## HISTORY AND THEORY OF CULTURE





UDC 26: 94 (470.6)

https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-4-31-37

Educational and Charitable Activities of Convents in the North Caucasus in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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### **Abstract**

*Introduction.* Female monasticism as a special cultural phenomenon in the North Caucasus has its own specific features. The rich and little-studied history of charitable and educational activities of convents in the North Caucasus in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is investigated. Their role as centers of social interaction and education in the region is considered.

*Materials and methods.* Historical documents and materials, historical-comparative and chronological methods are used. Results. Convents in the North Caucasus were significant cultural and spiritual centers. Combining monastic asceticism with educational and charitable activities, they were deeply involved in missionary work. Thanks to their social service, convents in the North Caucasus made a significant contribution to strengthening traditional values of the Russian people. Their activities softened the process of the region's incorporation into the socio-cultural space of the Russian Empire, as a result it took place without sharp contradictions.

**Discussion and conclusion.** The analysis of convents' influence on the development of culture and education in the context of the national policy of the state in the North Caucasus in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was conducted. The new view on the active participation of monasteries in the formation of public consciousness was proposed, their importance in the development of the socio-cultural space of the North Caucasus was emphasized.

**Keywords:** history of the Russian Orthodox Church, North Caucasus, monasticism, convents, charity, educational activities, education

**For citation.** Shalikashvili EN. Educational and Charitable Activities of Convents in the North Caucasus in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. *Science Almanac of Black Sea Region Countries*. 2023;9(4):31–37. <a href="https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-4-31-37">https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-4-31-37</a>

Научная статья

# Просветительская и благотворительная деятельность женских монастырей на Северном Кавказе во второй половине XIX— начале XX века

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### Аннотация

**Введение.** Женское монашество как особый культурный феномен на Северном Кавказе имеет свои специфические особенности и черты. Исследуется богатая и малоизученная история благотворительной и просветительской деятельности женских монастырей на Северном Кавказе во второй половине XIX — начале XX в., рассматривается их роль как центров социального взаимодействия и просвещения в регионе.





*Материалы и методы.* Использованы исторические документы и материалы. Применяются историко-сравнительный и хронологический методы.

**Результаты** исследования. Женские монастыри на территории Северного Кавказа были значимыми культурными и духовными центрами. Сочетая иноческое подвижничество с просветительской и благотворительной деятельностью, они были глубоко вовлечены в миссионерскую работу. Благодаря своему социальному служению, женские монастыри на территории Северного Кавказа внесли существенный вклад в укрепление традиционных ценностей русского народа. Их деятельность смягчила процесс инкорпорации региона в социокультурное пространство Российской империи, в результате он проходил без острых противоречий.

Обсуждение и заключение. Проведён анализ влияния женских монастырей на Северном Кавказе во второй половине XIX — начале XX в. на развитие культуры и образования в контексте общегосударственной политики государства. Предложен новый взгляд на активное участие монастырей в формировании общественного сознания, подчеркнута их значимость в развитии социокультурного пространства Северного Кавказа.

**Ключевые слова:** история Русской Православной Церкви, Северный Кавказ, монашество, женские монастыри, благотворительность, просветительская деятельность, образование

**Для цитирования.** Шаликашвили Е.Н. Просветительская и благотворительная деятельность женских монастырей на Северном Кавказе во второй половине XIX — начале XX века. *Научный альманах стран Причерноморья*. 2023;9(4):31—37. <a href="https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-4-31-37">https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-4-31-37</a>

**Introduction.** Female monasticism as a special cultural phenomenon in the North Caucasus has its own specific features compared to the convents of central Russia. The missionary function was added to traditional functions of convents in the North Caucasus. This function was implemented in two directions: firstly, it was aimed at preventing the spread of destructive sectarian ideas among the Slavic population; secondly, it was oriented towards the indigenous peoples of the region to popularize among them the previously dominant norms of Christianity and try to restore their influence.

After the end of the Caucasian War, the domestic political situation in the region changed. It became possible to transform not only the diocesan model, but also to carry out a number of transformations in the field of the changed social and legal status of a woman. It was required in new positions to implement the work of the monastery system with the main function of the estate structure, and they also had to be transferred to missionary work and expand the base, while having limited human and material resources.

**Materials and methods.** Historical documents and materials, historical-comparative and chronological methods are used.

**Results.** By 1917, there had been 13 convents and communities on the territory of the North Caucasus [25, p. 174]. Each of them was an important link in the spiritual education system of the region. All educational activities were carried out by convents at the expense of their own funds, donations and alms. The main aspects of social ministry in the field of public education were the establishment of schools and the organization of training.

The educational activity of convents in the North Caucasus begins its history in the late 1840s. So, the first school for girls appeared in the Church of Mary Magdalene, located in the Kuban Region, in 1849. According to 1861 40 pupils studied in the school. By 1878, about 50 girls of school age had been already living in the convent. Some of them were relatives of nuns, and the rest were brought by their parents for education and upbringing. In the convent, classes were organized for orphans from families of the clergy, who were deprived of the opportunity to learn to read Russian correctly (since they used the Ukrainian language in everyday life) [2, p. 52].

The city of Stavropol was the center of the Caucasian (Stavropol) diocese. The only convent, John-Mariinsky, functioned on its territory in the 19th century. In 1863, the monastery parish school was established, intended for the education of 45 girls. Four hundred rubles a year, including 300 rubles to pay for the teacher, were allocated from the convent for the maintenance of the school [11, p. 93].

The convents, located near the active Muslim community, played a special role in the spread of Orthodox Christianity among the population. Finding themselves in such conditions, convents took on the functions of missionary work, and became centers of Christian enlightenment. One of these convents was the Sentinsky Convent of the Transfiguration of the Savior, where the preaching of Orthodoxy ideas was conducted among the Karachays [3, p. 398]. At the end of the 19th century premises were built in the convent, in which the Russian school of literacy functioned, including a parish

course. Seventeen people were educated, among whom there were 9 children of Slavic nationality and 8 Muslims in the age range from 10 to 20 years. Adult highlanders came to study in the evenings. Later, after 1904, a building appeared which became a two-year parish school. In this school children from mountain villages and straits of Teberda and Kuban were taught [20, p. 204]. The teachers of the school were Father I. Solovyanov, appointed to the monastery in 1900, and a novice R. Tretyakova. Father John enjoyed the favor of the Circassians: at the request of two Sentinians, the priest read the Gospel with them in Russian. The highlanders often asked the priest to write them stories from the life of Old Testament and New Testament saints for reading. Sometimes books were distributed to the Sentinians free of charge [21, pp. 312–313]. In 1907, the school was transformed from a parish to a class school. The priest P. Lototsky became the head and teacher of religion at school, and O. Skorina became the teacher. According to 1914, the school continued to operate in the monastery.

Another example of the introduction to the ideas of Orthodoxy is the Stavropol John-Mariinsky Convent, which received girls not only of Slavic origin, but also immigrants from local peoples. There is a known case when the Mother Superior of the Stavropol Convent, Abbess Seraphima, turned to Bishop Theophylact with a request to accept two mountain girls: 6-year-old Dohizet Saugul and 7-year-old Gogo Selyakhi. The girls learned Russian, learned to read and memorized Christian prayers during their stay in the convent. At the request of the Abbess, it was allowed to baptize these children and let them stay in the monastery until adulthood [7, p. 34].

With the blessing of Bishop Agathodor, a school building was erected in the Yekaterinodar department in the Intercession Women's Community, it housed a teacher's room and a shelter for children living in remote villages. The community kept these children at its own expense. In 1900, the school had 20 students: 12 boys and 8 girls. Some of the children lived in the shelter of the community, and some came from farms near the communities assigned to the temple. The Law of God was taught by the priest L.P. Vishnevsky. E.V. Barykinskaya, the daughter of the priest who graduated from courses at the Yekaterinodar diocesan school, was a teacher. The community provided the teacher with an apartment with heating, lighting, a table and a servant. She received a salary of 240 rubles a year. In 1912, 15 children studied at school: 10 boys and 5 girls. By 1914, the number of pupils had been almost doubled and amounted to 27 people: 16 boys and 11 girls [18, p. 101].

At the beginning of the 20th century, St. George's Convent housed a library of ecclesiastical literature, an orphanage and a church school. The new abbess of the holy monastery, Sidonia, put a lot of effort on the creation of the school. On her initiative, the question was raised before the bishop of Vladikavkaz and Mozdok Pitirim about the construction of a new building for her. As a result of long correspondence, she managed to achieve a positive decision. So, on January 23–25, 1912, the order of the Vladikavkaz Theological Consistory "On the construction of a new school building in the St. George Convent" was published. Thus, in the St. George Convent a literacy school was opened for girls with five students. The novice Vaselina became the teacher, later she was replaced by a new teacher Varvara Andreevna.

Being on self-sufficiency and implementing the hostel charter, all convents of the North Caucasus were forced to actively engage in farming. For convents, in addition to traditional forms of subsistence farming, it was characteristic of deep involvement in handicraft industry, which depended on the cultural characteristics of individual territories. By implementing fishing and craft activities, convents also contributed to the education of women and children. One of these centers was the John-Mariinsky Convent. The foundation of the convent is associated with the emergence and development of needlework, including artistic sewing with gold, silver, beads, lace-making, knitting and spinning. Thanks to efforts of Mothers Superior, the craft was constantly improved. For example, in the 1870s Abbess Seraphima made a number of changes for the development of monastery crafts. She paid special attention to improving the seamstress' workshop, working with silk, chenille, silver and gold. She invited an experienced pious nun Feofania from Moscow to the convent, who taught new crafts not only the sisters of the convent, but also girls from the parish school. Thanks to her, the works of the sisters became known throughout the Caucasian (Stavropol) diocese. The convent began to receive orders for gold-sewn church supplies. Some works of the nuns of the John-Mariinsky Convent have survived to this day, they can be seen on icons in St. Andrew's and Assumption Cathedrals of Stavropol.

Under the leadership of Abbess Theophila, a two-story building was built, intended for the manufacture of various products of wood, bone, metal, painting and gold-embroidered works. They created priestly belts, liturgical cuffs, aers, the holy handkerchiefs, woven and embroidered icons, which were finished with chenille, silver and gold. These icons were presented even to the royal court. Rugmakers wove carpets of painted wool. Wonderful tablecloths, towels, napkins and rosary were also created here. Such products as typesetting boxes, carved cypress icons and crucifixions, embroidered portraits of Russian emperors were widely known throughout the Caucasian region [22, p. 35].

It is worth noting that an icon painting workshop was founded in the convent, which gave rise to the development of church painting in the region. The workshop gained an excellent reputation in the North Caucasus, in almost every parish of the diocese you could find icons made by the sisters of the convent [15, p. 30].

Charity work can be considered an equally significant area of activity of women's convents. Women's convents and communities have always been more involved in this area of activity compared to men's, despite worse financial opportunities. This is due to the fact that most convents adhered to moderate ascesis, the main priority of the sisters was to serve the community, rather than completely renounce it. Unlike men's monasteries, where social and charitable activity was not so significant, in women's convents it was the basis of their development and growth, thanks to the work and devotion of female ascetics [23, pp. 293–295].

The main areas of work in this sphere were the organization of care for orphans, children in the care of mothers and street children, the establishment of shelters and correctional colonies for juvenile criminals, the creation of infirmaries for wounded soldiers as well as the manufacture of linen and clothing for fighters.

Until the second half of the 19th century, children who committed crimes served sentences together with criminals that had more than one criminal record. In Russia, there were no special institutions for the re-education of juvenile criminals until the approval of the law "On the Establishment of Shelters and Colonies for the Moral Correction of Juvenile Criminals" on December 5, 1866. [13] The idea of opening correctional institutions in convents was supported by Bishop Agafodor, with his permission and blessing in 1898 shelters were opened for the detention of juvenile criminals and street orphans in the women's Mary-Magdalene and men's Catherine-Lebyazhye Nikolaev monasteries. Children received education and took a course of professional and general education disciplines at the convent school [5, pp. 1036–1038]. On the territory of the convent there was also a parish school for children of Cossacks and two xenial houses. The association of such institutions in the convents contributed to the spiritual and moral correction of people who committed criminal acts at a minor age.

During the period of military clashes of our country, many inhabitants of the convent sought to provide all possible assistance to society. One of these events was the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. By decree of November 24, 1876, the Synod proposed organizing infirmaries at the monasteries of the Caucasian (Stavropol) diocese and creating detachments from among the novices of the convent to care for wounded soldiers and officers. The appeal of the Synod received great support among the convents [14, p. 81].

Abbess of the Black Sea Mary-Magdalene convent, Olympiada, wrote to Bishop German that the mantle nun, Rafaila Timasheva, and 6 novices expressed a sincere desire to enter the service at military infirmaries. They were A.G. Malova and E.K. Ishchenkova, I.S. Miloradova, N.E. Ilyina, D.I. Stetsenko and E.I. Buryakova [14, p. 82]. At the same time, Abbess of the Stavropol St. John the Mariinsky Nunnery, Seraphima, sent a letter to Bishop German, notifying that 10 novices were ready to join the sanitary detachments. The rest of the inhabitants want to create infirmary supplies for military hospitals [4, p. 154].

However, due to the lack of previously similar precedents, the girls did not have knowledge in the field of medicine, therefore, the diocesan leadership organized courses specially for them in the Stavropol Military Hospital. On June 29, 1877, after two months of training and work in a military hospital, ten sisters of the Stavropol convent were sent to Tiflis, to the location of the Red Cross society. The local ladies' committee of the society provided them with money for the road, organized free travel to Tiflis and sent 1800 rubles to the Tiflis District Directorate of the Red Cross Society for their maintenance during service at military infirmaries, assigning 15 rubles a month for each [24, p. 448].

Hospitals during the war, where the sisters of Mercy worked, were located near the places of hostilities and were designed for 200 beds each. The camp hospital consisted of 17 covered rooms, each of which accommodated 16 patients, 10 Kalmyk nomad's tents, 6–7 officers and the same number of soldiers' tents [14, p. 83].

In addition to working in field hospitals, the sisters of Mercy also provided care in hospitals. For example, in the Alexandropolsky hospital, thirty sisters of Mercy cared for the patients, including novices of the Black Sea Mary-Magdalene Convent. One of the inhabitants of the Black Sea Convent, I. Miloradova, after several months of selfless service in the Alexandropolsky hospital, died of typhus on December 9, 1877 [9, p. 80]. The rest of the sisters returned to the convent only after the conclusion of peace a few months later [12, pp. 780–782].

By the decree of the Synod of March 2, 1879, on the proposal of Bishop German of the Caucasus, the blessing of the Holy Synod was expressed for the nuns and novices of the Stavropol John-Mariinsky and Black Sea Mary-Magdalene convents who assumed the duties of sisters of Mercy, who, according to the testimony of the military medical authorities and the Red Cross society, had been distinguished by special dedication and good behavior: during all hostilities they

were in advanced camp infirmaries, among the first to provide the wounded with medical care and moral support, and also worked all the time in the spirit of Christian self-rejection [17, p. 243].

**Discussion and conclusion.** Thus, convents in the territory of the North Caucasus were significant cultural and spiritual centers that made a great contribution to the development of the socio-cultural space of the region. Combining monastic asceticism with educational and charitable activities that are characteristic of convents in Russia, in the North Caucasus they were deeply involved in missionary work. But at the same time, for all the monasteries of the region, serving God remained the only form of their existence, following which they remained widely in demand in society.

Thanks to their social service, sometimes bordering on self-sacrifice, focused on promoting Christian morality and mercy, they made a significant contribution to strengthening the traditional values of the Russian people. Through their asceticism, in the poly-confessional region, that was the North Caucasus, many issues were built up in a system of cultural dialogue, mutual respect and close cooperation. Their activities softened the process of the region's incorporation into the socio-cultural space of the Russian Empire, and it took place without sharp contradictions.

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**Received** 10.07.2023 **Revised** 27.11.2023 **Accepted** 28.11.2023

Conflict of interest statement

The author does not have any conflict of interest.

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

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Поступила в редакцию 10.17.2023 Поступила после рецензирования 27.11.2023 Принята к публикации 28.11.2023

Конфликт интересов

Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов

Автор прочитал и одобрил окончательный вариант рукописи.