PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

THE QUR'ÂN OF PÊTR STOLYPIN (?)

The Qur'an is a unique monument in many respects. I have already written about the specific and multi-functional role that the Sacred Text have played in the Muslim world where the Qur'an became the ubiquitous feature of life both for the individual and for the Islamic society. In particular the Qur'anic manuscripts, handed down from generation to generation, served to register what we call today "stems of public record" [1].

The manuscript of the Qur'an as well as the text of the Sacred Book have been the most important ethno-cultural symbols for the Muslims. This has been, in particular, proved by recent research of St. Petersburg sociologists: in the system of modal images of Orthodox Church and Islam, the Qur'an for the Muslims of St. Petersburg turned out to be much more important than the Bible for the Christians living in the city.

Quite naturally, the Qur'an has been viewed as the most important symbol of the Islamic world as well as beyond the borders of this world — in Europe and America, in Black Africa and Russia. I have already written that the geopolitical location of the country and the course of Russian history laid the foundation for a special attitude toward the Sacred Book of Islam. Archival materials indicate that the Qur'an was included in the personal libraries of such Russian Tatars 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'an was also bound up with the personal decisions of the supreme rulers of Russia [3].

Quite recently I came across a manuscript of Qur'an which can serve as a vivid illustration of what has been said above.

Not long ago Prof. A. A. Zhukov (Oriental Faculty, St. Petersburg State University) informed me that he owns a manuscript of the Qur'an which could have belonged to Pëtr Stolypin, an outstanding reformer and an important figure in Russian 20th century politics. I, of course, became interested in the manuscript and soon received it for work.

The manuscript represents a small codex (16.7×10.4 cm) of vertical format which consists of 276 folios (the first one is missing). The manuscript is copied in a sure calligraphic nastāb (fig. 1) on glazed European paper (water signs could be traced). The text is written in black ink, for the headings of the sūratu placed in golden frames red ink was used. Red ink is also used to mark out the ta'wil signs. Both red and black inks were used to indicate the ta'wil elements on the margins. Here, on the margins, the elements of liturgical division regularly appear: the 'ā'ār are marked with floral rosettes of various forms (the colours — golden, light blue, pink, green). Pink ink was used to mark ḫūṣūs, dark red — to mark harrīs (nisīb). Golden circles present the ʿalam separators, in one place an ʿawr — the tenth nūr is marked in black on the margins.

The text is placed in a multi-colour frame (the order of lines from the outer edge of the pages to the text: a red, two black and a thick golden framed with a black line). There are 17 lines on a page. The size of the text is 12.7×7.1 cm.

The left part of a two-page ʿumrwān (fig. 2) is preserved. It is designed with the same set of four colours as the whole manuscript (golden, light blue, pink and red).

The manuscript is kept in the original Oriental brown leather binding moulded and gilt on the front part of the cover (four rosettes at the corners and one at the centre) and gold painting inside it (fig. 3).

Folio 275b presents a standard colophon (in red ink) without the mention of a date or the name of the copist (fig. 4). On the lower half of this page is a non-cursive handwriting and with omitted words the first sūratu is copied, which is missing from the codex in connection with the loss of the right part of the ʿumrwān. This, obviously, points to the fact that the first page of the manuscript had been lost before it was brought to Russia. There are no waqf inscriptions. The manuscript, which is an example of serial production must have been copied in Tabriz and dates to the end of the 17th century [4].

On the folio 276 in a column the following numbers are written (fig. 5):

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This record could have had a practical, as well as a ritual (for example, magic) meaning (for example, accounting records important for the owner, or a code).
E. Rezvan, The Qur’ān of Petr Stołypin (?)

On the folio 276v there are three owner’s records which are of special interest to us (fig. 6). On top of the page (with a pencil inscription):

“In Kochabel 159 881 from 62”

Below (in black ink):

“In the year of 1828 during the capture of the town of Tebriz by field marshal Paskevich this book was taken by his adjutant Mitinski in a palace of the heir to the Persian throne Abbas-Mirza – presented to Nikolai Andreevich Marievich (…) Mitinski.”

Under the line (in faded ink):

“To Petr Arkadievich as a sign of beauty devotion. Please, accept this book in memory from Mikhail Marievich. 29th of July.”

The signature is illegible.

The marginal notes preserved in the manuscript allow us to reconstruct its history during the main part of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Ivan F Đirovich Paskevich (1782–1856) was one of the heroes of the war of 1812 against Napoleon. Since 1827 he was the governor-general of the Caucasus and the commander of the Russian army in the wars against Persia and Turkey. In 1827 his army set out on a difficult mountain campaign to the Yerevan khaneate which was under the rule of Persia. After taking Yerevan Paskevich seized Tebriz, the capital of southern Azerbaijan and the residence of the heir to the shah’s throne ‘Abd-Ali Mirzâ (1789–1833) who was in charge of the country’s foreign policy and advocated its pro-English orientation.

Paskevich was ready for a March on the Persian capital, that is why Tebriz agreed to make peace. According to the Turkmenhāy peace treaty signed in February 1828, Russia received the Yerevan and the Nahchivan khaneates as well as an exclusive right to maintain a military presence on the Caspian Sea. The government of Persia promised not to put obstacles in the way of Armenians migration into Russia. Simultaneously with the peace treaty there was signed a trade agreement according to which Russian merchants received the right to free trade on the whole territory of the country. The record must have mentioned Ihodor Osipovich Mitinski – the field-captain of Life Guard Ulan regiment who was one of the adjutants of Paskevich in this campaign. Later he served in the Caucasus.

1. O. Mininski who took the manuscript as a military trophy presented it to Nikolai Andreevich Marievich whom we have been unable to find out anything about. From the next record it follows that Mikhail Marievich, who must have been the son or grandson of Nikolai Andreevich presented it “on the 29th of July” to someone “Petr Arkadievich.” Simple calculations show that this event could have happened in the end of the 19th—beginning of the 20th century.

The name “Petr Arkadievich” in the mind of a Russian person immediately evokes an association with Petr Arkadievich Stołypin (1862–1911), a state figure (from 1906 he was Minister of Home Affairs and the Head of the Council of Ministers), a reformer and initiator of military–field courts to suppress the revolutionary movement as well as of a large-scale agricultural reform. Under Stołypin’s supervision a number of important laws were introduced, including the reform of the local government, the introduction of primary education and tolerance of faith.

On the other hand after the revolution of 1905 in his struggle against revolutionary and liberation movements P. A. Stołypin proved himself to be a harsh opponent of Russification. The authorities shut down national schools and newspapers, banning even moderate nationalists. The Special Commission summoned by Stołypin in 1910 decided to ban the teaching of non-theological disciplines in Muslim religious schools. The government supported the conservatives against the jadal movement, accusing the latter of pan-Islamism. This policy naturally provoked an upswing of nationalism in the outlying regions of the Empire.

At the same time, for the sake of being fair, we must note that in a difficult time Stołypin gave his support to the committee which dealt with the building of a mosque in St. Petersburg by approving, despite influential opposition, the decision on its construction near the Peter and Paul’s cathedral, the graveyard of the Romanov family [5].

Of course, Stołypin was not the only “Petr Arkadievich” who lived in Russia at the turn of the 19th—20th centuries. Only the identification of the personalities of Nikolai Andreevich and Mikhail Marievich can clarify whether our manuscript belonged to the outstanding political figure of Russia. I am sure, however, that the Qur’ān which could have been kept in his library as well as in a library of any important Russian politician. Sooner or later we will be able to learn the full history of this manuscript. It is important for us, first of all, as another proof of the symbolic role of the Qur’ān manuscripts which even for non-Muslims have been symbolic of Muslim civilization on the whole.

Obviously, the history of another Qur’ānic manuscript from St. Petersburg academic collection is connected with the Eastern campaigns of the Russian armies of the first third of the 19th century. Two pages of that manuscript pasted together contain a beautiful multi-colour miniature which represents an emblem of a Russian noble dynasty. We plan to dedicate a separate article to this manuscript which, لله شاهد, will be published in one of the nearest issues of our journal.

Notes


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 Evgenii 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’anic 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 niches of human diseases, director of the Institute of Zoology, USSR Academy of Sciences (1942—1963), the winner of the highest state awards: the State (twice) and the Lenin awards, the gold medal of I. L. Mechnikov USSR Academy of Sciences, the Big Gold medal of the Geographical Society of the USSR. In 1964 Pavlovskii was awarded with the title of the Hero of Socialistic Labour. He was elected the President of the Soviet Entomological (1931—1965) and the Geographical Society (1952—1965) of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

A young graduate of the Military Medical Academy (St. Petersburg), he had to travel a lot around the Muslim world. In 1914 he was sent from west Europe to Algeria and Tunisia, in 1915 he for the first time went to the Middle Asia to Syr-Daryya. 1928 was marked with the beginning of works of the First parasitological expedition of the USSR Russian Academy of Sciences to the Middle Asia (Turkmenia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan). In 1932—4 Pavlovskii worked in Crimea, Kazakhstan, Transcaucasia, and in 1934—6 in southern Tajikistan. In 1933—40 he was director of the Tajik base of the USSR Academy of Sciences. During the war years (1941—3) he carried out three epidemiological parasitological expeditions in Iran and Iraq. 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 Academy 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 Tab. 1).

The character of the finding forces us to assume that the manuscript of Qur’ân 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 absence of specialists in Arabic manuscripts in the staff of the Museum did not make it possible to ascertain the manuscript and it was waiting for its hour for 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’ân 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.