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## The evil genius of Iranian constitutionalism? ‘Bloody Shapshal’ at the Qajar court


Denis V. Volkov<sup>a,b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, Russia; <sup>b</sup>Moscow State Linguistic University, Moscow, Russia

Late Imperial Russia’s multifaceted presence in Persia retains many fascinating life-stories of its actors, who often exerted crucial influence on the course of the history of Russian-Iranian relations. By the early twentieth century, Russia’s ‘peaceful penetration’<sup>1</sup> into Persia designed by ministers Sergey Witte (1849–1915) and Aleksei Kuropatkin (1848–1925)<sup>2</sup> had been solidly secured by the activities within four main domains of Russian state influence in Persia. These were the military, diplomatic service, academic scholarship, and Russian Orthodox Church missionary activities. Each of these domains had its own institutionally developed Persian Studies, the representatives of which, consciously or unwittingly, exploited the power/knowledge nexus and the interplay of habitus and the field to the limit, hence being at the spearhead of Russian influence in Persia.<sup>3</sup> However, among them was a personage who can be ascribed to none of the above-mentioned domains, although he was in the thick of the political and military intelligence activities of Imperial Russia in early twentieth-century Persia and played a crucial role in the crack-down on the Iranian *majles* in June 1908.

‘The author of numerous publications and hero of a few belletristic novels whose life-story is enshrouded in the mist of most dramatic myths and legends’ excelled in many capacities.<sup>4</sup> Seraia Markovich (Ben Mordehai) Shapshal (1873–1961) served as the *hakham* of Karaite communities in several countries at different times.<sup>5</sup> A passionate historian of the Karaites, he dedicated his scholarly activities to replacing their Jewish origins with Turkic ones and, in so doing, saved them from the Holocaust during the Second World War. In his twilight years, Shapshal became an internationally acknowledged Soviet turkologist, exposed posthumously as a forger of historical artefacts.<sup>6</sup> His adventurous biography later earned him a reputation resembling the Count of Monte Cristo.<sup>7</sup> However, his ‘Persian period’ (1900–1908) eclipses all of these achievements, and constitutes the apex of his turbulent life and remarkable orientalist career.

Seraia Shapshal was a Russian citizen who graduated from the Karaite secondary school in the Crimean city of Simferopol and then from the St Petersburg Faculty of Oriental Languages, but allegedly failed to find a job in Russia.<sup>8</sup> He arrived in Persia, as he put it himself later,<sup>9</sup> on his own in 1901 with a single reference letter in his pocket which had been secured for him by his university teacher, Professor Valentin Zhukovskii (1858–1918).<sup>10</sup> He finally found his way to the highest levels of the Qajar court, significantly influencing Persian internal and external political affairs, first as a private tutor to the Crown Prince, Mohammad Ali, and then, when the latter became the Shah of Persia, as his Court Minister as well as his confidant and most trusted counsellor.<sup>11</sup> Called ‘Bloody Shapshal’ by the liberal press for his ruthlessness towards Iranian constitutionalists,<sup>12</sup> he was also branded a ‘Russian spy’ by Edward G. Browne.<sup>13</sup> However, Shapshal’s

**CONTACT** Denis V. Volkov  [dvolkov@hse.ru](mailto:dvolkov@hse.ru)

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Russian contemporaries, including both 'straight' diplomats and intelligence officers, treated him with the utmost caution, and even suspicion, quite often pointing out that *Russkoe Delo* (The Russian Cause) was never his priority.<sup>14</sup>

Drawing on international scholarship about Russian-Iranian relationships at the turn of the twentieth century, but mostly on the relevant documents from Russian and Georgian archives and the private diaries of his contemporaries as well as his own notes, this article examines the activities of Seraia Markovich, focusing on his embeddedness both in the Qajar court and in Late Imperial Russia's policy towards Persia from 1900 to 1908. While shedding light on his enigmatic role in some crucial events in the history of the late Qajars, including the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, this article analyses Shapshal's activities from 1894–1917 against the backdrop of Russo-British-Iranian relations at that time. While seeking to answer what impact Shapshal had on the political developments of the period in question and what motivated him in his energetic activities, i.e., to establish what and/or whom he worked for and what his role was in the 1908 crack-down on the *majles*, this article argues that Colonel Vladimir Liakhov (1869–1920), so infamous and disliked among Iranians even today because of his alleged underlying role in the 23 June events,<sup>15</sup> in fact played a secondary, merely instrumental, role in the June crack-down on Iranian constitutionalists. Muriel Atkin argued that 'the Russian emissary to Tehran, Nikolai Genrikhovich Hartwig, and the brigade commander, Colonel Vladimir Platonovich Liakhov, encouraged Moḥammad-Ali Shah to use the Cossacks'<sup>16</sup> during the coup, although this is supported neither by historical evidence nor by the contemporary views of those two discursive figures. This article further argues that the mastermind and main organiser of the onslaught was Seraia Shapshal, guided mostly by his own personal interests. The analysis is informed by theoretical postulations of Michel Foucault (1926–1984) and Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), engaging with the interplay of power relations, the habitus and the field.<sup>17</sup>

The general political, economic and military aspects of Late Imperial Russia's presence in Persia were fairly extensively studied in the second half of the last century by Soviet scholars such as Mikhail Ivanov, Ninel Belova, Nina Kuznetsova, Liudmila Kulagina, Nina Mamedova and others as well as, to a lesser extent, in Western scholarship, mainly by Firuz Kazemzadeh, Richard Frye, Muriel Atkin, and Vanessa Martin.<sup>18</sup> Alongside all this scholarship, the history of Russo-Iranian relations, as more specifically reflected in the careers of individuals who actively participated in these developments, remains understudied. The first significant steps in this direction have been taken by scholars such as Elena Andreeva, Nugzar Ter-Oganov, Stephanie Cronin and Vladimir Genis.<sup>19</sup> Their works analyse various aspects of the mutual influence of the two cultures. Particularly, they engage with the destinies of the Russian intellectuals who, while carrying out their professional assignments in the context of the different discourses and institutional practices of Late Imperial Russia, made serious efforts to understand Iranian culture in a broader sense, which is exactly the field this article aims to contribute to.

It should be noted that works specifically dedicated to Shapshal's activities are few. They are rather brief and mainly focus on his activities as a scholar-turkologist during the Soviet period but mostly as head of Karaite communities in different countries in the inter-war period, during the Second World War and after.<sup>20</sup> A recent work *The Sons of Scripture: The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* by Mikhail Kizilov, contains a separate chapter on Seraia Shapshal, thus shedding significantly more light on his activities, including the pre-1915 period, the year he was elected *hakham* in the Crimea, a spiritual leader of the Karaites of the entire world.<sup>21</sup> However, mostly being situated in a completely different scholarly field, namely Karaite studies, this work is understandably far from studying Shapshal's role in the historical developments of early twentieth-century Iran.<sup>22</sup> This article aims to fill the gap through the use of first-hand materials from the AVPRI (the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire), the St Petersburg Archive of Orientalists (*Arkhiv vostokovedov* – AV) and the private notes of Captain Konstantin Smirnov (1877–1938), such an important primary source for the study of the period.<sup>23</sup>

Seraia Markovich (Ben Mordehai) Shapshal was born in Crimea in 1873 to a large patriarchal Karaite family. He was the twelfth and youngest child. Having studied in the Karaite parish school of Simferopol, he was lucky to find himself in St Petersburg, in a private high school. One of his brothers owned a stable and could afford to pay for his education. 'When he arrived in Saint Petersburg, he still knew no Russian, but he was, however, talented enough to learn this language quickly.'<sup>24</sup> In 1894, young Shapshal succeeded in entering the famous St Petersburg Faculty of Oriental Languages, from where he graduated successfully in 1899 with a First Class degree.<sup>25</sup> Between 1 September 1899 and late 1900 he underwent compulsory military service in Bakhchisarai Battalion N 212.<sup>26</sup> From this moment on, accounts of his life start to differ, even diverging diametrically from time to time.

In 1954, a leading Soviet academician-turkologist Andrei Kononov, while composing a bibliographical dictionary of Russian turkologists, asked Shapshal, who at that time was working at the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, to send him his autobiography. The St Petersburg Archive of Orientalists now owns this.<sup>27</sup> In this autobiography, Shapshal maintained:

I was offered a chance to go to Iran to study the Azeri and Persian languages by the University and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, seizing the opportunity of the invitation of the Iranian government to teach the Russian language and general subjects in a specialised school Lukmaniyeh in Tabriz. There, I also tutored a young prince Mohammad Ali who later became the Shah.<sup>28</sup>

However, not a single researcher has yet referenced such an invitation, which would have been found in the collection of the 'Persian Desk' of the *AVPRI*. Moreover, if one has a close look at the character of the correspondence between St Petersburg, the Russian Consulate in Tabriz and the Legation in Tehran about Shapshal, it is obvious that none of them mentioned him as their own *protégé* during his early career in Persia.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, it seems more credible that Shapshal established close contacts with the Russian diplomatic corps only several months after his arrival in Tabriz in January 1901. In fact, it was the Russian Consul-General in Tabriz Ivan Fedorovich Pokhitonov (1853–1913)<sup>30</sup> who identified the great potential of Shapshal's access to the person of the future shah of Iran Mohammad Ali. Pokhitonov invited Shapshal to move to accommodation on Consulate land and started to use Shapshal as a source of all sorts of information about the Crown Prince.<sup>31</sup> Oleg Petrov-Dubinskii argues that the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs seconded Shapshal to Iran.<sup>32</sup> This statement is refuted by the fact that in 1901 it was none other than the Persian Minister in St Petersburg who officially applied to the Russian War Ministry to receive a one-year military draft deferment for Shapshal because of his tutoring for the Crown Prince.<sup>33</sup> It was only from 1902 onwards that Shapshal applied each year for his annual draft deferment via the Russian Legation in Iran.<sup>34</sup> It appears more likely that Shapshal secured this job through his own connections in the Persian Embassy in St Petersburg, which he had been visiting actively as a student, and which in 1900 received the Crown Prince's request to find him a teacher of Russian.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, his link to a well-off horse-breeding elder brother, a rather famous supplier of steeds in St Petersburg, including to foreign embassies, who 'was well-known to St Petersburg high society'<sup>36</sup> also played a significant role in Shapshal developing his acquaintance with Persian diplomats. So in the beginning, when still in St Petersburg, Seraia Shapshal had nothing to do with the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The above-mentioned version of how Shapshal had found his employment under the Qajars and how he acquired his operative contacts with Russian diplomats in Persia is partially supported by one of his contemporaries, Ahmad-Shah's private tutor (1907–1914), Captain Konstantin Smirnov. He later wrote in his notes:

[...] Shapshal failed to find a job in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and set off for Tabriz at his own risk, where he managed to get a job as a Russian language tutor of Mohammad Ali Shah, who was Heir to the Throne at that time. He [Shapshal] succeeded in creating such a situation that made him the right man for both the would-be Shah and the Russian Consulate (the Consul was Pokhitonov at that time).<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, as his activities during the entire 'Persian period' of his life demonstrate, Shapshal always tried to preserve his exceptional strategic and operative position as 'a broker between the Shah and the Legation'.<sup>38</sup> In addition to Smirnov's testimony, Shapshal's institutional 'otherness' towards Russian state entities is also maintained by the style and character of his brief reports, written on slips of paper and addressed to the Russian Legation, as well as by the internal correspondence within the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Russian War Ministry.<sup>39</sup>

Research therefore shows that Shapshal found himself in Persia and initially succeeded in securing a strategically important position mainly due to the following factors. Firstly, his expertise in Oriental studies. He graduated with excellence and, by that time, in addition to French, he spoke Arabic, Persian, Turkish, several Azeri dialects, and was able to read Hebrew and Ottoman Turkish).<sup>40</sup> Secondly, his ambitions. Although he was offered employment at the University, he was eager to find a place in Russia's most prestigious and difficult institution at which to win a place, similar to Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966), but failed.<sup>41</sup> Thirdly, the recommendations and connections of his teacher, Professor Valentin Zhukovskii, who was famous for settling the careers of his disciples, and who, since his protracted field work in Persia in the 1880s, had been well known to both the Qajar court and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Imperial Russia.<sup>42</sup> All these components constitute no less than the Bourdieusian interplay of the habitus and the field as well as the Foucauldian productive manifestation of the power/knowledge nexus.

Almost immediately after Shapshal had started his classes of Russian with Mohammad Ali in Tabriz, he succeeded in gaining his sympathies.<sup>43</sup> As one of his contemporaries, an Armenian traveller, journalist and writer, Sarkis Mubagazhian (1860–1937) (with the pen name of Atrpet), maintained, 'The erudite, benevolent and tactful Shapshal, who, in addition, possessed diplomatic talent and enviable patience, aroused the Shah's interest toward himself and gained his favour very soon.'<sup>44</sup> In addition, Shapshal always stressed that he had adopted Islam and was Muslim like the Iranians as well as sharing the same mentality as them.<sup>45</sup> However, slightly different epithets were given to Shapshal's manners and behaviour by his other contemporaries who had an opportunity to observe his activities from a professional standpoint and were very critical of him. The above-mentioned Smirnov and Minorsky referred to Shapshal as 'a flatterer', 'a lickspittle', 'smug', 'trying to exert influence through women', 'a bribetaker', 'a thief', 'a swindler', and 'a toady'.<sup>46</sup> Another contemporary of Shapshal, Edward G. Browne, mentioned his name more than fifteen times in *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909*, almost always with a great deal of stigma.<sup>47</sup> Following the anti-Semitic trends of the time, Browne did not shy away from labels such as 'the notorious Russian Jew' and 'the notorious Jewish Russian agent'.<sup>48</sup> Of course, for the sake of objectivity, it should be stated that this piece of research lacks other important testimonies, namely those of Mohammad Ali Shah himself, since the references given to Shapshal behind his back by his Iranian counterparts at the Court do not differ greatly from those given by Smirnov and Minorsky.<sup>49</sup> As a matter of fact, among them there was a sentence said by Mohammad Ali's son – the would-be Ahmad Shah shortly after Shapshal's departure from Iran in 1908: 'Yes, Adib-Soltan was *pedar-sukhte-ye bozorg*'.<sup>50</sup>

In any case, a teacher from Russia would not have reached such heights of political power in Persia at that time, had not Mohammad Ali fully trusted him. As evidenced by some letters written by Mohammad Ali to Shapshal and still kept in the archive of the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in addition to his affection towards Shapshal as his teacher and confidant, Mohammad Ali continued to perceive Shapshal as an inherent part of the decision-making field in Imperial Russia's foreign affairs establishment (which he was not) well until the exiled Shah's late years in Odessa.<sup>51</sup> Because of all this, the influence of Shapshal on Mohammad Ali and his impact on the political affairs of the *mamlakat* had been growing until the very last days of Shapshal's activities in Iran. The former Chief Instructor of the Persian Cossack Brigade, Colonel Chernozubov (1863–1919), his successor Colonel Liakhov, the second dragoman of the Legation, Smirnov's would-be closest friend Minorsky, and even the Russian Minister Nikolai Hartwig

(1857–1914), were all convinced that, after his arrival in Tehran in 1907, Smirnov should be introduced to the Shah only by Shapshal, simultaneously emphasizing his special position and political influence at the Qajar court.<sup>52</sup> As Smirnov later realised, this had worked against him since, considering Smirnov as a potential rival and pursuing his own interests, Shapshal had avoided introducing him to the Shah under various pretexts for several months. It was only because of the impatience of the Russian General Staff (which Smirnov was directly subordinate to)<sup>53</sup> and the pressure Smirnov exerted on Hartwig, that the Russian Minister had to resort to a trick to secure Shapshal's absence from Tehran for three weeks in order to be able to introduce Smirnov directly to the Shah, 'without hurting [!] Shapshal'.<sup>54</sup> This verbal evidence quoted by Smirnov, demonstrates an astonishingly delicate attitude on behalf of the Russian Minister Hartwig, who was a rather plainspoken person – an attitude that could not be applied toward those directly subordinate to either him or the Russian government. Therefore, Shapshal was perceived by the Russian diplomatic establishment not as an informant, albeit a very important one, but rather as an independent politician doing favours to Russians.

Correspondence between the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Russian Legation in Iran explicitly supports both assumptions, such as Shapshal's crucial importance for the *Russkoe delo* as well as his institutional independence from the Russian state. As early as 1905, Russian Foreign Minister Vladimir Lamzdorf (1845–1907) wrote in a secret cable to the Russian Minister in Iran, Actual State Councillor Speyer [Aleksei Nikolaevich Shpeier] (1854–1916):

In my message to the then Minister in Tehran, Actual State Councillor Vlasov, I already pointed out on August 11, 1903 what outstanding importance I ascribed to the activities of the mentioned Russian subject in Persia, and the subsequent information supported my opinion. Judging by all the available signs, Mr Shapshal is apparently destined to bring considerable benefit to the Russian Cause in Persia, in view of which we should treat him with great prudence and by all means avoid everything that can shatter his position. We should take measures in order to deprive his enemies of any opportunity to represent him as a Russian agent. Thus, one should not emphasize his affinity with the Legation and its staff too much. We should thoroughly withhold the fact that we use him as a middleman in our negotiations with the *vali-ahd* [Crown Prince]. In a word, we should not create that kind of unpopularity for him that was acquired by the English doctor Adcock [Hugh Adcock (1847–1920)] who had almost not concealed his role as an official British agent. The content of this letter should be brought to the attention of Shapshal in order to prevent your actions from being interpreted as distrust toward him or dissatisfaction by him.<sup>55</sup>

This ministerial correspondence about Shapshal also demonstrates an attitude toward him as a high-ranking and immensely influential foreigner working in the interests of the Russian Empire.

The status and the power that Shapshal gained at the Court can also be illustrated by the fact that he punched and kicked the War Minister, Amir Bahadur Jang, several times in front of the Shah himself and the Court servants after the 1908 assassination attempt on the Shah, as well as assaulting the Mayor – *shahrdar* - of Tehran on various occasions.<sup>56</sup> As Ter-Oganov points out, Shapshal's influence at Mohammad Ali's Court was 'almost absolute',<sup>57</sup> whereas Ilya Zaytsev and Mikhail Kizilov go even further, stating that 'during the 1908 constitutional coup Shapshal virtually ruled Persia, using his influence on the young Shah'.<sup>58</sup> As for other manifestations of Shapshal's supreme power at the Court, Smirnov's notes also testify that during the most crucial moments for the Shah it was only Shapshal who was aware of the subsequent tactics or measures which were supposed to be taken by the Shah and it seemed that, in actual fact, it was Shapshal who had designed them.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, not without good reason, constitutionalists demanded his permanent dismissal from the Court.<sup>60</sup>

Their demands were not confined to Shapshal's political dismissal, however, and shortly after developed into terrorist activities. Shapshal was included in the high-priority list for liquidation by the Caucasian revolutionaries, together with Mohammad Ali Shah himself.<sup>61</sup> The AVPRI holds an interesting report composed on 5 July 1908 and sent by Hartwig to the Russian Viceroy in the Caucasus Count Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov (1837–1916) and the Imperial Ministry for Foreign Affairs. It includes the following:



Several men disguised in women's dress and carrying bombs were detained on the Anzali-Tehran road. They had been seconded by the Baku Revolutionary Committee to liquidate the Shah, Shapshal and Liakhov. At the same time, four men set off for Baku from here to receive fragmentation shells. They will arrive onshore either from Tagiev's steamer on Monday, or on the mail steamer on Thursday.<sup>62</sup>

The international hunt for Shapshal announced by extremist revolutionaries greatly contributed to his final decision to leave Persia shortly after the June onslaught. However, as mentioned by Smirnov, 'Shapshal behaved fearlessly enough during the entire time of troubles',<sup>63</sup> and it is unlikely that this was the only reason. It was also the Russian Legation's growing frustration with his activities that was instrumental in his final decision to leave.

Indeed, as evidenced by the documents held in the Persian Desk Collection of the Archive of the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Hartwig's discontent with Shapshal's behaviour had been growing since late 1907. On 7 August 1908 in his report to the then Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Izvolsky (1856–1919), Hartwig, describing the origins and outcomes of Shapshal's dazzling success, maintained:

[...] Shapshal gradually became an inseparable member of the Shah's family who were nurturing great trust in him. The Shah showered him with favours, and granted him the title of *adeeb-soltan* as well as appointing him Adjutant-General and entrusting him with being head of the ceremonial affairs of the Court. All this must have turned the head of the young man. Instead of following the Legation's advice, tempering his ardour and lowering his tone, Shapshal, feeling the solid soil of Russian citizenship, began to abuse the exceptional status of the friend and councillor of the monarch. Already being half an oriental, Shapshal fully assimilated with the local element and adopted local character. He took part in all petty squabbles and intrigues at the Court. He patronized some and brought the monarch's rage on others. In the presence of strangers, Shapshal would call down the monarch, rebuking him for his indecisiveness or hypocrisy. [...] My exhortations did not work on him. He, as it is called, overreached himself. [...] I suggested he resign voluntarily. He used as a pretext the fact that he had not been paid for four months, which was a breach of the contract. Shapshal asked to resign but the Shah proposed to wait since he did not want to part with him. Despite that, Shapshal insisted and left Persia at the end of the last month.<sup>64</sup>

The above quote uncovers in enough detail the true character of Shapshal's relations with Russia's foreign affairs establishment and, more importantly, the fact that after the events of late June 1908 even a staunch absolutist and sworn apologist of drastic measures against constitutionalists, such as Hartwig, no longer considered Shapshal's activities in line with the Russian Cause and would prefer him to be far from the decision-making field of the Qajars.

Furthermore, Shapshal's status as one of the most hated characters of the Qajar Court was also supported by his sincere and energetic but cruel and even bloody efforts aimed at preserving the Persian monarchy embodied in his patron Mohammad Ali Shah. The Shah, in fact, continued to vest in Shapshal new capabilities multiplying his symbolic capital, hence endowing him with further power. Advocating drastic measures against revolutionaries and all those who threatened the viability of the regime in which he was so successfully embedded, Shapshal considered even Hartwig's approach to the current Persian affairs too mild.<sup>65</sup> Minorovsky's letters contain direct evidence that it was Shapshal who convinced the Shah to organise in the *bagh-e shah* a show mass execution of the revolutionaries seized after the shelling of the *majles* in June 1908. Among the executed, such famous constitutionalist leaders as Mirza Jahangir Khan Shirazi (Sur-e Esrafil) and Mirza Nasr'o'llah Beheshti (Malek al-Motakallemin) were hanged with Shapshal's personal participation.<sup>66</sup> When he nominated himself for the post of the Karaites' Supreme *Hakham* in the Crimea in 1915, the motion caused a deep division among the entire Karaite community of the Crimea.<sup>67</sup> The Russian liberal newspapers *Russkoe slovo* [Russian Word] and *Karaimskaia zhizn'* [Karaite Life] published the protests of a significant part of the Crimean Karaite community against this nomination, emphatically pointing to 'the rivers of blood spilt by Shapshal in revolutionary Persia'.<sup>68</sup> So, the epithet 'bloody' haunted Shapshal many years after he left Persia.

Further analysis of various snippets of the evidence and testimonies related to the activities of Shapshal during 1907–1908 which could be found in Minorovsky's and Smirnov's notes as well

as in the Russian military and foreign affairs archives sheds more light on the origin and modality of his actions. More importantly, it leads us to new conclusions about his personal impact on the historical developments of those days. First, contrary to the general line taken by the Russian minister for foreign affairs, Izvolsky, and notwithstanding Hartwig's both official and covert instructions regarding the strict non-interference of Russian nationals in combat activities, Shapshal always encouraged Mohammad Ali Shah to choose the use of force in response to any manifestation of opposition to his power. This culminated in him taking on virtual supreme command of the crack-down in which Colonel Liakhov became a mere executor of the technical part of Shapshal's plot, being skilfully manipulated by Shapshal. As evidenced, during the crucial days of June 1908, Shapshal, wearing a military jacket and with a rifle in his hand, solely directed the crack-down on the constitutionalists, coordinating the supply of ammunition, dispatching soldier units and energetically moving between strategic points in the city.<sup>69</sup>

Second, it appears that it was no one else but Shapshal who designed and secured Liakhov's decisive and no less infamous participation in the seizure of the *majles*. In his profound study of the Persian Cossack Brigade published in 2012, Ter-Oganov dedicated ten pages to the issue of the dubious credibility of Liakhov's so-called four secret reports demonstrating the alleged readiness of the Russian government for what happened on 23 June 1908, deconstructing the implied authorised and premeditated character of Liakhov's decisive action on the same day. Other researchers, such as Vanessa Martin and L. Ridgeon, also pointed to the dubious character of the documents, as had also been done by Browne himself.<sup>70</sup> However, in 1909, these fakes were used not only for political purposes by Browne in his report, *The Responsibility of the Russian Government for the "Chaos" Now Existing in Persia* privately circulated to the members of the Persia Committee,<sup>71</sup> but were also introduced into scholarly circulation by him in his *The Persian Revolution* (1910).<sup>72</sup> As stressed by Ter-Oganov, this was rather strange for a scholar of Browne's status.<sup>73</sup> If he had seen neither the originals nor their photocopies, and the source of these 'documents' was a widely-known adventurer compromised even among revolutionaries such as Fedor Panoff, why publish their content at all?<sup>74</sup>

With complete support from Ter-Oganov's argumentation, it should be pointed out that there is no evidence that Liakhov's actions were pre-authorised by the Russian government. Nor is there a plausible suggestion of this fact. The validity of this notion is diminished, to a certain extent, by the eventual outcome, namely the covert but unequivocal commendation of Liakhov and Shapshal on behalf of Nicholas II in the immediate aftermath of the developments, contrary to the dark expectations of Russian diplomats and Liakhov himself.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, shortly after Shapshal left Iran in 1908, he was the only participant of the events in question who was granted a personal reception by Nicolas II,<sup>76</sup> the supreme honour for the Russians of the time. The royal audience also supports his status as a mastermind of the decisive motion aimed at the protection of Russia's imperial interests in Persia. This, of course, by no means points to the premeditated character of the crack-down on behalf of Russia. Russia was indeed making serious efforts to stick to the spirit of the 1907 Convention and was readily sacrificing its interests in Persia for the sake of an alliance with Britain against the backdrop of the looming confrontation with Germany, as formulated by Smirnov.<sup>77</sup> However, the inherent perception of the *Russkoe delo*, as something morally and politically opposed to all things British and aimed at the preservation of kinship monarchies, was still strong at the Russian Court, in the army and among many representatives of the Imperial Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Therefore, although the coup was not pre-authorised, the outcome was highly appreciated by 'real Russian patriots', including His Majesty. In this context, it appears evident that Liakhov's actions were premeditated by a quite different player being neither a tsar, nor a Russian government or even a Russian minister to Persia, but rather by the Qajar Court Minister *adeeb-soltan* Seraia Shapshal.

In further support of the above-mentioned conclusion it should be noted that Liakhov was a brave, determined and ambitious commanding officer with combat experience, although very straightforward and rather credulous. Although he had some friction with Hartwig on the matter



of the unattained status of an official military agent in Iran, he would never have dared to act in the political field on his own, as attested by his contemporaries.<sup>78</sup> However, accepting the troubleshooting post of city governor with the aim of eliminating the riot, as perceived by Liakhov, and of restoring order in the capital quite suited the straightforward military spirit of Liakhov. Moreover, there was a strong possibility that Mohammad Ali's uncle and the governor of Isfahan Zill al-Sultan (1850–1918), an alleged British ally, would be able to seize power.<sup>79</sup> Liakhov perceived his own actions as not proactive but rather retroactive, i.e. protecting the Brigade and the order against the ongoing attacks on his Cossacks as well as against Zill al-Sultan's mutiny and the armed rebellion whose stronghold happened to be inside the *majles* building.<sup>80</sup>

However, it was Shapshal who knew how to capitalise on Liakhov's subordination to both the Shah and to the Russian Minister in Iran as well as to the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian Military District. This was not a secret to many in the Russian Legation either, including Minorsky and Smirnov. In the context of the June 1908 events the latter wrote, 'Having learnt how to play the weak strings of Colonel Liakhov and being aware of what can make him climb a wall, Shapshal decided to utilise him for the purposes of his accomplices.'<sup>81</sup> This is also supported by the fact that in 1909, a year after Shapshal left Persia, during the revolutionaries' successful takeover of Tehran, notwithstanding the above-mentioned cabled commendation of His Majesty, Liakhov, being in a similar situation with even more authority, did not undertake any decisive measure whatsoever to militarily protect the Qajar monarchy, as witnessed by Smirnov.<sup>82</sup> This was also pointed out by the ex-Shah Mohammad Ali, but later, when in exile.<sup>83</sup>

As mentioned earlier, on his return to Russia in 1908, Shapshal received the honour of being personally introduced to Nicholas II. The Tsar accepted his request to 'serve the Throne and the Fatherland in Turkey'.<sup>84</sup> The Ministry for Foreign Affairs eventually ignored the Tsar's consent to send Shapshal to Turkey as a diplomat because of Shapshal's bad reputation which was compared by Minorsky to an infamous person, much talked about at that time, the notorious *agent provocateur* Yevno Azef.<sup>85</sup> On 25 January 1909, in a letter to his best friend Smirnov, Minorsky, having mentioned Shapshal's meeting with Nicolas II, resentfully wrote:

Due to which merits will this adventurer outrun us and enter a place [the Ministry] where his impudent manners are inappropriate? The man who would sell Russian interests to everybody, who used to spy on us for the Shah, who was involved in the financial fraud together with Podlunskii, compromised us at the Court, conducted irresponsible policy – and based on all this he has made a career and reputation for himself.<sup>86</sup>

However, it appears that Minorsky, naturally not possessing the exhaustive information on Shapshal, was hasty in his judgement, and the Ministry, in fact, was not ready to fully embrace its former powerful agent of influence either. The Head of the Asiatic Department finally refrained from appointing Shapshal to the post of a conventional diplomat because of 'his smelly past'.<sup>87</sup>

That said, it should be mentioned that Shapshal was used twice as the Ministry's secret liaison with Seyed Hasan Taqizadeh (1878–1970) and some other Iranian constitutionalists to establish contact and conduct covert negotiations with them in Turkey. Shapshal spent the rest of the time in the Ministry's Press Section as a non-permanent staff translator composing surveys of foreign newspapers.<sup>88</sup> It was only in 1915 that he left the Ministry for the post of the Karaites *hakham* in the Crimea. The post was a rather modest one in comparison to what he had had in Iran, however it opened new chapters in Shapshal's long life. They comprised his emigration to Turkey and then to Poland after 1917, his protracted research on the history of the Karaites, including his profound efforts aimed at the scholarly substantiation of their non-Jewish origin. The establishment of contacts with the SS (Schutzstaffel) and the Nazi Institute of Racial Purity in the 1930s-40s with the purpose of studying the 'racial' roots of Karaites and their resulting salvation from the Holocaust was another sequential chapter in his turbulent life. Shapshal's efforts indeed resulted in the Nazis not recognising Karaites as a people of Judaic origin. Then he

miraculously survived the Soviet occupation of Lithuania from 1939–1941 and the Nazi occupation from 1941–1944 and then again the post-Second World War Soviet occupation of Lithuania. Finally, he became an acknowledged Soviet scholar-turkologist at the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.<sup>89</sup>

The untapped archival documents and the private notes of Shapshal's contemporaries as well as the available relevant scholarship allow this author to conclude that this research, for the first time in Iranian studies, has shed light in sufficient detail upon how Shapshal found himself in Persia and what enabled him to reach the highest levels of power at the Qajar court. It is now clear that initially it was not the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs through which Shapshal allegedly paved his way to the residence of the Qajar Crown Prince in Tabriz but rather his active successful networking enhanced by his family's background and his academic excellence. Shapshal gradually succeeded in multiplying his symbolic capital, which resulted in securing an imposing strategic position within the Qajars' decision-making field due to three key factors. First, he expertly juggled multiple major elements of his *milieu*, namely Mohammad Ali and his immediate relatives as well as the key figures of Russia's foreign affairs establishment in Persia. Second, he successfully capitalised on his status as a learned European, traditionally so much respected by Iranians. Third, his affinity with Iranians in cultural mentality and religion so emphatically stressed by him during his entire 'Persian period' also was instrumental.

As a result, on the one hand, Mohammad Ali perceived Shapshal as a devoted *consigliere* acting solely in the interests of his patron, as well as a very close friend who was simultaneously a key element of Russia's decision-making toward Persia. On the other hand, the leadership of the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Russian top diplomats in Persia perceived Shapshal as a high-ranking actor at the Qajar court, acting solely in Russian interests. The reality was that Shapshal's priorities were first and foremost his own interests. The conflation of all the above-mentioned factors resulted in him accruing the virtual supreme power that culminated in the June 1908 anti-constitutional coup since any reduction of his patron's power meant the destruction of the empowering *habitus* constructed by Shapshal, and would have led to the reduction of his own power. However, Shapshal's radical political motion eventually turned out to be a huge losing bet, depriving him of both Russia's political support in Persia and the wholehearted trust of his patron.

Another underlying finding of this research is related to the historical case of Colonel Vladimir Liakhov. While it is contrary to common sense to refute Liakhov's 'contribution' to the military crackdown of late June 1908 on Iranian constitutionalists and the fact of Liakhov's 'personal aiming an artillery gun'<sup>90</sup> at the building of the *majles*, it was not Liakhov who had masterminded the coup, nor was it Mohammad Ali Shah. The discursive label of the 'slaughterer' of the Iranian *namad-i mashruteh* that is ascribed to Colonel Vladimir Liakhov,<sup>91</sup> who was merely manipulated as a functionary, in actual fact belongs to Seraia Shapshal, who was ready to commit any act to preserve the monarchy in Persia and his patron as its head. Shapshal perceived Mohammad Ali's absolutist monarchy as the only professional field and fertile *habitus* that endowed him with vast power, operative autonomy and strategic capabilities in conformity with his extremely high personal ambitions and shining professional talents. Second, it was not Russia, nor was it the Russian government of the time, or the discourse of *Russkoe delo*, all of which were so important to his contemporaries, such as Minorsky, Smirnov, Hartwig and Liakhov, that secured Shapshal's utter devotion to Mohammad Ali Shah and induced him to defend the Iranian monarchy so energetically. Instead, it was his devotion to the *habitus* he had succeeded in creating, while navigating power/knowledge relations in Iran. As evidenced by Shapshal's private notes, this devotion was so strong that he indeed felt extremely excited after receiving news about Mohammad Ali's return to Iran in 1911, and sincerely anticipated an invitation to join his former patron again. During several ensuing years Shapshal also often saw his welcomed return to Mohammad Ali's Court in his night dreams which he tended to vest with extramundane meaning, as had been customary in his former Iranian *milieu*.<sup>92</sup> Thus, Shapshal's 'Persian period' was definitely his

brightest period in terms of making the most of the situation for his own sake and it had consequences that were dire for Iranians and rather awkward for Russians. However, his later energetic scholarly activities, most of which were questionable in academic terms and not without scholarly falsifications, eventually brought fruition not so much for him but for his own people, saving thousands of Karaites lives in Europe before and during the Second World War.

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## ORCID

Denis V. Volkov  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4786-6576>

## Notes

1. The Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (henceforth AVPRI), fond 144 (Persian Desk), d. 2308, l. 116. For more detail see also D.V. Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia: Orientalism in Diplomacy and Intelligence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.62–4.
2. Sergey Witte was Russia's Minister of Finance from 1892 to 1903. Aleksei Kuropatkin, War Minister of the Russian Empire (1898–1904), Lieutenant-General, eminent Russian Orientologist (including works on Persia) and full member of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society; in different periods, he served in Turkestan, and was Head of the Asian Department of the General Staff, Head of the Transcaspien Region, War Minister and Governor-General of Turkestan. In 1895 Kuropatkin was sent to Tehran as a special envoy of the Tsar at the Persian court. As War Minister he took an active part in establishing the Tashkent Officers' School of Oriental Languages and the Officers' Faculty at the Oriental Institute (Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.237–8). See also the Archive of Orientologists of the St Petersburg branch of the Institute of Orientalology of the Academy of Sciences (henceforth AV), f. 115 (Snesarev), op. 1, d. 152 (*The Humble Report of Lieutenant-General Kuropatkin on his trip to Persia in 1895*), l. 35–6, 64. AVPRI, f. 144 'Persian Desk', d. 2308, l. 116. See S. Vitte, *Vospominaniia* [Memoirs] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1960).
3. For more details on the organisational set-up of Late Imperial Russia's Oriental studies and the activities of its representatives see Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*. See also D.V. Volkov, 'Rupture or Continuity? The Organizational Set-up of Russian and Soviet Oriental Studies before and after 1917' in a special themed issue of the journal *Iranian Studies*, Vol.48, No.5 (2015), pp.695–712, edited by S. Cronin and E. Herzig; 'Persian Studies and the Military in Late Imperial Russia (1863–1917): State Power in the Service of Knowledge?' *Iranian Studies*, Vol.47, No.6 (2014), pp.915–32; 'Individuals, Institutions, Discourses: Knowledge and Power in Russia's Iranian Studies of the Late Imperial, Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods', *Middle East – Topics & Arguments*, Vol.4 (2015), pp.61–79; 'Fearing the Ghosts of State Officialdom Past? Russia's Archives as a Tool for Constructing Historical Memories of its Persia Policy Practices', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.51, No.6 (2015), pp.901–21.
4. M. Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture: The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (Berlin: De Gruyter Open, 2015), p.216.
5. The Karaites, a non-Talmudic Turkic-speaking Jewish minority that had been living in Eastern Europe since the late Middle Ages, developed a unique ethnographic culture and religious tradition. For further information on the Karaites see D. Shapiro, 'A Jewish Pan-Turkist: Seraya Szapszal (Shapshaloglu) and His Work Qirim Qaray Turkleri (1928)', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung.*, Vol.58, No.4 (2005), pp.349–53.
6. See D. Shapiro, 'A Jewish Pan-Turkist: Seraya Szapszal (Shapshaloglu) and His Work Qirim Qaray Turkleri (1928)', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung.*, Vol.58, No.4 (2005), pp.356–7, 374. See also I. Zaytsev and

- M. Kizilov, 'Puteshestvie Seraya Shapshala po Turtsii v 1911 godu' [Seraia Shapshal's travel around Turkey in 1911], *Vostochnyi arkhiv*, Vol.1, No.27 (2013), pp.25, 31.
7. M. Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture: The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (Berlin: De Gruyter Open, 2015), p.216.
  8. The Georgian National Centre for Manuscripts (henceforth GNCM), fond 39 (Smirnov's Collection), d. 12, l. 17, 45ob. See also N. Ter-Oganov (ed.), *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shaha, 1907–1914* [The notes of the Persian Shah's private tutor, 1907–1914] (Tel-Aviv, 2002), p.23.
  9. S. Shapshal, Valentin Alekseevich Zhukovskii in I. Orbeli (ed.), *Ocherki po istorii russkogo vostokovedeniia* [Essays in the history of Russian Oriental studies] (Moscow: Nauka, 1960), pp.131–3.
  10. Ibid. The letter was signed on 25 December 1900 by the Head of the St Petersburg University. Shapshal gave it to Pokhitonov in 1902 who sent it to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs also in 1902. The letter is still kept at the AVPRI (fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l.45-45ob.). On Zhukovskii's activities see further in the article.
  11. The Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI), fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 64 (Hartwig to MID, 07.08.1908); GNCM, fond 39 (Smirnov's Collection), d. 12 (Private Diary, summer 1907), l. 17.
  12. 'Protest protiv kandidatury S.M. Shapshala' [A protest against the candidacy of S. M. Shapshal], *Karaimskaia zhizn'*, Vol.7 (1911), p.118; 'Prezritel'nyi Tersit' [The contemptuous Thersites], *Zhizn' i sud*, Vol.3 (1916). See also Shapiro, 'A Jewish Pan-Turkist', p.354.
  13. E.G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), pp.214, 419. See also Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, p.173. Shapshal's epithet 'evil genius' was also coined by Browne in his same work (p.39).
  14. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 64ob-65ob (Hartwig to MID, 07.08.1908); GNCM, fond 39 (Smirnov's Collection), d. 12 (Private Diary, summer 1907), l. 17ob. On the discourse of *Russkoe delo* (the Russian Cause) see Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.75, 78, 80, 90. Also see Volkov, 'Persian Studies and the Military', pp.928, 930–1; and 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), or The Centenary of "Minorsky's Frontier" in R. Matthee and E. Andreeva (eds), *Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and Power in Iran in the Qajar Era and Beyond* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp.188–216.
  15. The day when the building of the Iranian parliament was shelled by the Persian Cossacks Brigade's artillery guns under the command of Colonel Liakhov and the functioning of the parliament (*majles*) suppressed until constitutionalists captured Tehran a year after.
  16. M. Atkin, 'Cossack Brigade', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cossack-brigade>, accessed 26 Oct. 2019). See also F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864–1914: A Study in Imperialism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), pp.522–4. See also S. Cronin, Deserters, Converts, Cossacks and Revolutionaries: Russians in Iranian Military Service, 1800–1920 in S. Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.167–70. For an alternative opinion see U. Rabi and N. Ter-Oganov, 'The Russian Military Mission and the Birth of the Persian Cossack Brigade: 1879–1894', *Iranian Studies*, Vol.42, No.3 (2009), pp.448–50.
  17. See M. Foucault, Technologies of the Self in L. Martin, H. Gutman, and P. Hutton (eds), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London: Tavistock, 1988), pp.16–49; C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, by Michel Foucault (London: Harvester, 1980); M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* [transl. A. Sheridan Smith] (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1989). See also P. Bourdieu, 'Sur les rapports entre la sociologie et l'histoire en Allemagne et en France' [On the relationship between sociology and history in Germany and France], *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, Vol.106, No.7 (1995), pp.108–22; P. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* [transl. P. Collier] (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988); 'Le plaisir de savoir' [The pleasure of knowing], *Le Monde* (27 June 1984), pp.1–10.
  18. See Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864–1914*; R.N. Frye, 'Oriental Studies in Russia' in W.S. Vucinich (ed.), *Russia and Asia. Essays on the Influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), pp.30–52; M. Atkin, 'Soviet and Russian Scholarship on Iran', *Iranian Studies*, Vol.2, No.4 (1987), pp.223–71; V. Martin, 'Hartwig and Russian Policy in Iran, 1906–08', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.29, No.1 (1993), pp.1–21. See also Rabi and Ter-Oganov, 'The Russian Military Mission and the Birth of the Persian Cossack Brigade: 1879–1894', pp.445–63. The most recent work in the field is A. Shablovskaia, 'Russian Hubris in Iran: Diplomacy, Clientelism, and Intervention (1907–1912)', *Ab Imperio*, Vol.1 (2019), pp.79–103; and L. Ridgeon, 'Russian Terrorism in Tehran: A Qajar Princes' Letters During the 'Minor Tyranny' of 1908', *Iran*, Vol.LV (2017), pp.44–61.
  19. See E. Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism* (New York, 2007); Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (London: Routledge, 2013); S. Cronin and E. Herzog, 'Russian Orientalism to Soviet Iranology: The Persian-speaking world and its history through Russian eyes', *Iranian Studies*, Vol.48, No.5 (2015); Ter-Oganov (ed.), *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shaha* [The notes of the Persian Shah's private tutor]; N. Ter-Oganov, *Persidskaia kazach'ia brigada, 1879–1921* [The Persian Cossack brigade, 1879–1921] (Moscow: Institut vostokovedeniia RAN, 2012); V. Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii: Sluzhba v Persii i Bukharskom Khanstve, 1906–1920* [Vice-Consul Vvedensky: service in Persia and

- the Khanate of Bukhara] (Moscow: MYSL', 2003); V. Genis, *Neverye slugi rezhima: Pervye sovetskie nevozvrashtsy, 1920–1933* (Moscow: Informkniga, 2009).
20. See Zaytsev and Kizilov, 'Puteshestvie Seraya Shapshala po Turtsii v 1911 godu' [Seraia Shapshal's travel around Turkey in 1911], pp.25–34; I. Zaytsev, 'Shto mne delat' i kak byt'? (pis'ma Seraia Markovicha Shapshala akademiku V.A. Gordlevskomu, 1945–1950)' [What should I do and how should I be? (The letters of Seraia Markovich Shapshal to the academician V.A. Gordlevsky)], *Vestnik Evrazii*, Vol.4, No.38 (2007):147–69; O. Petrov-Dubinskii, 'Shapshal (Adib-us-Sultan) – uchitel' Valiahda Mohammed-Ali, general-ad'utant Muhammed-Ali-shaha' [Shapshal (Adib-us-Sultan) – the tutor of the Crown Prince Mohammad Ali and the adjutant-general of the Shah Mohammad Ali], *Vostok*, Vol.5 (2007), pp.64–78; O. Petrov-Dubinskii, 'S.M. Shapshal v Persii. Puteshestvie po 'shapshalovskim' mestam 100 let spustia' [S.M. Shapshal in Persia. A journey to Shapshal's places 100 years later], *Karaimskie Vesti*, Vol.6, No.87 (2008), pp.1–12. See also Shapiro, 'A Jewish Pan-Turkist', pp.349–80. See also E. Andreeva, 'Russia v. Russians at the Court of Mohammad-Ali Shah', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/russia-iv-russians-at-the-court-of-mohammad-ali-shah>, accessed 20 July 2009).
  21. The St Petersburg Archive of Orientalists (henceforth - AV), fond 152, op. 1, d. 1563, l. 40. See also Zaytsev and Kizilov, 'Puteshestvie', p.26.
  22. See Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture*.
  23. See Ter-Oganov, 'Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Konstantina Nikolaevicha Smirnova' [The life and activities of Konstantin Nikolaevich Smirnov] in *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shaha*, pp.4–31.
  24. Shapiro, 'A Jewish Pan-Turkist', p.353.
  25. AV, fond 152, op. 1, d. 1563, l. 39; AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 102. See also Petrov-Dubinskii, 'Shapshal (Adib-us-Sultan)', pp.64–5.
  26. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 102.
  27. AV, fond 152, op. 1, d. 1563, l. 39–41.
  28. *Ibid.*, l. 39. It should also be taken into consideration that this autobiography was written by Shapshal more than two years before the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1956) and in the atmosphere of fear inherent to the Stalinist period (although Stalin died in 1953). During that period, people almost always lied about their pre-1917 past and their activities during the early Soviet period in order to prevent arousing suspicions from punitive institutions. For example, Shapshal mentioned that, being pursued for his 'openly expressed sympathies towards the Soviet power' by General Denikin's forces, he had to escape from the Crimea to the Caucasus and hide there, whereas he had remained in the Crimea until 1920, and only afterwards went to Turkey. He also concealed his activities as Head of the Karaites of Turkey and Egypt during the 1920s (*ibid.*, l. 40). Shapshal did not hesitate to resort to scholarly falsifications either (see Zaytsev and Kizilov, 'Puteshestvie', pp.25, 31).
  29. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 503; fond 194, op. 528/2, d. 97.
  30. On Pokhitonov see Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864–1914*, pp.454, 614; Shablovskaia, 'Russian Hubris in Iran', pp.91, 97.
  31. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 2-2ob., 41–2 (Pokhitonov's reports), 4–5 (Lamzdorf to Speyer).
  32. See O. Petrov-Dubinskii, 'S.M. Shapshal v Persii', *Karaimskie vesti* 6/87 (2008), p.2.
  33. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 18.
  34. *Ibid.*, l. 8, 9, 21.
  35. *Ibid.*, d. 503, l. 4 ob.-5 (Tabriz, 19/03/1901, Consul-General Petrov to Hartwig, MID).
  36. *Ibid.*, d. 604, l. 38–44 (Tabriz, 04/08/1903, Pokhitonov to Hartwig). See also Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture*, pp.220–1. See also Petrov-Dubinskii, 'S.M. Shapshal', p.2.
  37. GNCM, fond 39, d. 3, l. 17. Here, Smirnov is slightly inaccurate since it was Aleksandr Petrov who was still the Russian Consul General in Tabriz in January 1901 and it was he and his subordinate Nekrasov, Shapshal's former classmate, who, in actual fact, positively introduced Shapshal to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and established their cooperation. Ivan Fedorovich Pokhitonov replaced Petrov only in 1902 (AVPRI, fond 194, op. 528/2, d. 97, l. 13; AV, fond 134, op. 2, d. 200, l. 27, 29).
  38. A quote from Smirnov's notes (GNCM, fond 39, d. 3, l. 17).
  39. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 503, l. 4 ob. – 5 (Tabriz, 19/03/1901, Russian Consul-General to the Ministry). Based on the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' solicitation, Shapshal received an exemption from being summoned for recurrent military camps which were obligatory for most postgraduates at that time. He was granted the long-term exemption (until the end of his contract in Persia) by the Russian War Ministry only in 1905 (AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 9, 14, 21, 32 (The Chief of the General Staff's letter to the Foreign Minister Lamzdorf, dated 15/03/1905)).
  40. See Zaytsev and Kizilov, 'Puteshestvie', pp.25, 31.
  41. AVPRI, fond 194, op. 528/2, d. 97, l. 15. On the renowned diplomat and scholar-orientalist, Vladimir Minorsky, see Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)'; see also Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.183–6.



42. On Zhukovskii's activities within Russian-Iranian academia and state politics see Volkov, 'Persian Studies and the Military'; 'Individuals, Institutions and Discourses' and 'Fearing the Ghosts of State Officialdom Past? Russia's Archives as a Tool for Constructing Historical Memories on its Persia Policy Practices', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.51, No.6 (2015), pp.901–21.
43. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 503, l. 4 ob. – 5 (Tabriz, 19/03/1901, Consul-General Petrov to Hartwig, MID).
44. S. Atrpet, *Mamed-Ali Shah v Sovremennoi Persii. Narodnoe dvizhenie v strane l'va i solntsa* [Mohammad Ali Shah in contemporary Persia. Popular movement in the land of the lion and the sun] (Aleksandropol': Shirak, 1909), p.86.
45. See Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture*, pp.216, 233. See Zaytsev and Kizilov, 'Puteshestvie', pp.26–7.
46. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 22; d. 11, l. 17, 22; d. 13, l. 15ob.; d. 19 (Minorsky's letters), l. 71, 72.
47. See Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909*, pp.170, 214, 418–20, 443.
48. Ibid, 170, 214. It may be unlikely that Browne was an antisemite and such utterances seem a subconscious lip service to the wide-spread discourse of the time since he later made good friends with Minorsky (see Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)', p. 205).
49. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 45, 46ob.; d. 13, l. 85ob., 86.
50. The English rough equivalent is 'the hell of a son of a bitch' (Ibid, d. 12, l. 54–54ob.).
51. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 100–101 ob.
52. Ibid, d. 11, l. 17.
53. Ibid, d. 3, l. 3–5 (Smirnov's Record of Service). As soon as Smirnov was appointed Crown Prince Ahmad's private tutor, he was discharged into the so-called 'dummy reserve' and continued to serve as an officer of the Intelligence Section of the Caucasian Military District, providing it with regular reports and carrying out its missions.
54. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 11, l. 17–18.
55. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 4–5.
56. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 22, 22ob.
57. Ter-Oganov, 'Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Konstantina Nikolaevicha Smirnova', p.23.
58. Zaytsev and Kizilov, 'Puteshestvie', p.25.
59. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 32ob.
60. Ibid, l. 22ob., 30ob.
61. See Ter-Oganov, *Persidskaia kazach'ia brigada*, p.160; 'Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Konstantina Nikolaevicha Smirnova', p.23.
62. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 62.
63. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 47.
64. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 64–65 ob. (Tehran, 07/08/1908, Hartwig to Izvolsky). As Smirnov points out with bitter humour and a deep regret for his Fatherland's wasted money, the Russian Legation was even made to pay Shapshal the huge compensation for the contract termination since the Shah declared that he did not have such money [fifty thousand tumans] (GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 44 ob. - 45).
65. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 11, l. 28.
66. Ibid, d. 19, l. 8ob (Minorsky's letter to Smirnov).
67. Zaytsev and Kizilov, 'Puteshestvie', p.31.
68. *Karaimskaja zhizn'*, 7 (1915), p.18. See also <http://www.karaimskajazizn.estranky.cz/clanky/20.html>
69. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 32–47ob.
70. See Martin, 'Hartwig and Russian Policy in Iran, 1906–08', p.21; Ridgeon, 'Russian Terrorism in Tehran: A Qajar Prince's Letters During the "Minor Tyranny" of 1908', p.49–50.
71. The Library of the University of Toronto, HPer B8824r, Digital Copy, E.G. Browne, *The Responsibility of the Russian Government for the "Chaos" Now Existing in Persia (For Private Circulation Only)*, l. 1–11. See also M. Pavlovich, 'Kazachia brigada v Persii (iz istorii persidskoi kontrevoliutsii)' [The Cossack brigade in Persia (of the history of the Persian counter-revolution)], *Novyi Vostok* 8–9 (1925), p.92. See also <https://archive.org/details/responsibilityof00browuoft/page/n1>.
72. See E.G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), pp.221–7. On the political uses Browne found for his book also see H. Javadi, 'E. G. Browne and the Persian Constitutional Movement', *Iran*, Vol.14 (1976), pp.136–7; C.N.B. Ross, 'Lord Curzon and E. G. Browne Confront the "Persian Question"', *The Historical Journal*, Vol.52, No.2 (2009), pp.385–411; D. McLean, 'A Professor Extraordinary: E. G. Browne and His Persian Campaign 1908–1913', *The Historical Journal*, Vol.21, No.2 (1978), pp.399–408.
73. See Ter-Oganov, *Persidskaia kazach'ia brigada*, pp.164–75. See also Martin, 'Hartwig and Russian Policy in Iran, 1906–8', p.21.
74. See Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909*, pp.213–15. See also Ter-Oganov, *Persidskaia kazach'ia brigada*, pp.167–71.



75. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 43ob. See M. Pavlovich and S. Iranskii, *Persia v bor'be za nezavisimost'* [Persia in the struggle for independence] (Moscow: VNAV, 1925), p.97.
76. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 19 (Minorsky's letter, 25/01/1909), l. 71.
77. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 11, l. 14 ob. - 15.
78. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 41 - 41ob.
79. AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 59 (Tehran, 22/05/1908, Hartwig to Izvolsky).
80. See Ridgeon, 'Russian Terrorism in Tehran', pp.49–50.
81. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's notes), d. 12, l. 41 - 41ob.
82. *Ibid*, d. 13, l. 34ob.-36, 52, 59ob.-54ob.
83. See Ter-Oganov, 'Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Konstantina Nikolaevicha Smirnova', p.31.
84. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's Collection), d. 19 (Minorsky's letters), l. 72–3.
85. *Ibid*, l. 7, 72.
86. GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's Collection), d. 19 (Minorsky's letters), l. 72 ob.
87. *Ibid*, l. 71.
88. *Ibid*, l. 8ob. See also AVPRI, fond 144 (Persian Desk), op. 488, d. 604, l. 91 (St Petersburg, 10/02/1909, Shapshal's letter to Mohammad-Ali).
89. See Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture*, pp.245, 279, 289, 292, 293–368, 389–95. See also Shapiro, 'A Jewish Pan-Turkist', pp.356–7, 374.
90. Father Superior A. Zarkeshev, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v Persii- Irane, 1597– 2001* [The Russian Orthodox church in Persia-Iran, 1597–2001] (St Petersburg: Satis, 2002), p.79.
91. See Cronin, 'Deserters, Converts, Cossacks and Revolutionaries', pp.168–9. See also Atkin, 'Cossack Brigade'. See also Zarkeshev, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v Persii- Irane*, p.79.
92. See Zaytsev and Kizilov, 'Puteshestvie', pp.26–7.