



Building of the Iravan Teachers Seminary, 1905

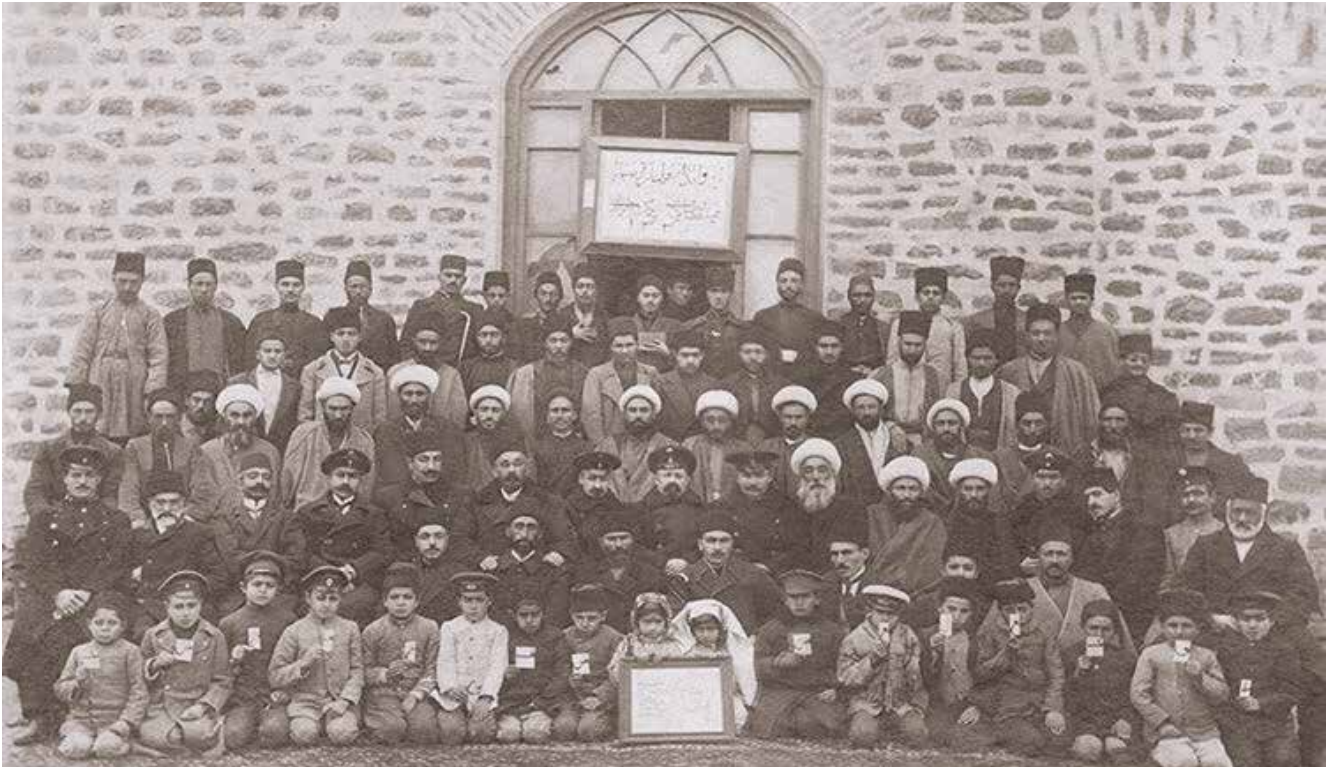
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IRAVAN TEACHERS SEMINARY: SIGNIFICANT EDUCATION CENTER FOR AZERBAIJANI PEOPLE

The city of Iravan (Erivan) not only became a significant political, trade and economic hub as early as in the Middle Ages, but also turned into an important cultural and educational center located in western Azerbaijani territories. Following the region's invasion by the Russian Empire, **Iravan was granted the status of a governorate center, which further bolstered its position as an economic and cultural center.**

An order of the Azerbaijani President on marking the 140th anniversary of the Iravan Teachers Seminary dated December 29, 2021 says, *"The city of Iravan gained fame as one of the major scientific, educational and cultural centers where the indigenous Azerbaijani population lived historically."*

"An extremely abundant literary and cultural environment pertaining to the Azerbaijani people shaped up in the city. Following the inclusion of the Iravan Khanate in Tsar-

Teachers and students of the Iravan Teachers Seminary, 1917

ist Russia, this environment, itself, played an important role in the fact that special attention was paid there to secular education," the document said.

On August 2, 1829, Russia's Ministry of National Education passed "Regulations on Transcaucasian Schools", which gave a significant impetus to the development of education in the South Caucasus. As early as on **January 14, 1832, the first district specialized school was launched in Iravan. Children of Azerbaijani attended it, along with students of other nationalities.** In 1869, the school was re-organized into a "progymnasium". On March 31, 1881, it became a five-grade preparatory school instead.

On October 20, 1880, Emperor of Russia Alexander II enacted **an order of the State Council on opening the Iravan Teachers Seminary.** In accordance with the document, an amount worth 28,350 Rubles was allocated to fund the seminary.

According to official data, treasury funds totaling 28,173 Rubles were spent in 1891 to meet the needs of the seminary, as well as the elementary school and a boarding school operating under the educational institution. Approximately the same amount of funds was envisaged for the seminary in 1894-1896.

The seminary started operating formally on November 8, 1881 in leased premises. Initially, the seminary

had 11 teachers and employees. **Yakov (Stepanovich) Suschevsky**, who served as the first-ever principal of the seminary, held the position until late 1894.

Children of local Azerbaijani residents were among the seminary students. Moreover, children arrived there to study from Nakhchivan, Baku and even Dagestan. Graduates were granted a certificate of a teacher of a rural primary school.

The classes offered at the Iravan school covered **creeds and languages of indigenous nations, including Tatar (Azerbaijani), and Sharia (Islamic law)**, just like in other seminaries of the South Caucasus, in addition to such generally accepted disciplines as the Russian language and literature, the history of Russia, mathematics and natural sciences.

Emperor of Russia Alexander III issued a special decree dated September 30, 1881 allocating 500 Rubles annually for the teaching of Sharia. **Akhund Mammadbagir Gazizade was a long-time teacher of Sharia at the Iravan Teachers Seminary**, who initially taught the Tatar language as well. Seminary students were also taught various types of agricultural work, meteorological observation, as well as playing the violin. Moreover, teaching of calligraphy, drafting, drawing and geography began from the mid-1890s. Students also studied book-binding, carpentry and turnery.

Hashim-bay Vazirov, graduate of the Iravan Seminary



According to the reports of the Caucasus Educational District for 1883-1884, the seminary employed 13 people in the mentioned period. In 1885, its principal, Y. Suschevsky, sent a message to the Iravan governor



Hamid-bay Shahtakhtinski, graduate of the Iravan Seminary

saying 16 people worked under his leadership since the seminary was founded, including four who had arrived from Russia, while the rest of them hailed from various regions of the Caucasus. **Eight of the employees had higher education, while six others had secondary education and two of them had primary education.** Nevertheless, the reports covering activity in 1885-1890 cite 13 employees of the seminary. Presumably, technical staff was taken into consideration when Suschevsky referenced 16 employees.

The curriculum at the Iravan Teachers Seminary lasted four years, including the preparatory, first, second and third grades. Children with a low level of knowledge were admitted to the preparatory class, **while graduates of elementary schools (two or three-year educational institutions) started in the first grade of the seminary and studied at the expense of the treasury.** According to a report of the Trustee of the Caucasus Educational District for 1890, average annual tuition at the Iravan Teachers Seminary totaled 322 Rubles per person, while room and board cost 194 Rubles.

Young men aged 15-18 were admitted to the Iravan Teachers Seminary. Those who studied at their own expense made a payment worth 30 Rubles and further paid 180 Rubles for each academic year. **Children seeking admission to the seminary were tested on their knowledge of the two-year elementary school curriculum.** A total of 42 people were admitted to the seminary during the first year of its activity and the preparatory and first grades were comprised of those students. In 1882, the second grade was launched and the number of students reached 54. The figure made up 69 with the opening of the third grade in 1883.

From the outset, theology was taught at the seminary as follows: Orthodoxy studies were overseen by senior priest Grigory Gambarov, while Akhund Mammadbagir Gazizade taught Islam and priest Gevond Atanasyants was charged with studies covering the Armenian Gregorian Church. In addition, Ivan Klopov taught the Russian language and literature, as well as the history of Russia, while Alexander Lyaudansky taught mathematics and Andrey Karamosko taught natural sciences. Furthermore, Mammadbagir Gazizade taught the Tatar language, while Sergey Bek-Nazaryan was a teacher of the Armenian language. Gymnastics was taught by Adolf Reiteman, while music and singing classes were taught by Emil Bayor and Bazilevich respectively. Ivan Tamamshev served as a primary school teacher. Mikhail

Porchinsky worked as a doctor at the seminary, while Bazilevich served as a secretary as well.

During the establishment of the Iravan Teachers Seminary **an exemplary elementary school was opened under the seminary for children who lacked prior schooling experience, as well as those from among indigenous nations.** Dmitry Popov was the first principal and teacher at this school until 1887. In 1888, Nikolai Suvorov was appointed an instructor at the elementary school. Suvorov became its director a year later. In 1905, the one-year elementary school was reorganized into a two-year institution at the suggestion of the trustee of the Caucasus Educational District. This allowed students of the seminary to undergo the teaching practice. As a rule, the seminary principal taught pedagogy and the teaching practice himself.

The main and student libraries were available at the seminary at the time. The libraries had a total of 8,320 books with 3,896 titles and 885 schoolbooks. The seminary's physics room was equipped with 319 devices estimated at a total of 3,674 Rubles.

Following R. Khalilov, the Tatar language was taught at the seminary by Rashid-bay Shahtakhtinski in 1902-1904, Hamid-bay Shahtakhtinski in 1905-1907 and Mirza Jabbar Mammadov in 1908-1916.

In the mid-1890s, significant changes occurred in the Iravan Teachers Seminary's staff. In 1896, **Mikhail Miropiyev** was appointed its principal. Miropiyev held the position until his appointment as the director of the Transcaucasian Teachers Seminary in Gori in 1901. Priest Alexei Sokolov began to teach Orthodoxy at the Iravan Teachers Seminary during this period. The Armenian language was taught by Yefrem Atamanov, who was also charged with teaching calligraphy and drawing, which were newly included disciplines in the curriculum. The Tatar language class was taught by Rahim Khalilov, while the mathematics class was taught by Alexei Khrapko and Vasily Devitsky taught natural sciences and geography. Viktor Mukhin became the teacher of the preparatory class.

18th graduation of the Iravan Teachers Seminary (1901-1902)

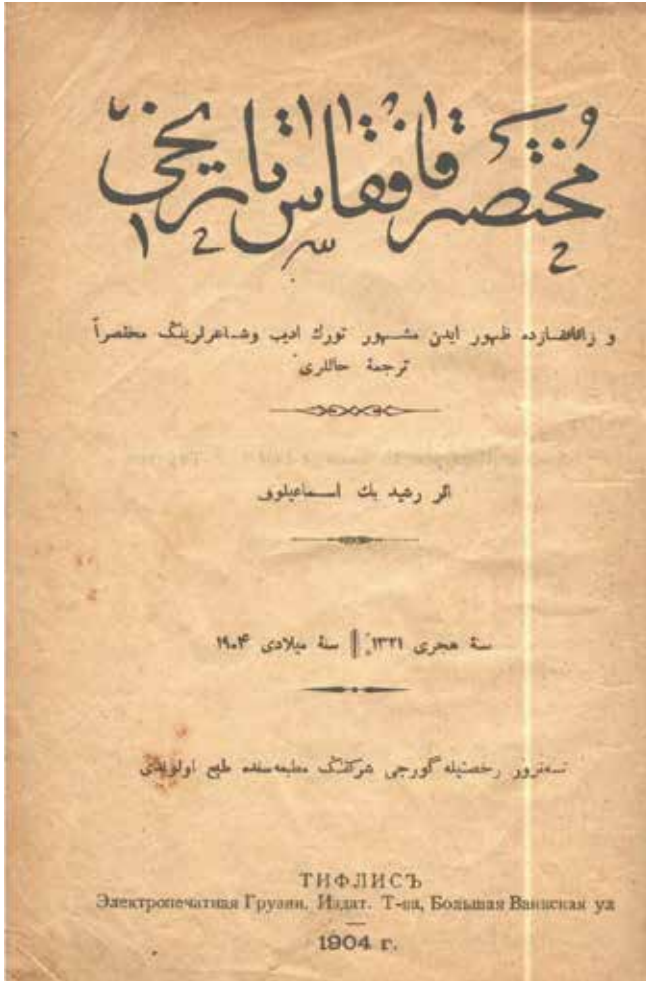


Nikolai Suvorov, who headed the exemplary elementary school at the seminary, simultaneously taught the bookbinding class, while Simon Kasradze became the secretary, accountant and also worked as a singing teacher; Mkrtych Elimirzoyev taught carpentry and the turning craft. Vasily Zaytsev became a gymnastics teacher, while Alexei Zrelv served as a seminary doctor.

As for the position of the Iravan Teachers Seminary principal, it was held by Ivan Postyutevich in 1902, Alexander Zazubovich in 1903-1905, Sergei Streletsky in 1906-1909 and Valentin Dobrotin in 1912-1916. **The number of Azerbaijani seminary students surged during Streletsky and Dobrotin's tenure.** The increase was due to the fact that the government assumed tuition fees of Muslims at the time to encourage their willingness to receive education.

Although Azerbaijanis accounted for most of the population of the Iravan (Erivan) province by the end of the 19th century, the number of Azerbaijani students at the Iravan Teachers Seminary was rather small in this period (Table 1). A similar situation was observed in all

Front cover of the book by Rashid-bay Ismayilov "Brief History of the Caucasus"



Russian-language educational institutions. **Azerbaijanis, as well as other Muslim nations of the Russian Empire, disapproved of "Russian schools" as many considered them a tool of "Russification" and Christianization.** Such sentiments were deliberately fueled by a part of the Muslim clergy. As before, the vast majority of Azerbaijanis sent their children to conventional religious schools. The Russian language and arithmetic were introduced only in the madrasahs operating under the Iravan Cathedral Mosque.

A total of 20 schools attended by 509 students were active as part of mosques in the Iravan province in 1888. The number of schools and students decreased by four and 58, respectively, compared to the previous year.

In 1905, the trustee of the Caucasus Educational District called for awarding 20 scholarships to Azerbaijanis attending the Iravan Teachers Seminary. In an appeal to the Caucasus governor, the trustee also requested allocation of 30,000 Rubles for construction operations.

In 1910, the Caucasus governor, Prince **I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov**, sent a report on his five-year tenure to Russian Tsar Nicholas II saying that **"in order to overcome urgent challenges in the field of training teachers among Tatars (Azerbaijanis) and mountaineers of the region, 20 scholarships have been instituted at the Caucasus teachers' seminary for students of these nationalities"**. Overall, the number of scholarships slated for Muslim students of teachers' seminaries was increased and regular teaching courses were organized in Yelizavetpol (Ganja) and Temir-Khan-Shura, the report said.

In 1910, there were one teachers' university and seven teachers' seminaries in the Caucasus, along with 10 teaching classes attended by 763 people, including 367 Russians, 128 Georgians, 62 Azerbaijanis, 48 Armenians and 18 mountaineers.

It is worth mentioning that Azerbaijani graduates of the Iravan Teachers Seminary further started teaching in the Azerbaijani-populated villages of the Iravan province. **Many of them were closely involved in local cultural activities. The Azerbaijanis frequently collected data on history, local lore, customs and traditions and published their findings in print media. Some of these young people were admitted to Russian and European universities** and further appointed to leading positions in various fields.

Rashid-bay Ismayilov, one of the well-known graduates of the Iravan Teachers Seminary, worked for the Tiflis-based newspapers Shargi-Rus, Tiflisskiy Listok ("Tiflis Sheet") and New Time from 1903. Ismayilov wrote "A Brief History of the Caucasus" and "the History of Azerbaijan". He also headed the chancellery in the third government of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR).

Hashim-bay Vazirov, another graduate of the seminary, taught at a specialized school in the city of Shusha, simultaneously staging theater performances. Vazirov has also written satirical comedies. Afterwards, he moved to Baku where he published the "Irshad" and "Teze Hayat" newspapers, as well as the "Mezeli" magazine.

Hamid-bay Shahtakhtinski, one of the graduates and teachers of the seminary, served as minister of public education and religious affairs in the fifth ADR cabinet and then as vice-principal of Baku University. Moreover, Shahtakhtinski is known to have developed a draft for the Higher Pedagogical Institute.

Mirza Jabbar Mammadov, another teacher of the seminary, published "Burkhani-Hagigat", the first-ever Azerbaijani language periodical in Iravan, in 1917.

Group of Azerbaijani educators of the early 20th century. Third from the right in the first row is the teacher of Sharia at the Iravan Seminary, Akhund Mammadbagir Gazizade



Thus, the Iravan Teachers Seminary played an important role in the development of public education as well as social and political life and the democratic movement of the Azerbaijani people and in the entire South Caucasus in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. ✨

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