

**A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ORTHODOX MISSIONARIES' PRE-  
REVOLUTIONARY EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE SAHA  
(YAKUT) REGION**

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**Abstract:** This study examines the educational activities and their impacts conducted by Russian Orthodox missionaries in the Saha (Yakut) region. The subject has been evaluated based on the reports kept by the Yakut Statistical Commission and the missionaries. Missionaries have been using the city of Yakutsk as their central location in Far Eastern Siberia since the 1620s. However, in the XVII century, it was quite challenging to mention any official institutions or organizations in terms of education and culture. According to Russian historians, there are two reasons for this. Firstly, Russian Orthodox missionaries did not have sufficient material as well as human resources, and knowledge to implement a conscious education policy for this period. The second reason is that due to the recent annexation of the region to the Russian state, conflicts between the Yakuts and the Russians hindered the implementation of this process. However, in our opinion, the first reason is realistic and directly proportional to the development of the educational and cultural life of Russian history. Especially from the second half of the XIX century, cultural developments began to manifest themselves in Yakut, and as a result of translation activities, education, and teaching became significant for the Russians. Before translation activities in the Yakut language were carried out, the missionaries' lack of proficiency in the Yakut language and the Yakuts' lack of knowledge of the Russian language rendered all efforts inconclusive.

**Key Words:** Sahas, Russians, Missionary, Mission, Education.

**SAHA (YAKUT) YÖRESİNDE ORTODOKS MİSYONERLERİN  
DEVİRİM ÖNCESİ EĞİTİM FAALİYETLERİNE GENEL BİR BAKIŞ**

**Öz:** Bu çalışmada Rus Ortodoks Misyonerlerin Saha (Yakut) ilinde yapmış olduğu eğitim faaliyetleri ve yansımaları ele alınmıştır. Yakut istatistik komisyonu ve Misyonerler tarafından tutulan raporlar ışığında konu değerlendirilmiştir. Misyonerler Yakutsk şehrini 1620'li yıllardan itibaren Uzak Doğu Sibiry'a da merkez olarak kullanmışlardır. Ancak XVII. yüzyılda eğitim ve kültürel açıdan herhangi bir resmi kurum ve kuruluştan bahsetmek oldukça

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güçtür. Rus tarihçilere göre bunun iki sebebi vardır. Birincisi Rus Ortodoks misyonerler bu dönem için bilinçli bir eğitim politikasını hayata geçirecek bilgi ve birikime sahip insan varlığının yanında yeterli materyale de sahip değildir. İkincisiyse bölgenin Rus devletine yeni ilhak edilmesinden sebep, Sahalar ve Ruslar arasında yaşanan çatışmaların bu sürecin işletilmesinin önüne geçmesidir. Ancak kanaatimizce birinci sebep gerçekçi olmakla birlikte Rus tarihinin eğitim ve kültürel hayatının gelişimi ile doğru orantılıdır. Özellikle XIX. yüzyılın ikinci yarısından itibaren yaşanan kültürel gelişmeler Yakut'ta da kendisini göstermiş çeviri faaliyetlerinin sonucunda eğitim-öğretim Ruslar adına anlamlı hale gelmiştir. Saha dilinde tercüme faaliyetleri gerçekleştirilmeden evvel misyonerlerin Saha diline hakim olamaması ve aynı şekilde Sahaların da Rus dilini bilmemeleri her türlü girişimi sonuçsuz bırakmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sahalar, Ruslar, Misyonerlik, Misyon, Eğitim.

### **Introduction**

The history of the first Orthodox educational institutions in Russia dates back to the Yaroslav Decree, which established a school for the education of Orthodox priests in Novgorod in 1030. In the following centuries, education for the clergy of the Orthodox Church was carried out in several brotherhood schools affiliated with monasteries and in separate schools affiliated with bishops' houses. The first theological academy opened in Russian territory was the Kyiv Theological Academy, established in 1632. The first attempts in the field of education in Yakut city were in the second quarter of the XVIII century. Most of the Turkish lands occupied by the Russians were associated with Islam and madrasah education was widespread. Although Russians did not accept these institutions as educational institutions, they encountered educated people and made attempts to impose their ideology and education system on this mass. The situation in the Yakut region is somewhat different. Russians arrived in the region at an early date and attempted to establish their system here. For this reason, a dual education system cannot be discussed specifically for the Yakuts. However, it is possible to mention a duality between state and church schools. The first factor to be considered in the education and teaching plan is undoubtedly the general characteristics of the region and its population. For this reason, when the Yakut church network is considered, the construction of a church in almost every tribe has led to the emergence of the church as the institution that provides the most suitable conditions for education.

Although the Yakut language does not have an alphabet, it has established itself in Far Eastern Siberia and has become the biggest rival of Russian as a common language, over time, missionaries realized that they had no choice but to learn and teach this language. For this reason, efforts to translate books into the Yakut language date back to the early XIX century. However, sending the first translated books to the region from Irkutsk did not solve the problem, on the contrary, it created problems. The situation is obvious when one considers that Russian Orthodox administrators and missionaries did not know the Saha language and that the Saha people were not literate. Realizing this situation, the Translation Commission was established by Dimitri Hitrov, who was appointed by Saint Benjamin the Bishop of Kamchatka, and through this commission, the first translated books were created. During the same period, educational activities in the Yakut region also accelerated. In order to avoid the recurrence of the problem mentioned, it was mandatory for those who work or are likely to work in the Yakut Diocese to know Yakut. In other words, education in the city of Yakutsk was provided as a service to privileged classes until the XIX century. After the cultural changes, attempts were made to organize the education system to cover the entire region.

### **Missionary Education Institutions and Activities in Yakut Region**

The first state school opened within the Russian Empire was the Greek-Latin school founded by Tsar Peter the Great in 1714. Later, its name was changed to the Slavic-Greek-Latin School. The opening date of the first educational institution in the lands where the Sahas live dates back approximately 21 years. The first attempts in the field of education in the Yakut Region were made during the time of the Bishop of Irkutsk, Missionary Nerunovich II. In 1734, the bishop ordered Archimandrite Nathanel who was the administrator of the Yakut Spass Monastery, to open a school in the monastery to teach young people between the ages of seven and eighteen to read and write in the Russian language.<sup>1</sup> This school is the first educational institution registered in the city of Yakutsk. The first church school in Yakut was opened in the last quarter of the

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<sup>1</sup> G. A. Popov. *Soçineniye İstoriya Gorada Yakutsk 1632-1917*, Tom, 3, Yagu, 2007, p. 129.

XVII century<sup>2</sup>. Thus, in XVIII the first educational institutions began to emerge in the Saha province.

The Bishop of Irkutsk, Innokent Neuronovich, opened the first spiritual school within the Yakut Spass Monastery during his visit to Yakut in 1735. This seminary had 10 students in the 7-15 age group, and 6 of these 10 students were children of newly baptized Saha Turks. This school was closed 12 years later in 1747. Following the closure of this school, the first military schools in Yakut and Okhotsk were opened in 1747, and the teachers at these schools consisted of Russian Cossacks. In addition to teaching Russian, martial arts lessons were given at the school. These schools continued to exist for a while after the Geography schools were opened.<sup>3</sup>

The first geography school was opened in the city of Yakutsk, and in these schools, traders, travelers, and soldiers served as teachers. The schools' curriculum covered basic subjects such as geography, Russian laws, and mathematics. Due to the insufficient number of students and teachers in the school, naval officers were brought to the city, and subjects like geometry and architecture were added to the curriculum<sup>4</sup>. In 1754, the Irkutsk-Japanese School was opened by the Irkutsk Chancellery, and this school continued its activities until 1816<sup>5</sup>. The geography school, which was closed for a while in 1744, was reopened in 1766, and approximately 40 students were educated in Russian laws, arithmetic, geometry, trigonometry, geology, astronomy, and geography.<sup>6</sup>

The first local school in the Yakut Region was opened in 1789. A letter claimed to have been written by İlya Şadrın, the lord of the Kangalas, was delivered to the emperor at the opening of the Yakut Seminary (1800) and the desire to open a school for the Sahas was emphasized. Following this initiative, the Spiritual School for Foreigners was opened within the Spass Monastery on the 1st of January 1801 and a total of 30 students, 20 of whom were Saha Turks, were educated by Missionary İerodiakon Kapiton. Subsequently, Missionary Vinokurov, a student of the Irkutsk Theological Academy, came to the school

<sup>2</sup> İ. S. Moskvın, "Voevodi i Naçalniki g. Yakutskıa i İh Destviya" *Pamyatnaya Knijka Yakutskoy Oblasti Za 1863*, SPB. 1864, p. 197; G. F. Safranov, *Pravoslavnoe Hristianstvo v Yakutii*, Moscow, B. İ., 1998, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> *Ot Pervih Şkol- Do Naşey Dney*, Yakutsk, Ofset, 2007, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> P. Sleptsov, *İstoriçeskoe Obozreniye Sibiri: p 1743 po 1823 God*, Kniga 2, SPB 1886, p. 231.

<sup>5</sup> *Yakutiya Hronika Fakti*, (Ed. Kalaşnikof, A. A.) Tom 1, Yakutsk 2000, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> *Ot Pervih Şkol*, p. 9.

and worked there until 1816. The first public school was opened in 1808, and the first local spiritual school was opened in 1819<sup>7</sup>. The period during which educational institutions and churches spread in the region coincides with the same time frame. Russians have shaped the region according to periods in line with their interests. The opening dates of the first geography schools and military schools were during the period when the Russians wanted to occupy the Chukchi region. If we were to provide evidence for this, the Yakut Geography schools was closed between 1744 and 1766, and the graduated students were enlisted in exploration expeditions to Kamchatka and the Chukotka region. Since the XIX century, the Russian Tsardom has been the sole ruler in Far Eastern Siberia. This period is the period when missionary work is intense due to the construction of churches and educational institutions.

Starting from the second quarter of the XIX century, important Russian scientists began to come to Yakutsk. As a result, the number of educational institutions and students increased, and cultural developments began to gain momentum. Dimitriy Pavlovich Davidov, a poet, writer, and pedagogue moved to Yakut in August 1833, and Davidov, who was fluent in French, English, German, and the Yakut language, worked there for 13 years. During his stay, he created a Yakut-Russian dictionary and conducted travels for climate-related research<sup>8</sup>. The city of Yakutsk is one of the important trade centers in the Far East of Siberia. Especially, the Russians who reached the oceans created trade corridors, enabling many people to visit Yakutsk. During this period, efforts were made to enhance interaction between the Russians and the Yakuts by organizing social and cultural activities in the region. For this purpose, the District School in Yakutsk known as "Yakutskago Uyezdnago Ucilisa" was converted into a gymnastics hall on June 26, 1867<sup>9</sup>. According to the report of the Yakut Schools Directorate dated 1856, Yakut District School, Preobrejenskaya Women's School, and Olekminsk Spass School were officially operating in Yakut. 12 teachers from different professional branches worked in these schools<sup>10</sup>. After this date, educational activities in the region gained momentum in a positive direction. The number of operating schools, both official and unofficial, has made significant progress. As a result of the initiatives of Bishop Saint Venyami-

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<sup>7</sup> A.g.e., p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> A. g. e., p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Jurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveteniya, Čast CXXXV*, St. Petersburg, 1867, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> RGIA, F. 733, Op. 95, D. 1071, p. 4,5.

nov, the first church seminary was opened in 1860, and the number of seminaries increased to eight in 1867. A total of 108 students were educated in the seminaries opened within the Itik-Kol, Amgin, Suntar, Sins, Kallah, Nam, and Bayagantay and Upper-Maya churches. The teacher of Itik-Kol Church Seminary was Dimitri Hitrov<sup>11</sup>. The Batur's Itik-Kol Church school has been operating since 1850, and the first teacher of the school was a priest who worked in the Georgian Mission.<sup>12</sup> The priest who was exiled for various reasons, was replaced by Dmitry Vasilevic Hitrov, who would become the Yakut Bishop in the future.

Since the city of Yakutsk is the intersection of river routes, it has always been one of the most important business lines in commercial activities. The first trade school in the field of education was opened in 1860, and the school had 10 teachers and 362 students, which was a significant number for that time. In the central literacy school, there were 82 students while in the local schools, there were 139 students.<sup>13</sup> There were a total of 75 students in the missionary schools, 20 of whom were educated at the Yakut Seminary, 28 students at the local district schools, and 27 students at the local seminaries. The first Women's Seminary was opened in 1888, 18 years after the Yakut Presbytery was elevated to the status of a diocese, and it began to operate as a boarding and semi-boarding school<sup>14</sup>. Initially, this school was a two-year institution with three classes, but later it expanded to seven classes. In 1890, an additional class was added, and in 1892, a class for grammar education was introduced. In September 1899, Bishop Nikanor established a primary school to provide practical training for teacher candidates, and this school became a model school the following year. The students in their final year engaged in practical teaching twice a week and were observed by other teachers and inspectors<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> *Yakutskie Yeperihalniye Vedemosti*, 1895, No 16, s. 249; G. F. Safranov, *Pravoslavnoe Hristianstvo*, p. 58,59.

<sup>12</sup> İvan İvanoviç, Mainov, *Zaçatki Naradnogo Obrazovaniye v Yakutskoy Oblast*, Tip. Gaz. İrkutsk, 1897, p. 180.

<sup>13</sup> These schools were often opened through the transformation of buildings without furnishings, such as barns, which is why they were referred to in this way by missionaries. As teachers, individuals who were distanced from their religious duties were appointed; *Yakutskie Yeperihalniye Vedemosti*, 1892, No 8, p. 125

<sup>14</sup> *Yakutskie Yeperihalniye Vedemosti*, 1892, No 24, p. 371.

<sup>15</sup> A. A. Pavlov, *Professionalnyye i Sredniye şkolu Yakutii (XVIII- nachalo XX vv.)*. Yakutsk, 2013, p. 134.

In 1883, in the central districts of Yakutsk city, there were 17,520 men and 18,257 women living and the literacy rate was only 146 men and 9 women, which corresponds to a rate of 1.8%<sup>16</sup>. The reason for this low literacy rate is that the educational institutions established until that time primarily provided education to Russian and Cossack children. The spread of education in rural areas, that is, among baptized communities, took place after 1884. These data turned around quickly with the expansion of the school network, and there was a trend of increasing both the number of schools and students. Missionaries constantly emphasized the difficulties of serving in the region in their memoirs and reports. Missionary educational institutions in the XIX century. The general situation in the third quarter of the century is as follows: The Saha's congregation school of Dupsun Trinity Church was opened in 1862 and a total of 4 Saha children were educated in the school. Lessons were given by Psalm reader E. Longinov, but the school was closed due to a lack of materials and high cost. St. Yohan Popov generally gave education to the children of civil servants in the Virgin Mary church of the Bayagantays, one of the most populous tribes of the fields, and this school was opened in 1860 and then transferred to another place.<sup>17</sup> These two examples are enough to explain the situation of educational activities in rural areas. Missionaries, on the other hand, point out the increase in diseases in the region, the lack of sufficient materials and buildings, the long distance between prihods. and the reluctance of Saha Turk parents to send their children to the homes of religious leaders. In this case, Saha Turks asked for help from foreigners who were exiled to Yakut to teach their children to read and write. While the number of exiles teaching during the winter months was approximately 30, there were 1-4 students per teacher. Certificates were awarded to the students who completed these courses. Students who graduated from here continued their education in other fields such as mathematics, physics, and geography while teaching other children<sup>18</sup>.

According to the 1891 Yakut Statistical Committee Report, the general situation in the region is as follows: The total Orthodox population in the Yakut center is 146,204 people, 73,720 men and 72,204 women. The number of school-age children consists of 12,700 boys and 12,000 girls. In Olekminsk, there are 7,447 men and 6,444 women, and the number of school-age children is 890 boys and 702 girls. The total population in Vilyuy is 71,658, including

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<sup>16</sup> Mainov, *Začatki Narodnogo Obrazovaniye*, p. 178.

<sup>17</sup> A. g. e., p. 181.

<sup>18</sup> A. g. e., p. 181,182.

36,916 men and 34,742 women. The number of school-age students is stated as 6,000 boys and 5,900 girls. In Verhoyansk, there are a total of 12,890 people, 6,665 men and 6,225 women, and the number of students is 2,020, 1,020 boys and 1,000 girls. There were 3,117 male and 2,904 female population in Kolim, and the number of students was 980, including 510 males and 470 females<sup>19</sup>. During this educational period, schools in Vilyuy and Verkhoyansk could not be opened due to the delayed collection of the statistical information mentioned above.

The city of Yakutsk is an application center where the first initiatives were made in the field of education, as in every field. There were seven schools in the city in 1890. In response to this, four literacy schools were opened, and one literacy school was converted into a church school. The total number of schools in the region under the Ministry of Education is five, one of which is in Yakut. While the total number of schools in the Olekminsk region was six church schools and three literacy schools, later two more church schools and three literacy schools were opened, and the total number became fourteen. The number of schools is approximately the same in other regions. In the 1890-91 academic year, the total number of schools in the region was thirty-five<sup>20</sup>.

The commission report prepared by the Yakut Education Committee for the 1890-91 academic year, apart from the above information, makes it possible to make detailed analyses down to the lowest settlements of the region. Thanks to this report, we can observe the literacy rate in Saha, the abilities of Saha children, the level of education, and the conflicts between church schools and public schools. What is noteworthy is the emphasis made by mostly missionary observers on the unnecessaryness of public schools. Another issue is the collection of education expenses from the local people. It is clear that the Sahas are not in a position to cover their educational expenses. Families with financial means would send their children to church schools as boarders<sup>21</sup>. Not all of these schools have their own buildings. There were 7 seminaries in the 1888/89 academic year, 8 in 1889/90, 8 in 1890/91, 16 in 1891/92, 23 in 1892/93, and 26 in 1893/94. In places where there were no school buildings, education was

<sup>19</sup> *Otčet Yakutskago Oblastnago Statičeskago Komiteta Za 1891 God*, Yakutsk, 1892, p. 14,15,16,17,18; *Otčet Yakutskago Eperihalnogo Učilišnago Soveta "Sostayaniy Tserkovno-Prigodskih Škol i Škol Gramoti Yakutskoy Eparhii Za 1890-91 Učebniy God."* Yakutsk, 1892, p. 1,2.

<sup>20</sup> *Otčet Oblastnogo 1892*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *A.g.e.*, p. 1,48.

provided in churches and homes.<sup>22</sup> These schools also include small home-schools. A home school was opened in the Bogoron Viladimir church for the education of three Saha children, and the teacher was the niece of the church priest Maria Longinova<sup>23</sup>. According to the 1892-93 education report, the number of students in the region increased by ninety people. According to the report, the number of schools was stated as 54, and the number of students was 437. However, the report also emphasized that it was insufficient in this regard. As a result, it was stated that there was almost no progress when looking at the number of schools, the number of students, and the general condition of the hostels. The report emphasized the inadequacy of teachers working in state schools compared to the teachers in seminary schools<sup>24</sup>. In the 1891/1892 academic year report, it was emphasized that Saha children had very good manual skills and that education should be provided in this direction.

*“Most Yakut boys are accustomed to handling knives. Therefore, to strengthen manual skills, it will be useful for administrators and teachers to encourage children who are inclined to cut sticks to make frames, boxes, and other small gizmos. 2. The development of gardening in schools will cause Yakuts to look at schools with sympathy. 3. Yakut children use pencils very well, so it will be useful to have guidance counselors to help children master this noble profession. Meanwhile, the Diocesan School Council found this report very positive and emphasized that it was feasible.” An opinion was expressed.*<sup>25</sup>

According to the 1899/1900 report, 49 seminaries and 21 literacy schools operated. A bishopric and seminary school for women operated in Yakut. A total of 800 students (excluding the Theological Academy) were educated in these schools<sup>26</sup>. The education system in the Yakut Region has acquired a cosmopolitan structure over time. During the early years of educational activities,

<sup>22</sup> *Yakutskie Yeperihalnie Vedemosti*, 1895, No: 16, p. 245,248; 1898, No: 8, p. 123; 1892, No 9, p. 134.

<sup>23</sup> *Yakutskie Yeperihalnie Vedemosti*, 1892, No 23, p. 363.

<sup>24</sup> *Otčet Yakutskogo Eperihalnogo Učilišnogo Soveta o Sastaynii Tserkovno Prihodskih Škol i Škol Gromati Yakutskoy Eparhii za 1892-1893 Učebnie Goda*, Typography Yakutskogo Oblastnogo Pravleniya, Yakutsk, 1894, p. 2,3,4.

<sup>25</sup> *Otčet Yakutskogo Eperihalnogo Učilišnogo Soveta o Sastaynii Tserkovno Prihodskih Škol i Škol Gromati Yakutskoy Eparhii za 1891-1892 Učebnie Goda*, Typography Yakutskogo Oblastnogo Pravleniya, Yakutsk, 1893, p. 28, 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Yakutskie Yeperihalnie Vedemosti*, 1895, No: 7, p. 101,104; No: 8, p. 129,130; No: 13, p. 220.

Saha children, Cossack children, and children from other communities received separate education, and an institutional structure could not be established. Since the beginning of the XIX century, the mixed education system has become effective in the region. According to the activity report of the 1910-11 academic year, 68 schools of all types operated under the Yakut diocese. In forty of these schools, Russian, Saha, Yukagir, Tatar, Jewish, and Tungus children were educated together, and the rate in the entire region corresponds to 58%<sup>27</sup>. The biggest reason behind the implementation of the mixed education system is to reinforce the sense of belonging among different communities.

### CONCLUSION

The scarcity of educated people in the Yakut region has led to the emergence of privileged groups. In particular, Orthodox missionaries became the intellectuals and teachers of the cultural movement newly established in Yakut. These schools, mostly managed by missionaries, have served their purposes. Missionaries saw these schools as centers of spiritual transformation. After the Russians took over the region, small-scale educational activities developed over time and the first intellectually educated people of Sahas began to emerge. Educational activities that started in monastery schools were later continued in the form of a dual system with the opening of public schools. The influence of the region's very large and semi-settled lifestyle has led to the emergence of the boarding education model. It was aimed to assimilate other local communities of the region into the mixed education system through educational activities. In particular, the use of the Saha language by other communities in the region is the main reason why missionary activities focus on the Saha Turks. The missionary education system is a model in which different options are evaluated. In this system, Saha children were educated according to their abilities. The natural talents of the Saha Turks were observed by missionaries, and they emphasized this in detail in their annual reports and recommended its implementation to the necessary authorities.

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<sup>27</sup> *Yakutskie Yeparihalnie Vedemosti*, 1913, No: 1, p. 5.

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