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THE CONTENT OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY JADID TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract. This article analyses the place and content of religious instruction in the educational textbooks produced by the Turkestan Jadids in the early twentieth century. Drawing on the primers and religious-subject textbooks authored by Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Munavvar Qori Abdurashidkhanov, Abdulla Avloni, and Saidrasul Saidazizi, the study demonstrates that the new-method (usul-i jadid) reform did not abolish religious teaching but rather reformed its methodology and content. The findings confirm that in Jadid maktabs, Qur'anic literacy was taught through the phonetic method (usul-i savtiya), while creed, ritual practice, ethics, and the history of Islam were taught in the mother tongue — systematically and intelligibly. The author assesses the Jadid educational project as a movement of renewal (tajdid) within the Islamic tradition.

Keywords: Jadidism, new method, phonetic method, religious education, textbook, maktab, Behbudi, Munavvar Qori, Avloni, ethics, Turkestan.

INTRODUCTION

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a profound transformation took place in the spiritual and cultural life of Turkestan society. The Jadid movement, which emerged under conditions of Russian imperial colonialism, constituted a broad reformist programme devised by the region's progressive intelligentsia to awaken the nation through education and knowledge. At the heart of this programme lay the field of education — more precisely, the radical renewal of the traditional maktab and madrasa system. In the Jadid view, the renewal of society was possible only through the upbringing of a new generation, and the upbringing of a new generation was possible, above all, only through the reform of the educational system.

The theoretical and practical foundations of the new-method school are directly linked to the activity of the Crimean educator Isma'ilbek Gaspirali (Gasprinskii, 1851–1914). In 1883 he founded the newspaper *Tarjuman*, and in 1884 he established in Bakhchysarai a school based on the "usul-i savtiya tadrijiya" ("graduated phonetic method"). This phonetic method became known as *usul-i jadid* ("the new method"), and the reformers who followed it came to be called *Jadids*. In Turkestan, Jadid ideas spread widely from the 1890s onwards, and new-method schools were established one after another across the region.[1]

[1]Gh'affarov Sh. Factors influencing the worldview of the Jadids in the late 19th and early 20th century. — Samarkand: Imam Bukhari International Research Centre, 2022. URL: https://www.bukhari.uz

The question of the Jadids' attitude towards religion and religious instruction has long been interpreted one-sidedly in historiography. Soviet-era scholarship frequently portrayed the Jadids as "secularisers" who displaced religious teaching, while their conservative opponents — the *qadimists* — condemned them as "atheis ts." Yet as Adeeb Khalid, who analysed Jadidism as a project of cultural reform, has emphasised, the Jadids were not secularisers who rejected Islam but Muslim reformers striving to reconceptualise knowledge and Muslim society.[2]

The most direct and reliable source for determining the Jadids' true attitude towards religious instruction is the educational textbooks they themselves produced. A textbook reveals most clearly what its author conceived as the content of education and what he aimed to convey to the pupil, and how. From this standpoint, studying the religious content of Jadid textbooks makes it possible to illuminate not merely the pedagogical views of individual authors but the strategy of the movement as a whole in the sphere of religious instruction.

The relevance of the topic is determined by several factors. First, it serves the understanding of the relationship between religion and secular knowledge, tradition and modernity, in the history of Central Asian enlightenment. Second, an impartial analysis of the religious content of Jadid textbooks helps to revisit, on a scholarly basis, both the one-sided labels of 'seculariser' and 'atheist.' Third, the national enlightenment heritage retains theoretical significance for the sphere of education and upbringing today.

The aim of this article is to analyse, on the basis of primary sources, the place, composition, and methods of religious instruction in early twentieth-century Jadid textbooks. To this end the following tasks were set: to identify the types of Jadid textbooks by religious content; to classify the domains of religious knowledge within them (Qur'anic literacy, creed, ritual practice, ethics, history of Islam); and to determine the essence of the new-method reform's impact on religious instruction.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS

The primary sources of the research are educational textbooks published in Turkestan in the early twentieth century: Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's *Muxtasari tarixi islom*, *Amaliyoti islomiya*, *Kitobat ul-atfol*, and *Alifboi maktabi islomiya*[3]; Munavvar Qori Abdurashidkhanov's *Adibi avval*, *Havoiji diniya*, *Tarixi anbiyo*, *Tarixi islomiya*, and *Tajvid*[4]; Abdulla Avloni's *Turkiy guliston yoxud axloq* and *Birinchi muallim*; and Saidrasul Saidazizi's *Ustodi avval*. Auxiliary sources include the periodical press of the era (*Oyina*, *Tarjuman*, *Sadoyi Turkiston*) and archival data cited in the scholarly literature.

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[2]Khalid A. The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia. — Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. — P. 1–17, 158–183.

[3]Mahmudkhôja Behbudi (1875–1919) // Ziyouz Library. URL: https://n.ziyouz.com

[4]Munavvar Qori Abdurashidkhanov // Jadid.uz portal. URL: https://jadid.uz/jadids/munavvarqori-abdurashidxonov; see also: New Method Schools // Encyclopaedia of Uzbekistan.

The following methods were employed: the principle of historicism — textbooks were studied in connection with the socio-political and cultural environment in which they were created; the historical-comparative method — textbooks by different authors were compared with one another and with the Crimean-Tatar (Gaspirali) model; source-study (textual) analysis — the structure and content of the textbooks were examined; content analysis — domains of religious knowledge were categorised; and the systemic-structural approach — which made it possible to determine the place of religious and secular subjects within a unified curriculum.

From a source-study perspective, one important caveat must be noted: the publication dates of Jadid textbooks vary across different catalogues and studies. For instance, Behbudi's *Muxtasari tarixi islom* is given as 1904 in some sources and 1909 in others; *Amaliyoti islom* is recorded as both 1905 and 1908. These discrepancies are explained by the repeated reprinting of the works and by old printing-house practices. The dates given below are therefore approximate, and establishing the precise details of each edition requires bibliographical verification. Moreover, the fact that complete copies of many textbooks have not survived to the present day is an objective factor complicating textual analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Analysis of the Jadid textbooks shows that religious instruction in them was not incidental or secondary but systematic and purposeful. The content of religious knowledge may be divided into the following principal domains.

Literacy and the primer — through the phonetic method.

Primer books such as Saidrasul Saidazizi's *Ustodi avval* (1902), Munavvar Qori's *Adibi avval* (1907), and Avloni's *Birinchi muallim* (1912) organised literacy acquisition through the phonetic method in place of the old letter-by-syllable (*hijo*) approach. This method enabled a child to become literate within a few months and laid the foundation for reading the Qur'ān with comprehension and correct pronunciation. Saidazizi's *Ustodi avval* was among the first primers in Turkestan to be produced using the phonetic method, and Avloni also drew upon it when compiling his own textbook.[5]

Qur'anic literacy and tajwid.

Munavvar Qori's *Tajvid* (1911) textbook presents, in a systematic fashion, the science of tajwid — the rules for the correct recitation of the Qur'ān — including the rules of *ta'awwudh* and *basmala*, pausing (*waqf*), and silence (*sakta*). This textbook demonstrates that Qur'anic recitation — the central element of religious instruction — was placed on a scholarly and methodological footing.[6]

Creed and ritual practice (practical religious instruction).

[5]Ibid. Avloni based his 'Birinchi muallim' on Saidrasul Azizi's 'Ustodi avval' (1902).

[6]Munavvar Qori Abdurashidkhanov — a distinguished scholar of tajwid // Central Asian Journal of Education and Innovation. URL: https://in-academy.uz/index.php/cajei

Behbudi's *Amaliyoti islomiya* and Munavvar Qori's three-part *Havoiji diniya* ("Religious Essentials") were aimed at teaching, in an intelligible manner in the mother tongue, the foundations of belief and practical worship (*iman*, prayer, ritual purity, fasting, and so on) required of every Muslim. Behbudi stressed that a child must from an early age be taught all the practices obligatory for Muslims; sources record that his pupils' religious learning was acknowledged by numerous scholars.[7] Archival documents confirm that Munavvar Qori's eligious textbooks were used not only in his own school but also in the new-method schools of Kokand.[8]

History of Islam and history of the prophets.

Behbudi's *Muxtasari tarixi islom* ("A Brief History of Islam") and Munavvar Qori's *Tarixi anbiyo* and *Tarixi islomiya* presented the pupil with a comprehensive historical picture of the religious heritage. The fact that some of the textbooks Behbudi prepared for school were deliberately devoted to religious instruction and Islamic history shows that he regarded religious knowledge as primary in the upbringing of the child.[9]

Ethics — Islamic moral instruction.

Abdulla Avloni's *Turkiy guliston yoxud axloq* ("The Turkish Rose-Garden, or Ethics", 1913) is the most influential ethics textbook of Jadid education; it presents, on the basis of Islamic morality, a systematic account of good and bad character, human duty and virtues. Behbudi's *Kitobat ul-atfol* likewise contained practical recommendations concerning fine conduct, courteous behaviour, and calligraphy — for example, models for addressing one's parents with the words *muhtaram* and *aziz*.[10]

The harmony of religion and secular knowledge.

The religious subjects enumerated above were taught in the Jadid school alongside secular subjects such as geography, arithmetic, the mother tongue, and history — within a single, unified curriculum. The Jadids interpreted secular knowledge — *ilm* — as a domain not in conflict with Islam but indeed called upon by religion to be developed. In this way, the textbooks united religious and secular instruction not as opposites but as parts of a single enlightenment system.

The above findings are reinforced by the geographical spread of the new-method schools: the first such schools were established in Bukhara in 1893, in Kokand and Samarkand in 1898, and in

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[7]Behbudi's pedagogical path — educating students without punishment // Oyina.uz, 2025. URL: https://oyina.uz/uz/article/3634

[8]The first school-founder and the first Jadid to be executed — the honourable path of Munavvar Qori // Oyina.uz. URL: https://oyina.uz/uz/article/3700. The article, citing archival documents, notes the use of the textbooks in Tashkent and Kokand new-method schools.

[9]See: Behbudi M. Muxtasari tarixi islom and related textbooks listed in the bibliography.

[10]See: Behbudi M. Kitobat ul-atfol. — Samarkand, 1908; 1914.

Tashkent in 1900–1901 (by Munavvar Qori).[11] In a 1914 issue of the journal *Oyina*, Behbudi described the book as "the gateway to paradise and the future," calling upon the people to embrace school education.[12]

DISCUSSION

The findings of the research demonstrate the groundlessness of the view that portrays the Jadids as a force opposed to religious instruction. The target of the Jadid reform was not the content of religion itself but the *method* (*usul*) of its transmission and its intelligibility. This conclusion is reinforced by the personal biographies of the authors: Behbudi held the rank of mufti and was a scholar with a deep knowledge of Islamic history and sharia; Munavvar Qori was a memoriser of the Qur'ān and an accomplished master of the science of tajwid. They therefore reformed Islam from within its own tradition.

The accusation of "atheism" levelled at the Jadids by their opponents in the Jadid–*qadimist* controversy was largely polemical in character. In reality, religious knowledge in the Jadid maktabs was conveyed more systematically and intelligibly than in the old-method schools: a child was taught not merely to memorise the Qur'ān but to read it with understanding, and was instructed in the foundations of creed and worship and in the principles of Islamic ethics — all in the mother tongue.

From a comparative perspective, the Turkestan Jadid textbooks emerge as a continuation of the Crimean model established by Gaspirali. The phonetic method, the harmony of religious and secular subjects, intelligible instruction in the mother tongue — all of these were inspired by Gaspirali's pedagogy. At the same time, this process is in harmony with the broader reformist spirit — the idea that knowledge is a religious duty and that education should be adapted to the demands of the age.

According to Adeeb Khalid's concept of cultural reform, the core of Jadidism lay in the reconceptualisation of knowledge; the new-method school was the institutional pillar of this reform.[13] As Begali Qosimov has emphasised, it was precisely through educational reform that the foundations of national awakening were laid.[14] In this sense, the religious content of the Jadid textbooks serves as a unique primary testimony to how religion and modernity were reconciled in Central Asia.

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[11]New Method Schools // Wikipedia (Uzbek). URL: https://uz.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yangi_usul_maktablari; Jadid Educational Methods // Periodica.org, 2022.

[12]Behbudi M. Maktab // 'Oyina' journal, 1914, No. 11. Cited in: Talim xabarlari, 2025. URL: https://talimxabarlari.uz/25822

[13]Khalid A. The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform. — P. 93–135.

[14]Qosimov B. National Awakening: Courage, Enlightenment, Dedication. — Tashkent: Ma'naviyat, 2002.

At the same time, certain limitations of the research must be acknowledged. The discrepancies in the publication dates of the textbooks, the scarcity of their complete copies, and the tsarist administration's policy of obstructing the activities of the new-method schools[15] complicate textual analysis. Consequently, a more thorough study of the precise edition, structure, and page-by-page content of each textbook on the basis of archival and library holdings remains a task for future research.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the early twentieth-century Jadid textbooks convincingly demonstrates that the *usul-i jadid* reform did not negate religious instruction but reformed it. The textbooks aimed to convey Qur'anic literacy through the phonetic method; the foundations of creed and ritual practice (*Havoiji diniya*, *Amaliyoti islomiya*); the history of Islam (*Muxtasari tarixi islom*, *Tarixi anbiyo*); and ethical instruction (*Turkiy guliston yoxud axloq*) — all in the mother tongue, systematically and intelligibly. In these textbooks, religious and secular instruction were united not as opposites but as a single, integrated enlightenment system.

The educational activity of Jadidism should therefore be assessed not as an abandonment of the Islamic tradition but as a movement of tajdid — renewal within its bounds. A deeper study of the religious content of the Jadid textbooks, on the basis of individual editions and archival sources, remains a promising direction for the historiography of Central Asian enlightenment and the relationship between religion and modernity.

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