The history of the Muslim community of Tiflis (Tbilisi)\(^1\) presents quite a valid interest. For centuries (especially during the 8th-early 12th) this community played a leading political and economic role in the life of the city. The Muslim natives of Tiflis had been renowned for their learning and creative work at many centres of the Islamic World.\(^2\) The Muslim population was making its own contribution into the inimitable tincture of Tiflis taking part in many domains of the city life.

It is to be admitted that the history of the Muslim community of Tiflis has been highlighted in the respective sources rather unevenly. Having become a strong point on the northern borders of the Arab Caliphate, the city attracted close scrutiny by the Arab and Persian authors who regarded it as the frontier outpost of the Islamic World. That interest did not diminish after 1122, when Tiflis merged in the Georgian Kingdom to become its capital. Oriental historians used to provide vivid descriptions of special policies conducted by the Georgian kings with regard to the Muslim part of the population in the city of Tiflis. While focusing upon the religious differences, they casually touched upon the issue of the ethnic-confessional composition of the city’s population. There is definitely a lack of the locally produced history of the city. As to the Georgian authors of the 8th-13th centuries, in particular, they regarded the Muslim community as an alien element countering the local Christian traditions. They present only some basic stages of the political history of Tiflis, highlighting in a very fragmentary manner the role of the Muslim clergy in individual events.

Fragmentary character of information is even more significant with regard to the history of Muslim community of Tiflis in the 16th-17th

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\(^1\) For general information on the city see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. Tiflis.

centuries. The long and violent Turkish-Persian wars had left their imprint on the nature of evidence reported in the sources by Persian and Turkish authors. By reason of over-infatuation with the military and political events, the historians and travellers revert to an extensive use of military terminology and categories while describing the situation in the region. They refer oftentimes to the writings of the preceding centuries inadvertently creating the standard picture of an Oriental city. A typical example would be *Jihan-Numa* by Katib Chelebi compiled in 1655-1657. In this patchwork the data on Tiflis are mainly borrowed from the writings by the Arab and Persian geographers of the 10th-14th centuries.3

To recreate the entire ethno-confessional and social portrait of the population of Tiflis, its artefacts, morals and habitual practices of the individual urban groups, as well as links between diverse communities, the sources of the 18th-19th centuries are of invaluable help. However, they are affected by certain one-sidedness, as if they lack a vision from the inside. Thus, the statistical data disregard the ethnic affiliation of individual groups constituting the Muslim community of Tiflis. The documents available are not always sufficient to clarify the confessional division within this community.

The first Muslims must have appeared in Tiflis as far back as the second half of the 7th century, at the time of the Arab Conquests. At least, still in the year 654 Habib ibn Maslama took care of the future Muslim residents of the city by providing them with the “Writ of Protection”. The townspeople converted to Islam used to become the co-religionists of the Arabs enjoying the rights (actually the privileges) upon a par with other Muslims.4 The most favourable conditions for spreading Islam emerged in the late 7th-early 8th centuries when nearly the entire Transcaucasia was firmly embedded into a large military-administrative unit, Armenia (Arminiyya).5 It can be assumed that the Tiflis Muslims were the Arab warriors of the local garrison. The city was governed by an Arab *Emir* who combined the functions of both military commander and supreme judge. His power was originally spread all over Eastern Georgia and even to the southwestern parts of the country. He managed the collection of taxes and was commander

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