DOI: https://doi.org/10.15500/akm.06.12.2021

Zusammenfassung: Historians have identified military elites as crucial pillars of empires. In the Russian Empire, too, the integration of non-Russian elites into the higher echelons of the army was central to building and sustaining the empire. This allowed Muslims, generally nobles, to pursue careers in the army throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among them was Abd-al-Aziz Davletshin who used his position to lobby the government for a more balanced treatment of the tsar's Muslim subjects. He is a fascinating example of an "imperial subject" who participated in the ruling of the empire and at the same time interpreted the imperial realm.

The Saint Petersburg Mosque was opened in 1913. A number of Muslim officers of the Russian army were members of the special committee which collected the funds for its construction, among them was general Abd-al-Aziz Davletshin. (picture: Alex 'Florstein' Fedorov)

In 1873, the American diplomat and writer Eugene Schuyler published a multi-volume account of his travels to Russian-ruled Central Asia. Among other things, Schuyler was interested in the tsarist empire's handling of its Muslim population. In this regard, he was impressed with the administration of the city of Samarkand where – in contrast to Tashkent – "all the officials seem to have at heart the welfare of the country and to be earnest in their work."[1] He was particularly struck by the prefect of the city, a "Captain Syrtlanof, a Mussulman gentlemen of Bashkir origin, speaking Kirgiz, Turki [sic] and Persian with great fluency". According to Schuyler, the "inhabitants were well pleased with him, not only because he was a Mussulman, but because he was able to listen himself to their complaints and to decide their disputes and was, what is rare enough to deserve mention, thoroughly honest." Schuyler praised Syrtlanof for his successful establishment of an "excellent hospital" in Samarkand, as well as the opening of a school for Muslim children, which had led "many leading Mohammedans to send their children there for the purpose of learning Russian". However, "unfortunately both for the population and for the best interest of the Russian government, Captain Syrtlanof is no longer there. The Governor-General [of Turkestan] got an idea into his head that he was a fanatic, and removed him."[2]

Schuyler's observations elucidate the precarious position of Muslim officers in Russian imperial service in the nineteenth century. Socially they were often nobles, but adhered to a religion which was considered inferior to Russian Orthodoxy, or even prone to fanaticism.[3] As the example of Syrtlanov illustrates, Russian officials sometimes regarded them with suspicion. On the other hand, the tradition of Muslims serving as officers in the army survived well into the twentieth century. Indeed, military elites have long been highlighted by historians as important pillars of empires.[4] In this article, I first briefly discuss how the army was one instrument of elite integration in the various Muslim regions of the Russian Empire, with a particular focus on the Volga-Ural region. I then look in-depth at one officer from this region, Abd-al-Aziz Davletshin, and analyse how he used his position to push for a more informed policy of the empire toward its Muslim subjects. Drawing on the concept of "autobiographic practices" and the "imperial biography", I argue that Davletshin was an example of how a few noble Volga-Ural Muslims could still enjoy outstanding careers as officers in Russian service despite

[1] Eugene Schuyler, Turkistan. Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja; with 3 Maps and Numerous Illustrations, 2 vols., London 1876, p. 266. For the circumstances of Syrtlanov's dismissal, see: Alexander Morrison, Russian Rule in Turkestan and the Example of British India, C. 1860-1917. In: The Slavonic and East European Review 84, 4 (2006), pp. 666-707, on p. 699.

[2] Schuyler, Turkistan, p. 277.

[3] See Paul W. Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy. Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905, Ithaca 2002; Robert P. Geraci, Window on the East. National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia, Ithaca 2001; Elena I. Campbell, The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance, Bloomington 2015; Mustafa Tuna, Imperial Russia's Muslims, Islam, Empire, and European Modernity, 1788-1914, Cambridge 2015. For a more optimistic appraisal of the Russian state's relationship to its Muslim subjects in European Russia and Central Asia, see: Robert D. Crews, For Prophet and Tsar. Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia, Cambridge, MA 2006.

[4] Istvan Déak, Beyond Nationalism. A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918, New York 1990.

the growing suspicion toward Islam within the imperial elites.[5] In this particular case, the government in fact consciously appointed a Muslim to investigate a phenomenon which was increasingly on officials' minds: the Hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage. On numerous levels, Davletshin was a figure who, with varying degrees of success, advocated the interests of Muslims vis-à-vis the imperial state throughout his life.

Elite Integration in Russia's Muslim Regions

Muslim officers in the Russian army were not a homogenous group. In terms of ethnicity and regional provenance, they reflected the diversity of Islam in the Russian Empire. Some stemmed from the Volga-Ural region which had been incorporated into the Muscovite state from the sixteenth century onwards.[6] After the annexation of Crimea in 1783, officers were recruited from among the Crimean Tatar elites as well.[7] In the Caucasus, gradually subjugated to Russian rule in the course of the nineteenth century, the integration of elites was more selective. The Southern Caucasus was incorporated into the Russian Empire after the wars against Persia. Until 1828, the Russian government followed its tested methods for the establishment of imperial rule through a mixture of violent suppression of resistance, the cooperation with certain segments of the elites, hostage taking and fortification.[8] Individual members of the influential khan families and a few *beks*, the Muslim land-owning elites, were awarded military ranks and their sons were allowed to pursue careers in the Russian military.[9] Administrators in the Caucasus ultimately refrained from granting either members of the khan families or *beks* any rights equivalent to those of the Russian nobility. Instead, the new category of the "higher Muslim estate" (*vyshe musul'manskoe soslovie*) was created, whose exact legal status remained unclear until the downfall of the tsarist regime. It was the Provisional Government which finally abolished all discriminations based on social, ethnic or religious grounds. The imperial state's handling toward Muslims in the Southern Caucasus stood in marked contrast to the government's approach toward the Orthodox Georgian nobility, who were awarded the same privileges as their Russian counterparts. In the Northern Caucasus, resistance of its various tribes under the banner of Islam from the late 1820s onwards fueled Russian suspicions against the elites of the indigenous

[5] See Campbell, The Muslim Question and Tuna, Imperial Russia's Muslims, pp. 195-216.

[6] Matthew P. Romaniello, The Elusive Empire. Kazan and the Creation of Russia, 1552-1671, Madison, WI 2012.

[7] For the process of elite integration in Crimea, see: Kelly O'Neill, Rethinking Elite Integration. The Crimean Murzas and the Evolution of Russian Nobility. In: Cahiers du Monde Russe 51, 2-3 (2010), pp. 397-418 and Kelly O'Neill, Claiming Crimea. A History of Catherine the Great's Southern Empire, New Haven/London 2017, pp. 124-163.

[8] Eva-Maria Auch, Muslim, Untertan, Bürger. Identitätswandel in gesellschaftlichen Transformationsprozessen der muslimischen Ostprovinzen Südkaukasiens (Ende 18. – Anfang 20. Jh.), Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 78-80.

[9] Auch, Muslim, Untertan, Bürger, p. 80; Firouzeh Mostashari, Tsarist Colonial Policy, Economic Change, and the Making of the Azerbaijani Nation. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania 1995, pp. 332-353.

societies.[10] Nonetheless, in this region, too, the government followed a strategy of forging loyalty by rewarding military ranks to the members of families deemed influential.[11]

Volga-Ural Muslims thus looked back to the longest tradition of service in the Russian army. After the conquest of the khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan in the sixteenth century, elite co-optation was an important strategy for the establishment of Muscovite rule in the region. Tatars were integrated into the army in order to "neutralize" them as potential political adversaries. This approach co-existed with violence against the Muslim population.[12] Toward the end of the seventeenth century, the pressure on the aristocratic elites to either convert to Christianity or to lose their privileges increased. Some of them abandoned Islam and were eventually assimilated.[13] During this period of heightened cultural and religious pressure, only a few noble families managed to keep both their privileges and their faith.[14] The offspring of these families were the ones who often pursued careers in the Russian military in the following centuries. It was a son of such a family, namely Kutlu-Mukhammad Tevkelev, who would become the first general of Muslim origin in the Russian imperial army in 1755. There is, however, a strong indication (he changed his name to Aleksei Ivanovich) that he had converted to Christianity already by 1734, the year he was promoted to the rank of a colonel. Tevkelev died after a distinguished career in imperial service in 1766.[15] Kutlu-Mukhammad Tevkelev's conversion to Christianity was most likely a reaction to the policy set by Peter I and some of his successors of severely increasing the pressure on Muslims to abandon their faith. Because of the loss of their privileges and estates during the missionary campaigns of the eighteenth century, many *murzy* had turned to commercial activity as an alternative source of income. Russia's expansion into the steppe allowed Muslim merchants to act as intermediaries between the markets of the inner Russian provinces and the Muslim khanates of Central Asia. Catherine II actively

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[10] Moshe Gammer, Muslim Resistance to the Tsar. Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan, London 1994; Clemens P. Sidorko, Dschihad im Kaukasus. Antikolonialer Widerstand der Dagestaner und Tschetschenen gegen das Zarenreich (18. Jahrhundert bis 1859), Wiesbaden 2007.

[11] Michael Khodarkovsky, Bitter Choices. Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus, Ithaca 2011, pp. 17-21. For an introduction to the diverse forms of social organization among the peoples of the Northern Caucasus and Russian perceptions thereof, see: Vladimir Bobrovnikov/I. L. Babich (eds.), Severnyi Kavkaz V Sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii, Moscow 2007, pp. 61-70.

[12] Janet Martin, Tatars in the Muscovite Army during the Livonian War. In: Eric Lohr/Marshall Poe (eds.), The Military and Society in Russia, 1450-1917, Leiden 2002, pp. 365–387, here on p. 384; Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, The Volga Tatars. A Profile in National Resilience, Stanford, Calif. 1986, pp. 38-39. On Bashkirs, see: Charles R. Steinwedel, Threads of Empire, Loyalty and Tsarist Authority in Bashkiria, 1552-1917, Bloomington 2016.

[13] Michael Kemper, Sufis und Gelehrte in Tatarien und Baschkirien, 1789-1889. Der Islamische Diskurs unter russischer Herrschaft, Berlin 1998, p. 19.

[14] Kemper, Sufis und Gelehrte, p. 20. For an overview of the Russian aristocratic families with "Turko-Tatar" origins, see: Shamil' Kamilevich Akhmetshin, Barkhatnaia Kniga Tatar Rossiiskie Dvorianskie Rody Tiurko-Tatarskogo Proiskhozhdeniia, Saint Petersburg 2010.

[15] See Charles Steinwedel's essay on the Tevkelevs' family biography: Charles Steinwedel, Kutlu-Mukhammad Batyr-Gireevich Tevkelev (1805-?) and Family. In: Stephen M. Norris/Willard Sunderland (eds.), Russia's People of Empire. Life Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the Present, Bloomington 2012, pp. 189-197, on p. 190.

promoted this role of Muslim merchants and laid the foundations for their equal treatment with the Russian merchants, which was eventually codified in 1824. The growing importance of the Muslim economic elite went hand in hand with the marginalization of nobles. But it was also Catherine II who guaranteed a number of Bashkir families their land holdings and allowed them to register as nobles in 1785.[16] Her policy of toleration enabled Muslims in general to enter the noble estate. By this time, however, the number of Muslim nobles had already been minimized. Additionally, the procedure to obtain noble status was protracted and sometimes difficult. Muslim families had to file a correspondent request, but whether this was met with a positive response very much depended on local circumstances: The authorities in the governorate of Orenburg were fairly generous in this respect, while those in Kazan were not. The consequences of these different approaches were still visible at the end of the nineteenth century, when the imperial census records showed that only a meagre 0.02 percent of Muslims in the governorate of Kazan were noble, while the correspondent figure in the governorate of Ufa was 2.32 percent.[17]

The change of policy under Catherine II manifested itself in the family history of the Tevkelevs. In the nineteenth century, they could openly assert their Islamic identity and at the same time pursue careers in the civil and military institutions of the Russian Empire.[18] In this period, too, a number of Tevkelevs embarked upon a military career. The most distinguished one was perhaps Selim-Girei who made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1852 after a successful military career and was later appointed as mufti of the Muslim Orenburg Spiritual Assembly, a post which he held from 1865 until 1885.[19] He was not the last Tevkelev to serve the Russian army, his nephew Kutlu-Mukhammad also reached the rank of a colonel, before he participated in the local administration and the *zemstvo* in his home region. In 1906, he was elected to the Duma, where he would remain a deputy until 1917.[20] Noble status continued to be the most likely entry ticket into the Russian officer corps, even if the importance of education gradually grew following the military reform of 1874.[21] There was only a small group of men for whom a career in the Russian military was fairly easily accessible.[22] Thus, a few noble Muslim

[16] Christian Noack, Muslimischer Nationalismus im Russischen Reich. Nationsbildung und Nationalbewegung bei Tataren und Baschkiren, 1861-1917, Stuttgart 2000, p. 55.

[17] Noack, Muslimischer Nationalismus im russischen Reich, p. 56, n. 66. The comparatively high number in the case of the governorate of Ufa can also be explained with the number of Bashkir nobles in the region.

[18] Steinwedel, Kutlu-Mukhammad Batyr-Gireevich Tevkelev (1805-?) and Family, p. 190.

[19] The selection of a military man rather than one of religious learning shows, that the Russian administration was far more interested in appointing someone who was considered politically reliable and had a good command of Russian rather than someone who would enjoy moral authority among the Muslim population of the Volga-Ural region due to his credentials as an alim.

[20] Steinwedel, Kutlu-Mukhammad Batyr-Gireevich Tevkelev (1805-?) and Family, pp. 193-196.

[21] John W. Steinberg, All the Tsar's Men. Russia's General Staff and the Fate of the Empire, 1898-1914, Washington, D.C. 2010, pp. 11-19.

[22] Peasants only began reaching the rank of an officer through service alone in higher numbers by the beginning of the twentieth century, see: Dimitry Ponomareff, Political Loyalty and Social Composition of a Military Elite. The Russian Officer Corps, 1861-1903, Santa Monica, CA 1977, pp. 23-24.

families from the Volga-Ural region continued to bring forth distinguished officers of the Russian army.

Abd-al-Aziz Davletshin

One of these men was Abd-al-Aziz Davletshin. He was born in the governorate of Ufa as the son of a lieutenant-colonel (*podpolkovnik*) and came from one of the noble Muslim families of the Volga-Ural region, who had served the Russian tsars for centuries. He received his military training in the Paul Military Academy in St. Petersburg, from which he graduated in 1882.[23] Five years later, he enrolled in the courses for "Eastern languages" (*vostochnie iaziki*) in the Asiatic Department of the Russian Empire's Ministry for Foreign Affairs. After several assignments in the *zakaspiskaia oblast'* in Central Asia, Davletshin served as a commissioner at the Russian-Iranian border. From this post, he was summoned to undertake a journey to Mecca to report on the Hajj and the role of Russia's Muslim subjects in it.[24] After submitting his account to the government in 1899, he went on to serve in the War Ministry's main staff (*glavniy shtab*) in St. Petersburg. There, he was involved in pressing ahead with the construction of a central mosque in the empire's capital. In 1905, a committee was founded whose purpose was to organize the mosque's site and to secure funds for the project. Davletshin was one of two chairmen of the committee which consisted of 21 Petersburg Muslims, among them a considerable number of merchants and officers.[25] The mosque was inaugurated in 1913.

After the outbreak of the First World War, Davletshin approached the Ministry for Internal Affairs in October 1914 in his function as chairmen of the committee to successfully lobby the government for allowing the establishment of a charitable organization for Muslim soldiers and their families.[26] In 1916, Tsar Nicolaus II awarded him the order of the Holy Stanislav of the first rank (*orden Cviatogo Stanislava pervoy stepeni*) "in recognition of excellent, zealous service and your special works, elicited by the conditions of the ongoing war" (*v vozdanie otlichno-revnostoy sluzhby i osobykh trudov vashikh, vyzvannykh obstoiatelstvami tekushchey voyny*).[27] After the downfall of the tsarist regime in February 1917, he was appointed by the Provisional Government as member of the "Turkestan committee" which was to oversee the establishment of the new political order in Central Asia. After the Bolshevik takeover, in 1920 he approached the commander (*nachal'nik)* of the newly founded Red Army, N. I. Rattėl', with his

[23] The following biographical sketch is based on: Dmitrii Iu. Arapov, Imperatorskaia Rossiia i musul'manskii mir. Sbornik statei (konets XVIII-nachalo XX V.), Moscow 2006, pp. 228-232.

[24] On Davletshin's report, see also: Elena Campbell, The 'Pilgrim Question'. Regulating the Haj in Late Imperial Russia. In: Canadian Slavonic Papers 56, 3-4 (2014), pp. 239-68, on pp. 253, 255.

[25] Maksim Ivanov, Sobornaia Mechet' V Peterburge, Saint Petersburg 2006, p. 16. In all, five officers were members of the committee.

[26] Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv, RGIA [Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg], f. 821, op. 10, d. 598, ll. 21-46.

[27] Arkhiv Vostokvedov Instituta Vostochnykh Rukopisey RAN [Archive of Orientalists of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, St. Petersburg, hereafter AVIVRRAN], f. 70, op. 1, d. 80.

project of establishing a department for Oriental Studies in the Academy of the General Staff – a project which was realized shortly after Davletshin's death in 1920.[28]

In what sense was Daveltshin's life an imperial one? In the field of empire studies, the genre of the biography has experienced a revival in recent years. For a number of reasons biographical studies can contribute to our understanding of empire.[29] By focusing on the micro-perspective of individuals, biographical approaches can, first, highlight the nuances of imperial experiences which are often lost from a macro-perspective. Second, since imperial subjects often spent their careers in different colonies of empire, studying their biographies can, in the words of David Lambert and Alan Lester, "connect people, spaces and events analytically in the ways that colonial relations had connected them historically".[30] Third, by focusing on the "autobiographic practices" of imperial subjects, we can learn how men and women who were brought forth by the empire interpreted imperial realm and how they participated in its governance.[31] General Davletshin's life was no doubt shaped by empire. He served in different parts of the Russian Empire, participated in policy debates and managed to secure the state's support when he and other Muslim elite figures organized relief for Muslim soldiers and their families during the First World War. He was also an individual whose life certainly took "multicultural direction".[32] His personal residue in the Orientalists' archive of the Russian Academy of Science reveal that he commanded Persian in addition to his mother tongues Tatar and Russian, and also studied French, English and Arabic.[33]

Davletshin's most notable contribution to debates about Islam policies in the Russian Empire, was his detailed report on the annual Muslim pilgrimage, the Hajj. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the pilgrimage of Muslims from the Russian

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[28] Arapov, Imperatorskaia Rossiia i musul'manskii mir, p. 231.

[29] See, for example: David Lambert/Alan Lester (eds.), Colonial Lives across the British Empire. Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century, Cambridge 2006; David Gilmour, The Ruling Caste, Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj, New York 2006; Nathaniel Knight, Biography as Archive. Writing the Lives of Scholars in Imperial Russia. In: Slavonic & East European Review 96,1 (2018), pp. 16-40 ; Ian W. Campbell, Writing Imperial Lives. Biography, Autobiography, and Microhistory. In: Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 18,1 (2017), pp. 151-64; Stephen M. Norris/Willard Sunderland (eds.), Russia's People of Empire. Life Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the present, Bloomington 2012; Tim Buchen/Malte Rolf (eds.), Eliten im Vielvölkerreich. Imperiale Biographien in Russland und Österreich-Ungarn (1850-1918) = Elites and Empire. Imperial Biographies in Russia and Austria-Hungary (1850-1918), Berlin/Boston 2015; Malte Rolf, Einführung. Imperiale Biographien. Lebenswege imperialer Akteuere in Groß- und Kolonialreichen. In: Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Zeitschrift für historische Sozialwissenschaft 40,1 (2014), pp. 5-21. For studies of the Russian Empire told through the lens of an individual's life, see: Khodarkovsky, Bitter choices; Willard Sunderland, The Baron's Cloak. A History of the Russian Empire in War and Revolution, Ithaca 2014.

[30] David Lambert/Alan Lester, Imperial Spaces, Imperial Subjects. In: David Lambert/Alan Lester, Colonial Lives Across the British Empire, pp. 1-31, on p. 5.

[31] Martin Aust/Benjamin Schenk (eds.), Imperial Subjects. Autobiographische Praxis in den Vielvölkerreichen der Romanovs, Habsburger und Osmanen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert, Köln 2015. Schenk and Aust put forward a broad understanding of "autobiographic practices" and include for example policy proposal or other administrative documents. This article follows their approach in this respect.

[32] Stephen M. Norris/Willard Sunderland, Introduction. Russia's People of Empire. In: Stephen M. Norris/Willard Sunderland, Russia's People of Empire, pp. 1-15, on p. 5.

[33] AVIVRRAN, F. 70, op. 1.

Empire had a more pressing issue for the government, since the numbers of pilgrims embarking onto the journey were rising primarily for two reasons. First, Russia's expansion into Central Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century had increased the number of Muslim subjects. Second, Russia's industrialization had produced a better infrastructure for the pilgrims who could now rely on railroads, which made the journey cheaper and thus accessible to more people.[34] Initially, the Ministry for Internal Affairs had attempted to stop this movement across borders by simply prohibiting the pilgrimage in 1861. Unsurprisingly, the pilgrims continued to travel to the Ottoman Empire illegally, and the ban was lifted in 1881.[35] Even if some imperial administrators looked upon the practice with suspicion, viewing it as a manifestation of dangerous pan-Islamic sentiments among Russia's Muslims, it became increasingly clear that the government had to become involved in the organization of the pilgrimage if it wanted some kind of control over its subjects. As Eileen Kane has recently demonstrated, the government's interest in exploiting the Hajj for its own purposes eventually outweighed concerns about this migration movement and the state actually became a supporter of the pilgrimage.[36]

It was in this context that the Muslim general Davletshin was commissioned to describe the phenomenon. In his survey, he explained the basic facts and the meaning of the Hajj for Muslims, the routes the pilgrims were taking and the most important stops on the way. Then Davletshin went on to describe the role Russian Muslims played in it, and the sanitary conditions during the pilgrimage. Davletshin also devoted a chapter to the pilgrims from other states, before analyzing the outbreak of cholera epidemics that equally concerned the European empires, and which forced the British, the French, the Ottoman and the Russian Empire to co-ordinate their efforts to contain them.[37]

With regard to Davletshin's attempts to influence the Russian government's approach toward and view of its own Muslim subjects, his take on their participation in the Hajj is of particular interest. To begin with, Davletshin explained that the number of pilgrims from the Russian Empire had actually been quite low in 1898, with only 450 men arriving in Mecca that year. He attributed this to the rigid policy of the government that refused to issue passports to people solely for the purpose of completing the Hajj.[38] But Davletshin was skeptical whether it was possible to prevent Russian Muslims from travelling to Mecca. One possibility to restrict their movement could be to issue

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[34] Daniel Brower, Russian Roads to Mecca. Religious Tolerance and Muslim Pilgrimage in the Russian Empire. In: Slavic Review 55,3 (1996), pp. 567-84. For an exhaustive and excellent history of the Hajj in the Russian Empire, see: Eileen Kane, Russian Hajj. Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca, Ithaca 2016.

[35] Daniel Brower, Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire, London 2003, p. 114.

[36] Kane, Russian Hajj.

[37] The Hajj was an issue in international efforts of the European empires to co-ordinate their actions against the outbreak of cholera epidemics, see: Valeska Huber, The Unification of the Globe by Disease? The International Sanitary Conferences on Cholera, 1851-1894. In: Historical Journal 49,2 (2006), pp. 453-76.

[38] Voennaia Tipografiia, Otchet shtab-kapitana Davletshina k komandirovke v Khidzha, Saint Petersburg 1899, pp. 86-87.

passports only in their place of residence.[39] After explaining in detail where the Russian-Muslim pilgrims exactly came from, which routes and which shipping companies they took and in which cities they had obtained their passports, Davletshin dwelt on the nature of the pilgrimage and the effects it had upon the Muslims of the Russian Empire.

Davletshin was eager to emphasize that the pilgrimage was first and foremost a religious affair and that it did not fuel any kind of pan-Islamic or pan-Turkish sentiments among the Muslims of the Russian Empire.[40] He hereby advanced a different interpretation of the Hajj than many Russian administrators. Davletshin asserted that in certain respects the pilgrimage actually had quite the opposite effects: The Russian Muslims were allegedly shocked when confronted with the narrow streets and poor houses in Constantinople, the capital of the caliph of Islam. Mecca itself made a similar impression on them. There they would meet the Bedouins who were after all the "fellow-tribesmen" (*soplemenniki)* of the prophet, but who nonetheless would rob the pilgrims in broad daylight under the eyes of passive "Turkish soldiers".[41] To Davletshin's mind, the pilgrimage led to a disenchantment of Russia's Muslims toward the political and religious centers of Islam and instead heightened their appreciation of their homeland. Nor was the pilgrimage suited to lead to a rapprochement of the various Muslim ethnic communities, not even the Kirgiz and Tatars from the Russian Empire took a particular interest in one another.[42] The Hajj was simply not a political affair.

According to Davletshin, the influx of Russian Muslims into Mecca accounted for the Russian Empire's excellent reputation among the inhabitants of Hejaz (a region in the West of the Arabian peninsula, which also includes the cities of Mecca and Medina): "I was very pleasantly surprised that our dear homeland (*rodina*) possesses a special appeal among the population of the far away Hejaz; here one speaks of the might of the Russian tsar, about the orderliness, and above all about the justice, which exists in Russia."[43] This could only be explained with the stories Russian-Muslim pilgrims were disseminating among the locals. Davletshin claimed that as they were confronted with the backwardness of the Arabian lands, "our Muslims" were turned into "ardent patriots" (*goriachie patrioty*) and the term "Russian subjects" inspired respect in Hejaz.[44] This excellent standing stood in stark contrast to that of the British, who were considered as insidious people and some locals held them responsible for a number of disturbances such as the movement in Sudan, the insurgency in Yemen and the Italian invasion in Abyssinia. In 1899, he had met some inhabitants of Mecca in Cairo and upon asking their opinion about the recent rebellion in Andizhan, they replied that this had surely been a plot of the English. It seemed probable that the accounts of pilgrims from

[39] Ibid., p. 90.
[40] Ibid., p. 117.
[41] Ibid., p. 116.
[42] Ibid., p. 117.
[43] Ibid., p. 118.
[44] Ibid., pp. 118-119.

India and Egypt had led to this bad reputation.[45] With this report, Davletshin came to the defense of Muslim pilgrims from Russia, whom many imperial administrators regarded as agents of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism, and instead portrayed them as people who were contributing to Russia's reputation as a civilized and mighty state. He emphasized that they did not turn into Muslim fanatics during their journey, but rather returned to Russia as patriots. Davletshin thus used his position as a respected imperial officer to attempt to influence the government's perception of Muslim pilgrims from Russia and the state's approach toward them. The government, in turn, used him to advance its knowledge about a phenomenon which it found hard to grasp.

The report on the Hajj was not the only case in which Davletshin positioned himself in debates within the imperial bureaucracy on the adequate policies toward Muslim subjects. In 1901, he issued a report on the judicial system in St. Petersburg for the War Ministry.[46] But before that, he also got involved in the debate about an incident which greatly worried Russian imperial authorities: the violent attack on a Russian military camp in the Andizhan area in Turkestan in 1898, which left over twenty soldiers of the Russian imperial army dead and eighteen wounded. It was carried out by some 2,000 natives under the leadership of a Sufi master of the order of Naqshbandi. The outbreak of violence took regional administrators by surprise, who in spite of regular occurrences of unrest in the region had not seen any real obstacles for the establishment of Russian rule.[47] The shock over Andizhan changed this. Especially the new governor-general of Turkestan, Sergei Dukhovskoi, who arrived in Tashkent shortly after the attack, considered the "Muslim question" a very real threat not only in Turkestan, but throughout the empire. In a report to the tsar, he called for a fundamental re-formulation of Russia's Islam policy, citing the tradition of "tolerance" since Catherine II as a cardinal mistake.[48] Additionally, under Dukhovskoi's auspices, the Turkestan administration published a collection of articles on Islam (*sbornik materialov po musul'manstvu*) in which administrative officials put forward a thoroughly negative view of Islam, which they considered a political menace to the Russian Empire in general. The collection was to serve as guidance for administrators in the region.[49]

It was in reaction to this publication that Davletshin, in his capacity as a commander (*nachal'nik*) in the main staff in St. Petersburg, composed a letter to war minister Aleksei Kuropatkin. Davletshin criticized the authors of the collection for their extreme views on Islam and accused them of lacking basic knowledge of the religion, as well as of the social reality in Muslim communities. Davletshin declared, that the

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[45] Ibid., p. 119.

[46] Otchet kapitana Davletshina po komandirovke v Turkestanskii krai i stepniia oblasti, dlia oznakomleniia s deiatel'nost'iu narodnykh sudov, Saint Petersburg 1901.

[47] Campbell, The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance, pp. 91-92.

[48] For a detailed discussion of Dukhovskoi's take on the "Muslim question", see: Campbell, The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance, pp. 93-97, as well as Brower, Turkestan, p. 100. For a critically edited and commented version of Dukhovskoi's report to the Tsar, see: Arapov, Imperatorskaia Rossiia i musul'manskii mir, pp. 138-178.

[49] Campbell, The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance, pp. 96-97.

assertion that the Koran was a posthumous collection of Mohammed's teachings and sayings showed their complete ignorance of the Koran, since even those who knew little about Islam were aware of the fact that the Koran was seen by Muslims as a revelation of God, and that Mohammed's sayings were compiled in different hadith collections.[50] The authors' erroneous, selective, and unhistorical reading of the Koran was one of Davletshin's main points of criticism: They cited certain passages to underpin their claim that Muslims regarded Christianity as their enemy without paying any attention to the fact that these extracts had been formulated in wartime when Muslims were fighting against pagans and Jews.[51] In a similar fashion, the authors conceded that Mohammed had at first been an advocate of religious tolerance and had then taken a turn and called for the war against alleged unbelievers. Davletshin insisted that this was also incorrect. Mohammed's epigram that "religion knows no force" actually stemmed from the later period of his life, and one could find both examples of tolerance and of calls to war in the Koran, regardless of whether these stemmed from the time before or after Mohammed's flight from Mecca. Nor did the authors mention that the Koran held science in higher regard than war, and that there were many circumstances in which going to war was actually forbidden.[52] Ultimately, Davletshin was pleading for a strictly historical reading of the Koran which took into account the specific circumstances of its creation and its many inner contradictions.

Davletshin's criticism was not confined to the question of the correct reading and interpretation of the Koran, he also pointed to a number of errors with regard to recent developments among Russia's Muslim subjects. For one thing, the authors' statement that teachers in Central Asian *madrasas* were calling for the extinction of "infidels" was simply not true.[53] Davletshin also found that another phenomenon, which he himself had studied, had been profoundly misunderstood by the authors: the Hajj. Not only was the estimated number of 4,000 pilgrims from the Russian Empire far too high, the claim that the pilgrims who completed the Hajj three times were regarded as saints was as wrong as the assumption that the pilgrimage was a manifestation of "Muslim fanaticism".[54] In this context, Davletshin's tone became rather poignant. He declared that the idea that the pilgrimage could lead to a union of all Muslims headed by the sharif of Mecca, who would be comparable in his standing to the pope, was "nothing more than a phantasy".[55]

In spite of such strong words, Davletshin conceded that the collection of articles on Islam had been gathered in haste and under the impression of the recent events in

[50] Arapov, Imperatorskaia Rossiia i musul'manskii mir, p. 233.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., pp. 234, 236.
[53] Ibid., p. 233.
[54] Ibid., pp. 233-234.
[55] Ibid., p. 235.

Andizhan.[56] Nonetheless, he regarded the potential damage it could cause the government and Russia's relationship to her Muslim subjects as quite high. If officers became acquainted with Islam on the basis of this collection, it would only lead to the spread of the idea that all Muslims regarded Christians as their enemies and would thus result in a greater degree of hostility and mistrust toward the population of Central Asia. In turn, the Muslims of Central Asia would regard this as an insult of their religion.[57] Davletshin expressed his regret that in the officers' courses for "Eastern languages" (*vostochnie iaziki*) the study of Islam was not a compulsory subject.[58] To Davletshin's mind, this was the key to a more sober and multi-layered approach to Islam – a state of affairs that was currently not reached. Once more, Davletshin intervened with the clear goal of improving the relationship between the Russian Empire and its Muslim subjects. There is no indication that Davletshin's lobbying for his fellow Muslims delegitimized him in the eyes of other imperial administrators.

But were his interventions ever successful? Their impact is hard to measure. Regarding his intervention in Turkestan, Davletshin was not the only one highly critical of Dukhovskoi's line of argument. The influential finance minister Sergei Witte was equally skeptical of the governor-general's policy proposals, albeit for different reasons. Witte saw little substantive evidence for a pan-Islamic movement and regarded the dangers of a radically different approach to Islam as far greater than its benefits. To his mind, the "Muslim question" was not a particularly alarming one.[59] In spite of the rebuff of Dukhovskoi's policy proposals, anti-Muslim sentiments among officials in Turkestan continued to be high. But in other spheres Davletshin's actions had an impact: The St. Petersburg mosque remains the religious center of the city's Muslims until this day. During the First World War Davletshin managed to obtain the government's approval for the establishment of a relief organization for Muslim soldiers and their families. As for the management of the Hajj, the influence of Davletshin's report is hard to assess, particularly since he refrained from making detailed policy proposals, and instead concentrated on describing the conditions in Mecca and Medina and on straightening Russian misconceptions about the ritual. However, his report together with those of Russian doctors seem to have served as the basis for the "Temporary Regulations for Muslim pilgrimages" of 1903, which stipulated that pilgrims were required to obtain a special passport and that they would be allowed to re-enter the Russian Empire at specific sea-ports and border points after having undergone a sanitary check.[60]

Hence, while Davletshin surely did not initiate a radical re-assessment of anti-Muslim stereotypes among Russian administrators, he was able to use his positions as a general of the main staff to call for a more nuanced perception of Muslims in Russia. In

[56] Ibid., pp. 235-236. The uprising did indeed make a great impression on local officials in the region, and they regarded Islam as a driving force behind the rebellion, see: Brower, Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire, pp. 97-99.

[57] Arapov, Imperatorskaia Rossiia i musul'manskii mir, pp. 236-237.

[58] Ibid., p. 236.

[59] Campbell, The 'Pilgrim Question', p. 98.

[60] Ibid., p. 258.

contrast to the Volga-Ural Muslims, mostly of peasant background, who served in the rank-and-file of the Russian army, Davletshin could, as a Russian imperial noble and as a Muslim, challenge Russian stereotypes of Muslims. His interventions show that he understood himself not only as a spokesperson for the Volga-Ural Muslims, but of all Muslims living within the Russian imperial realm in Central Asia, the Caucasus or Crimea. Throughout his life, he was a loyal servant of the Tsarist regime and he continued to serve Russia after the February Revolution of 1917. The career path he took was only open for a very small number of people. However, empires depended on such go-betweens with expert knowledge on indigenous peoples throughout their existence, and in this context, the army was one of the most important institutions of elite integration.

This article was edited by Christina Kecht.

Zitierempfehlung

Franziska Davies, Military Elites as Pillars of Empire. General Abd-al-Aziz Davletshin and Islam Policies in the Russian Empire, in: Portal Militärgeschichte, 06. Dezember 2021, URL: https://portal-militaergeschichte.de/davies_elites, DOI: https://doi.org/10.15500/akm.06.12.2021 (Bitte fügen Sie in Klammern das Datum des letzten Aufrufs dieser Seite hinzu).