EARLY QUR‘ĀNIC MANUSCRIPT FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF ST. PETERSBURG KUNSTKAMERA
(PRELIMINARY REPORT)

M. Rezvan

The history of the manuscript

In 2003 in the process of revision of non-catalogued materials and documents of the Department of Central Asia of the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences my attention was attracted by a scroll with the name of the Member of the Academy of Sciences Evgeni Nikanorovich Pavlovskii. After opening the scroll I found badly damaged folios of parchment glued to each other with soil in between them (fig. 1). At a closer look the folios turned out to be a Qur‘ānic code of horizontal format. The first and the last several folios were missing and the level of the damage grew from beginning to the end. The last folios were practically “eaten out” by the time and conditions in which they were kept. The manuscript was registered under No. 7241.

Academician E. N. Pavlovskii (1884—1965) — the founder of a scientific school in parasitology and the creator of the concept of natural nidus of human diseases, director of the Institute of Zoology, USSR Academy of Sciences (1942—1962), the winner of the highest state awards: the State (twice) and the Lenin awards, the gold medal of I. I. Mechnikov USSR Academy of Sciences, the Big Gold medal of the Geographical Society of the USSR. In 1940—51 Pavlovskii was head of the Tajik Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences (form 1951 he was an Honorary Member of the Tajik Academy of Sciences). During these years his responsibilities included numerous trips around Tajikistan and participation in all main Academic expeditions in this region [1].

After returning from his numerous expeditions (during his life he participated in more than 160 expeditions) he more than once gave to the Museum of Ethnography and Anthropology items from his collections (see Table 1).

The character of the finding forces us to assume that the manuscript of Qur‘ān got into the Museum through Pavlovskii’s relatives after his death (as well as the collection No. 6578 from Tajikistan). The condition of the manuscript and the absences of specialists in Arabic manuscripts in the staff of the Museum did not make it possible to ascribe the manuscript and it was waiting for its hour for as many years.

Preservation

Today the manuscript is in terrible condition and needs immediate conservation and restoration. Most folios are glued with each other and form a single block. The general condition of the manuscript as well as the presence of traces of sand and soil on separate folios allows assuming that this Qur‘ān was for a long time buried in the earth. There are at least three possibilities: (i) the scroll, after having decayed could have been buried according to the traditions common among the pious Muslims (fig. 2) [2]; (ii) the finding was of archaeological character; (iii) the manuscript, as many other codes made in Arabic graphics was hidden in the earth in the 1920ies—beginning of the 1930ies, in the time of anti-religious repressions. Then, in Stalin’s camps there appear a special category of prisoners — “arabists”, i.e. people who kept books and manuscripts written in Arabic and could read them.

Today the manuscript contains ca. 200 folios. Most part of them is represented in separate fragments which preserved at the core of the cover and contain no text at all.
Fig. 1
The outside, the peculiarities of the design, the dating and localization

The manuscript represents a code of horizontal format 10.2 × 13.6 cm [3] on parchment. Its special value is determined by the presences of the preserved elements of the cover (the sewing and the core 5 × 10 cm) (fig. 3) due to which most folios of the manuscript have preserved, unfortunately in quite different condition.

The presence of the sewing leads to the conclusion that the second (archaeological) version is correct. A preliminary study shows that the preserved sewing must have been done when copying the manuscript. If this is correct, that means that the manuscript was buried in a good condition and, thus, can not have been buried because of becoming shabby or be buried a thousand years after its creation. However, a final conclusion on this issue can only be made after detailed research which must be carried out parallel with works on restoration and conservation of the manuscript.

According to F. Déroche's classification, the handwriting of the script corresponds to groups B Ia—b, the so-called “early-‘Abbāsid” handwriting styles [4]. The top and the bottom margin — 1.6 cm, the side margin — 2 cm. The height of the line — 0.4 cm, the interline interval — 0.2 mm. The best preserved folios contain 16—18 lines. Waqf and owners' inscriptions are missing. The manuscript can be preliminary dated to the 9th—10th c. AD and it possibly comes from Iraq. The geography of Pavlovski's travels allows localizing the region of its finding. This could have been Tajikistan where he worked for many years or Iraq/Iran (see the number of units of collection 6370, Table 1). However, there are many other possibilities.

The contents and the peculiarities of transmission of the Qur'ānic text

On the folio 2b the 133rd āya of the second sūra (fig. 4) is readable. The number of the folios allows to assume that the fragments of the last folios which preserved at the cover core contained the text of the final sūras of the Qur'ānic text.

The text is written in black ink, the vocalization signs are marked with red dots. The above-line and the under-line signs are put consistently. Among the peculiarities of the handwriting we can note dots above letter shīn placed horizontally parallel to the line as well as a specific, typical of the handwriting style B Ia form of the final writing of letter qāf, the sub-line part of which is placed parallel to the line in the form of “ ”.

The condition of the preserved folios does not allow to fix the presence or absence of markers-dividers of āyāt, sūra, ajzā’ and ahzāb.

The further study of the manuscript will only become possible after the completion of restoration works which the centre of Jum’a al-Mājid on Culture and Heritage (Dubai) has gracefully taken upon itself on the initiative of its founder.

Addenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of the collection</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Qt of units in the collection</th>
<th>Qt of exhibits</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Year of acquisition</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6341</td>
<td>Peoples of China</td>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6370</td>
<td>Persians</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td></td>
<td>183</td>
<td>215</td>
<td></td>
<td>1958</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6498</td>
<td>Peoples of China</td>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6562</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>1961</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6592</td>
<td>Peoples of China</td>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>1961—4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6558</td>
<td>Peoples of India</td>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6564</td>
<td>Bulgarians, Hungarians, Georgians</td>
<td>Europe, Caucasus</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6650</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6660</td>
<td>Peoples of India</td>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6742</td>
<td>Peoples of China</td>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>1965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6747</td>
<td>Mongols</td>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6578</td>
<td>Tajiks</td>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>From heirs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E. N. Pavlovski's collections in the MAE RAS

Table 1
Fig. 4
Notes

1. In more detail about acad. E. N. Pavlovskii and his works see: “Evgeni Nikanorovich Pavlovskii”, Materialy k bio-bibliografii uchenykh SSSR. Seriia biologicheskikh nauk. Parazitologiiia, i (Moscow, 1956); N. P. Prohorova, Akademik E. N. Pavlovskii (Academician E. N. Pavlovskii) (Moscow, 1972). I am deeply thankful to V. N. Kisliakov and A. V. Kurbanov for their assistance in the search of bibliographical and collection materials connected with the life and activities of E. N. Pavlovskii.

2. The rules of the “burial” of shabby copies of Qur’ān were developed very thoroughly. The scrolls had to be buried in the same way as a man is buried — they had to be washed, wrapped in a “shroud” — a clean fabric and buried so that the folios are not touched with dust or dirt and people would not disturb the “grave”. For details see: J. Sadan, “Genizah and genizah-like practices in Islamic and Jewish traditions”, Bibliotheca Orientalis, XLIII/1—2 (1986), pp. 36—58.

3. All measurements are given according to the best-preserved folios.


Illustrations:

Fig. 1. General outlook of the Qur’ān manuscript No. 7241. Parchment, 10.2 × 13.6 cm. Iraq, 10th c. Collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), RAS. Photo by E. B. Tolmacheva. Courtesy of the Museum.

Fig. 2. The burial place of the Qur’ān manuscript. Qishlaq ‘Arab-khān not far from Qarshi (Uzbekistan). Photo by T. M. Fedorova. Expedition by E. A. Rezvan to the Arabic parts of Uzbekistan (May, 2004).

Fig. 3. The same manuscript. View of the core. Photo by E. B. Tolmachëva. Courtesy of the Museum.

Fig. 4. Folio 2b of the same manuscript. Photo by E. B. Tolmachëva. Courtesy of the Museum.