Archival materials indicate that the Qur’ān was included in the personal libraries of such Russian Tsars as Ivan the Terrible (1530—1584), Peter the Great (1672—1725), and Catherine II (1729—1796). The fate of publications, translations, and rare manuscripts of the Qur’ān was also bound up with the personal decisions of the supreme rulers of Russia. As in the East the Sacred Text have been widely used by the local powers for the purposes of both inner and foreign politics. The history of most important Qur’ānic manuscripts can only prove this statement [1].

Recently there has been increased interest in the ancient manuscripts of the Qur’ān and a particularly interesting part of them — the group of manuscripts called “the Qur’āns of ‘Uthmān”. This topic was actively discussed in Cairo during unprecedented meetings between European and Egyptian specialists organized by Professor Sergio Noya Nosedá in 2006 and 2007. It was reflected in a recently published article by Professor David James [3].

The manuscripts in question are among the most ancient. They are seriously damaged, and frequently damaged no less than those which were regularly removed from circulation in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH. In most cases, these copies made their way to special repositories in large mosques where they slowly decayed. They could also be “buried” with a special ritual [4]. However, the manuscripts we are discussing now were preserved. Why? Firstly, at the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries AD, evidently those Qur’ānic copies were preserved which corresponded to the ijmā’ canon adopted for that time [5], and secondly, they began to be seen as a symbol of supreme power equal to the khirqa of the Prophet, and there is numerous evidence of this.

Dr. David James has found a reference to the Qur’ānic manuscript attributed to ‘Uthmān which shows that it was in Cordova around 870. All other references to it date from after 1150. While working on the “history” of it — how and why it came to Cordova — he found reference to another “Qur’ān of ‘Uthmān” which belonged to Ibn al-Ahmar, the founder of the Kingdom of Granada and which he gave as a present to the Almohad sultan. The Cordova manuscript was lost when the ship carrying it from Tunis to Morocco sank in the 14th century.

In 1243, the Egyptian sultan Baybars sent the khān of the Golden Horde Berke a letter of “accession to citizenship and subjugation” [6]. Soon the Egyptian ambassadors brought presents to the Horde: clothes of honour, a throne incrusted with ebony, ivory and silver and the “Qur’ān of ‘Uthmān”. The book was bound in red satin embroidered with gold and placed in a case of dark red leather padded with silk. Additionally, a stand (lawh) for the Qur’ān was sent, which like the throne was encrusted with ebony, ivory and silver [7]. It is not difficult to note that insignia were sent from Egypt to the Horde [8]. Surprisingly enough, in sources connected with the Golden Horde we do not find another line about this important relic and symbol of power. Today, however, it is obvious that the history of this manuscript did not end with the demise of the Golden Horde. The facts show that this copy continued to have the status of a symbol of power for several centuries to follow. Its history is linked with the name of Timūr, and subsequently with the names of “religious masters” — famous sūfī shaykhs. But all this will be discussed in its turn.

For several years I was studying two Qur’ānic MSS, which were venerated by the Muslims of Central Asia as “Qur’āns of ‘Uthmān” [9]. The analysis of the historical sources shows that both MSS were preserved as the most valuable sacred relics and were transmitted inside the structure of sūfī brotherhoods.

The history of the first one, so called “Samarqand sūfī Qur’ān” had been studied in detail, but only since early 15th century. Nobody ever has written a line on the history of the MS before this date. It is well known that for decades it was one of the most important relics belonging to the Naqshbandiya brotherhood. Existing traditions insist that its appearance in Mā warā’ al-nahr is connected with the name of Khwāja Ahrār (1404—1490) one of the most prominent religious and political leaders of the region of Timūrid times. He was incontestable authority. He brought up Timūrid princes, was in friendly correspondence with such famous poets as Nawā‘ī and Jāmi. Khwāja Ahrār was an influential political figure and one of the richest persons of his time. The rise of Naqshbandiya influence both in Mā warā’ al-nahr and beyond its frontiers as well as

© E. Rezvan, 2008
Naqshbandiyya active political and economical activities are connected with the name of this person [10]. According to the local legendary tradition the MS once belonged to “Caliph of Rûm”. Murid of Khâjâ Ahrâr received it as a payment for miraculous healing of the Caliph done because of Khâjâ Ahrâr’s baraka he possessed. The MS was brought to Khâjâ Ahrâr, kept firstly in Tashkent and then in Samarqand.

According to A. L. Kuhn, great Russian 19th century authority in the Central Asian history and MSS tradition, it belonged to the MSS treasures brought to the region by Timûr. After the acquisition of the MS by Russians in 1869 Kuhn had the possibility to show it to local connoisseur, certain Yahyâ Khâjâ. According to the latter the sacred copy was the only remainder of the book treasures collected by Timûr in Samarqand. It was the best embellishment and brought by Timûr himself [11].

In April of 1391 in the battle at the river Kondurcha Timûr defeated the army of the Golden Horde. His warriors ransacked the whole Low Volga region and Sarây-Bâttû, capital of the Golden Horde and obtained fantastic loot [12]. We have every reason to believe that Timûr brought to Samarqand the sacred copy once delivered to the Golden Horde from Egypt. It embodied the power of Mamlûk sultans of Bâhrîd dynasty, that of Golden Horde rulers and Timûrids who passed it to Naqshbandiya brotherhood. The MS played an important role in the rise of authority of Naqshbandiya lead by Khwâjâ Ahrâr.

As for the second MS its history was revealed only recently (fig. 1). Starting from the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century it belonged to the Ishqiyya brotherhood. In the times we are speaking about previously unlimited Timurid power was growing weaker and weaker. On the contrary the position of Muhammad Shaybânî-Khân (d. 1510) consolidated one day after another. Shaybânî-Khân prepared the conquest of Mâ wará’ al-nahr and was in search of the ally which could be composed with Khâjâ Ahrâr and the brotherhood the latter was dominating. It is hardly a coincidence that Shaybânî-Khân, on seizing Samarqand in 1500, conquered the vast fortune of Khâjâ Ahrâr’s family and destroyed his sons. At that time, the Ishqiyya brotherhood and its shaykhhs quickly gained influence and economic power. Among their murids were many representatives of the Turkic clan nobility and Ishqiyya shaykhhs played an active role in political events. It was then that they began constructing the costly mosques and mazârât. The fall of the Shaybânids reduced the influence of the Ishqiyya shaykhhs to nil, once again affirming the tie between them.

Russian specialist in Central Asian history A. A. Semenov described in detail this interesting period in the history of Central Asia and analysed the most important sources connected with it. A. A. Semenov writes about the fierce struggle between the sufi brotherhoods characteristic of Mâ wará’ al-nahr at the time [13].

But we are going back to the turn of the fifteenth — sixteenth centuries. The Ishqiyya shaykhhs retreated farther from Samarqand, the realm of Khâjâ Ahrâr, and closer to Afghanistân, with which they already had ties. The alliance with the Shibânids was probably formed at that time. Shaybânî-Khân was personally familiar with these places, visited them several times, and was building a palace in Qarshâ.

In 1513, the Uzbek sultân who had by then occupied northern Khurâsân and Balkh were compelled to “cleanse” the areas they had conquered. Sultân ‘Ubâyd Allâh resettled the residents of Marw to Bukhârâ, and Jânibek resettled the residents of Balkh, Shuburghân and Andîkhoi, a region in northern Afghanistân inhabited by Arabs, to his domain on the other side of the Amû-Daryâ. Documents show that the migrants needed a patron in their new location; moreover, the concept of ihtimâm (payment for care) existed.

In the traditional tale of how the mosque was built in Katta-Langar, place where Arabs had arrived, told to me by its inâm ‘Abd al-Jabâr b. Ibrâhîm it is constantly stressed that the mosque was constructed collectively, with each of the neighbouring tribes responsible for some “aspect” of the construction: preparing or delivering construction materials, providing livestock and cooking food for the builders, etc. The mosque, which they began to build only a few years after their move, was intended to unite Muslims regardless of their ethnic origins, and also to integrate the migrants into local society.

Arabic resettlers [14] appealed Ishqiyya shaykhhs for support and the ancient copy of the Qur‘ân as well as the other relics brought by them were the “payment for care”. Probably among the items they brought there were also such significant items as a tasbih, a string of yellow rosary beads which allegedly belonged to Muhammad himself; mây-ye muhâra‘k, sacred hairs from the beard of Muhammad; and, finally, a kîring or jînda-chapan, which was also supposed to have belonged to Muhammad.

The influence of a brotherhood and its shaykhhs was to a great extent determined by the presence of sacred relics, which were intended to confirm by their presence the traditions that accompanied the history of the silsila. It was the violence struggle among Timûrids and Shibânids. Naqshbandiya was the ally of the first, Ishqiyya — of the second. Both brotherhoods used the relics they had as the banner in this struggle. Ancient Qur‘ânic MSS became important argument in the political struggle. Their careful preservation guarantied the result. We think that it was this mechanism that protected several earliest Qur‘ânic MSS.

I have written frequently of the important role played by sufi teachings and their adepts in the development and emergence of that multi-faceted phenomenon in mankind’s cultural history designated in brief by the word “Qur‘ân”. This includes development of principles for the allegorical interpretation of the text. The latter served as the basis of hundreds of works which make up an important element of Islamic religious culture. The specific features of sufi teachings were directly reflected in how the “word of Allâh” was used in religious practice, in the physical appearance of Qur‘ânic manuscripts and works of Qur‘ân-related literature. The world-outlook of sufi brotherhoods acted as a catalyst for the broad penetration
Электронная библиотека Музея антропологии и этнографии им. Петра Великого (Кунсткамера) РАН
http://www.kunstkamera.ru/lib/rubrikator/02/978-5-88431-236-4/
© МАЭ РАН
of fragments of the Qur'ānic text into ordinary life as a belief in the magical power of the “word of Allāh” led to the frequent appearance of ayāt and fragments on weaponry, jewellery, pottery, and fabric. Today we can speak of yet another important element in the system of relations between the Qur‘ān and Śūfīsm. By this we mean the religious and cultural paradigm connected with the preservation of extremely ancient copies as the sacred relics of sūfī brotherhoods. By their very existence, these manuscripts, which preserved the most ancient layer of the Sacred text’s history, were intended to confirm the traditional histories of specific silsilas, affirm the authority of their shaykhās, attract new adepts, and awaken religious enthusiasm in believers. In our view, this explains the phenomenon known as the “Qur‘ān of ‘Uthmān”, at least two of them venerated by Central Asian Muslims. Only the study of the other ancient Qur‘ānic copies which were in use through all the centuries of their existence can help us to confirm or to refute the hypothesis.

The history of ‘Iṣḥāqiyya manuscript spans at least twelve centuries, a remarkable tale bound up with the fates of dynasties and states, cities and people, the fate of Islamic civilization from its emergence in Arabia in the seventh century to the triumph of Islam, which survived and outlasted communism in the Muslim republics of the former USSR [15].

We can see that the “Qur‘āns of ‘Uthmān” remained symbols of power over centuries. Undoubtedly, bringing the Samarqand relic to St. Petersburg also had symbolic significance. This was confirmed by the relocation to Russia of supreme power over Turkistān. The governor general of Turkistān at the time, von Kaufmann, saw to this personally. It was also planned to send a giant stone stand (lawḥ) to the capital of the empire. The lawḥ stood in the courtyard of the Bibi Khānum mosque and was once used as a pedestal for another Qur‘ān symbolizing power that was created by order of Timūr.

Fifty copies of the “Samarqand kūfī Qur‘ān” were published in St. Petersburg as a ceremonial present from Russia to the Muslim neighbours of the empire — a present which emphasized the power of the “white emperor” (fig. 2). The handing over of the manuscript to Muslims in 1918 was also a symbolic gesture, and carried out on direct orders from Lenin (fig. 3). This meant the handing over of part of power in exchange for participation in the “revolutionary project”. “Moscow is the new Mecca; it is the Medina of all repressed peoples”, was declared in 1921 by the Scientific Association of Russian Orientalists. In reality, the manuscript only reached Muslims (the Religious Administration of Muslims (the Administration of Muslims in Tashkent) after Uzbekistān gained independence [16].

Finally, before the Russian president’s visit to Saudi Arabia (February 2007), a Qur‘ān was made in Russia on thin gold plates costing “tens of millions of roubles”. 14 kg of triple-nine gold was used in the manufacture of the “book” (163 gold pages around 14 cm high and around 10 cm wide) at the Russian Mint. A copy of the manuscript which was once passed around the ‘Iṣḥāqiyya brotherhood and is now held in Russia was used. Russia is a world power with a Muslim population of many millions, whose relics and traditions are genuinely respected and honoured — this is the meaning of the Golden Qur‘ān (fig. 4).

N o t e s

1. The articles “The Qur‘ān and power in Russia. II: publication” and “The Qur‘ān and power in Russia. III: translation” will be published in Manuscripta Orientalia 1 and 2 (2008).


3. Planned for publication in the Manuscripta Orientalia journal.


10. From the fifteenth century on, we see the increasing involvement of sūfī brotherhoods in political processes. The descendants of Šaf al-Dīn al-Ardabīlī (d. 1334), founder of the Šafavīyya brotherhood which gave rise to a powerful religious movement, established control over the main territories of Persia, founded the Šafawī dynasty and proclaimed Twelver Shi‘ism the state religion. Ismā‘īl I, the founder of the dynasty, transferred his power to the Great Deputy of the head of the order. Members of the Ni‘mat-Allāhiyya order, closely connected with the Šafawīds, headed a number of provinces in the new state. At practically the
Fig. 4
same time, the Naqshbandiyya order gained control over significant territories in India, Afg[h]nistan and Central Asia. Brotherhoods professing a mixed Šûfi-[sh][i]-ite doctrine began to play an ever greater role on the enormous territory from the Balkans to Persia.

11. B. V. Lunin, Sredniaia Asiiia v dorevoliutsionnom i sovetskom vostokovedenii (Central Asia in Pre-Revolutionary and Soviet Oriental Studies), (Tashkent, 1965), p. 104


14. The descendents of these people live in the South of Uzbekistan. In St. Petersburg in 2004—2005 and in Tampere (Finland) in 2006 the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), RAS organized an exhibition on their culture and traditions (for details see exhibition catalogue: Rezvan, Jeysnov — “We arrived”. Arabs of Uzbekistan: Images of the Traditional Culture (St. Petersburg, 2004) and web-site of the exhibition at http://web1.kunstkamera.ru/jeysnov/eng/index.htm). In 2006, the Museum organized an expedition to the qishlāq of Jeysnov, a region with a compact Arab population. Specialists on material culture, ethnography, physical anthropology and Islam took part in the expedition. In 2005, in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences an unpublished monograph by the outstanding ethnographer and specialist in Arabic linguistics Isaak Vinnikov (1897—1973) was discovered. The book entitled “The Kashka-Daryā Arabs: Language, Folklore, Ethnography” is currently preparing for publication by the Museum.

15. Details see in: Rezvan, op. cit.

16. In the current political practice the Qur‘ān has acquired the status of a state symbol (for the swearing-in of the president in a number of states in the CIS and subjects of the Russian Federation for example). Here one can see mostly Western influence but not the “return to the Islamic roots”.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. The “Qur‘ān of ‘Uthmān”, 6:159—7:9. Parchment, 53.5 × 34 cm, hijāzī script. Arabia or Syria, last quarter of the 8th — beginning of the 9th century AD. SPIOS, E-20, fol. 13r. Illustration from the book: Rezvan, “The Qur‘ān of ‘Uthmān”.

Fig. 2. ‘Abd al-Rahmān Bakhromov, Supreme Mufti of Uzbekistan and Chairman of Administration for Muslim Affairs at the save containing Qur‘ān of ‘Uthmān. Tashkent, 2001. Photo by the author.

Fig. 3. Lenin’s order on handing over the “Qur‘ān of ‘Uthmān” manuscript to Muslims (1918).

Fig. 4. Folio of the “Golden Qur‘ān” (14 × 10 cm). Copy of the fol. 13r of the “Qur‘ān of ‘Uthmān” (see fig. 1) made by WT Company (Moscow).