The present article is devoted to one of the brightest pages in the history of Russian-Arabic cultural ties. For a number of reasons neither Russian nor foreign researchers have studied this subject specifically until very recently. We will focus our attention on the correspondence between two outstanding figures of Egypt and Russia — the Grand mufti of Egypt Muhammad ‘Abdu and the great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy.

By the beginning of the 20th century, L. Tolstol had indeed become famous all over the world including the Arab countries [1]. As we will find out a bit later, by the time of initiating the correspondence Muhammad ‘Abdu had already been familiar with literary work and social activity of the Russian writer due to the intermediary efforts of western visitors in Iman Pasha. When answering back, L. Tolstol had also possessed considerable knowledge about the Egypt’s Grand mufti Muhammad ‘Abdu, his state and social activity as well as his input into the Egyptian culture and the Muslim Orient in general.

Thus, the ground for this contact was well prepared and the first messages were successfully exchanged. It would be wrong to underestimate the significance of this correspondence in the history of cultural ties between Russia and Egypt.

Before discussing the correspondence per se it seems reasonable to give a brief description to the personality of Egyptian correspondent of L. N. Tolstol.

Life as well as creative, state and public activity of Muhammad ‘Abdu (1849—1905) has received considerable attention of the researchers. He left his mark as one of the most influential ideologists of Muslim modernism. The scholars point out that in many aspects his teaching was based on the works of well-known medieval theologians Ibn Taymiyya (1263—1328/661—728), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292—1350/691—751), etc. and developed the ideas of Jamali al-Din al-Afghani (1839—1897), who was his teacher and senior companion in the fight for Islamic reformation.

The ideas brought forward by Muhammad ‘Abdu encountered adverse criticism in orthodox and conservativistic circles. From 1883 till 1888 he led active political life in exile in Paris. When political environment in Egypt changed, Muhammad ‘Abdu came back there in 1888 to become an influential statesman. Beginning with 1899 till his death he was the Grand mufti of Egypt [2].

Let us consider the correspondence between Muhammad ‘Abdu and L. Tolstol per se. Until very recently it has existed in two non-overlapping fields and in two different forms. One of them was known to the Russian readers who were familiar with L. Tolstol’s answer but didn’t have access to the letter of Egyptian theologian that was considered lost. The other was known only to the Arabic readers who learned about the letter of Muhammad ‘Abdu to L. Tolstol from an inaccurate copy and who didn’t know the answer of the Russian writer as far as we can judge. In the light of the abovementioned it makes sense to examine the history of correspondence in more detail.

First of all let us mention the facts that were known to the Russian reader and the scholars of L. Tolstol’s creative work. On May 12, 1904 L. Tolstol sent a letter to an English art historian and writer Sidney Cockerell (1867—1961) where he stated the following:

Now I have received the mufti’s letter and am very obliged to you for forwarding it to me. The mufti’s letter is so orientally laudatory that I find it [is] difficult to answer it. But I will try to do it and am very glad to communicate with such an interesting personality [3].

Leo Tolstol wrote the answer to Muhammad ‘Abdu the very next day, on May 13.

Cher ami!

J’ai reçu votre bonne et trop louangeuse lettre et je m’empresserai de vous répondre en vous assurant du grand plaisir qu’elle m’a procurée en me mettant en communication avec un homme éclairé quoique d’une autre croissance, que celle dans laquelle je suis né et fus élevé, mais de la même re-

© A. Kudelina, 2009
ligion, car les croyances sont différentes et il y en a plusieurs, mais il n'y a qu'une seule religion, la vraie. J'espère ne pas me tromper en supposant, d'après votre lettre, que la religion que je connais est la même que la vôtre, celle qui consiste à reconnaître Dieu et Sa loi - celle d'aimer son prochain et de faire à autrui ce qu'on voudrait qu'on vous fît. Je crois que tous les vrais principes religieux déconcent de celui là et sont les mêmes pour les Juifs, comme pour les Brahmanes, Bouddhistes, Christéens et Mahométans. Je crois que plus les religions se ressemblent de dogmes, de prêceptes, de miracles, de superstitions, plus elles énumèrent les hommes et même produisent l'inimité, et plus au contraire elles se simplifient et s'expriment, plus elles at- ténuent le but idéal de l'humanité - l'humanité de tous. C'est pourquoi votre lettre m'a été très agréable et je voudrais rester en communication avec vous... [4]

In the Complete edition of L. N. Tolstoy's works it is noted that this letter is an answer on the lost letter by Muhammad 'Abdul, the Russian writer by S. Cockrell, that was mainly devoted to religious issues. It was an answer to letter [5]. Until recently the Russian reader had very little information about this correspondence however it is known that in June 1906 L. N. Tolstoy was informed on Muhammad 'Abdul's death in 1905 [6].

Now let us study the information on the correspondence between L. N. Tolstoy and Muhammad 'Abdul known to the Arabic readers. We are aware of at least two independent publications of the letter by the Egypt's Grand Mufti L. N. Tolstoy and it is hard to state which of them appeared first. The above mentioned (note 1) Salim Qabayan, the author of the book "Tolstoy's Teaching" (1901), printed the letter in another work of his — "Wise Sayings of Prophet Muhammad Chosen by Philosopher Tolstoy and Selected Ideas and Topics from the Teaching by a Renowned Russian Philosopher" [7]. In his turn a famous poet, writer and critic A. M. Al-'Aqqiq (1889—1964) publishes the letter in the literary work "Muhammad 'Abdu: A Pioneer of Modern Thought in Egypt" [8]. Neither of the books tells about the circumstances that led to the correspondence between L. N. Tolstoy and Muhammad 'Abdul. Both of them don't publish the facsimile of mufti's letter itself offering just an incomplete and inaccurate version without post-scriptum, date and place of creation, etc. Nothing is known about the origin of this abridged version, too. On top of that both publications don't include L. N. Tolstoy's answer.

It should be mentioned that there is no scientific publication of the correspondence under consideration in other Arabic works studied. In this connection let us consider the whole scope of facts and materials related to an exchange of messages between Muhammad 'Abdul and L. N. Tolstoy [9].

Correspondence between L. N. Tolstoy and Muhammad 'Abdul would hardly have taken place, if it hadn't been for active participation of interested intermediary parties. In this relation it is necessary to lay out the chronology of events forerunning the letter exchange...

S. Cockrell visited L. N. Tolstoy in Isaiafa Poliana on July 12, 1903 leaving interesting memories about his visit. In the introductory part to publication of her memories T. G. Nikiforova, an L. N. Tolstoy Museum worker, mentions a very important detail:

On coming back to Tulia from Isaiafa Poliana, Cockrell immediately wrote several letters to his friends in England with a detailed description of everything he had seen in Isaiafa Poliana. One of the letters was addressed to W. S. Blant, who was a writer, poet, public figure, former diplomat. W. S. Blant as well as his wife Anna, Ilyor's grand-daughter, was an admirer of L. N. Tolstoy's creative work [10].

Further course of events can be traced due to an unpublished letter of S. Cockrell to L. N. Tolstoy that was kindly given to us by the L. N. Tolstoy Museum workers.

In the letter dated by May 2, 1904 S. Cockrell writes the following to L. N. Tolstoy:

You may perhaps remember my speaking and writing to you about the sympathy which Shabiy Muhammad 'Abdul, the Grand mufti of Egypt, has expressed for your attitude and teaching. I was lately in Cairo and he entrusted me with the enclosed letter to be forwarded to you. It has been translated into English by Lady Anne Blunt [11], a well-known traveller and an Arabic scholar, who is a friend and neighbour (during the winter) of the mufti. It will perhaps encourage you, at a time when your courageous declaration as to the unhappy conflict in the East must have caused the enmity of many to receive this expression of sympathy from a wise man of another religion, who has suffered much on behalf of principles which have not always been shared by his countrymen [12].

S. Cockrell's letter of May 2, 1904 significantly contributes to understanding the circumstances that led to establishing a contact between Muhammad 'Abdul and L. N. Tolstoy. The published letter of the Russian writer dated by May 12 just mentioned the fact that mufti's message had been resent by the Englishman. An earlier letter of S. Cockrell of May 2, 1904 clarifies that before the beginning of correspondence Muhammad 'Abdul and L. N. Tolstoy were well informed of each other's activity and positive character of this information paid the way for further contacts [13]. In addition it is mentioned that mufti's letter had an English translation, which significantly simplified the process of reading [14].

S. Cockrell's letter of May 2, 1904 (figs. 1—2) was sent by post to Isaiafa Poliana in one envelope with mufti's letter (figs. 3—4) and its English translation performed by A. Blunt (figs. 5—8). Now all these documents are kept in the L. N. Tolstoy Museum in Moscow, whose workers showed cooperation to the author in the process of creating this article.

The rest is known to us. L. N. Tolstoy informed S. Cockrell about receiving mufti's letter and sent the answer to his Egyptian correspondent on the next day. There is no evidence of any reaction to the letter from Russia on the part of mufti. There was no further exchange of messages between Muhammad 'Abdul and L. N. Tolstoy as well. The Grand mufti of Egypt passed away on July 11, 1905.
The Letter of Muḥammad ‘Abdū to Leo Tolstoy

A. KUDELIN. Muhammad ‘Abdū’s Letter to Leo Tolstoy

This page contains a letter from Muhammad ‘Abdū to Leo Tolstoy, written in Arabic and English. The letter discusses the relationship between reason and religion, and the role of the intellectual in society. The translation, provided on the right side of the page, conveys the main points of the letter in English.

Translation [34]

Aim Shems near Cairo [35] Egypt April 8, 1904

To the illustrious Philosopher Leo Tolstoy [36],

Although I have not the pleasure of being personally acquainted with you I am not without knowledge of your spirit; the light of your thoughts has shone upon us and in our skies the suns of your ideas have risen, making a bond of friendship between the minds of the intelligent here and your mind.

God has guided you to the knowledge of the mystery of that inborn essential nature according to which He formed man, and He has shown you the end towards which He has directed the human race. And you have grasped this, that man has been planted in this present existence that he may be watered by knowledge and that he may bear fruit by labour, which may be a weariness of body bringing reprove to his mind, and a lasting effort through which his race may be elevated.

You have perceived the misery which has befallen man when they have turned away from the law of their nature, and have employed those powers, given to them to obtain happiness, in a way which has disturbed their repose and destroyed their peace.

You have cast a glance on religion which has shattered the illusion of distorted traditions, and by this you have arrived at the fundamental truth of the Divine Unity.

You have raised your voice calling men to that wherein God has guided you, and you have gone before them in practice. And as by your words you have guided their intellects so by your deeds you have stirred up in them firm resolutions and great aims. As your ideas were a light to bring back those who had gone astray so was your example in action a model to be imitated by searchers for truth.

And as your existence has been a reprimand from God to the rich so has it been a succour held out by Him to the poor. Verily the highest glory have reached, the most sublime reward you received for your labours in advice and teaching, is what they [37] have called excommunication and interdict.

It was nothing — what you incurred from the hands of religion — nothing but a confession declaring to the world that you were not among those who had gone astray. Give praise to God that they have cut themselves off from you by your words as you also had abandoned them in their creeds and in their deeds.

This, and verify our hearts are in expectant desire of what shall come anew from your pen in the future days of your life — may God prolong its extent and preserve your strength and may He open the doors of men’s hearts to understand what you say, and may He urge their souls to imitate what you do. And salutations.

(signed)
The Mufti of Egypt
Mohammed Abdou

Should the Philosopher do me the honour to write he will be pleased to do so in French the only European Language known to me.

(signed) M.
knowledge, and that he may bear fruit by labor, which may be a means of body, the fruit of the mind, and a lasting effort through which his name may be celebrated.

You have perceived the misery which has befallen men when they have turned away from the love of their nature, and have employed their power to attain happiness in a way which has disturbed their repose and destroyed their peace.

You have cast a glance on religion which has shattered the theories of dedicated traditionalists, and by this you have arrived at the fundamental truth of the Divine Unity.

You have raised your voice calling men to that wherein God has guided you, and have

To the Illustrious Philosopher Leo Tolstoy,

Although I have not the pleasure of being personally acquainted with you, I am not without knowledge of your spirit; the higher that your thoughts have shown upon me and in me above the sum of your ideas have risen, making a bond of friendship between the minds of the intellectual hero and your mind.

God has guided you to the knowledge of the mystery of that inborn essential nature according to which the formed man, and he has shown you the end towards which he has directed the human race. And you have grasped, and thus, that man has been placed in the present existence that he may be weighted by knowledge

Then indeed you are also who have abandoned them in their nonsense in their heads.

Thus, and only our hearts are important; the desire of what shall come from you in the future days of your life — may God prolong to you and preserve you. And may the God, the best of hearts, resolve them to initiate what you do. And salutations.

(Author) The Night of Egypt

Mohammed Abdou

Since the Philosophers, too, the known, to write he will be pleased to do so in French, the only European language known to me.

Anna Stehlin

from Cairo

Egypt

April 8, 1909

A. KURDIN

Mohammad Al-Salihi, Letter to Leo Tolstoy

Have you before them in practice. And so by your words you have guided their intellects as by your deeds you have stirred up them to wise and great aims. As you have been a light to bring back those who had gone astray, to bear your example in action a model to be imitated by searchers for truth.

And as your existence has been a beacon from God to the whole, so hasn’t been a beacon held out by men to the poor. Which is higher, the glory, you have reached, the most difficult toward which you have reached for your labors, I desire and teaching, to what they have called communications and instruction.

It was nothing — what you received from the minds of religion — nothing but a permission declaration to the world that you are not among those who had gone astray. Give praise to God that they have cast themselves off from you by
A. KUDELIN, Muhammad 'Abdī's Letter to Leo Tolstoi

18. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
19. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
20. ibid., "Vospominaniya".
21. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
22. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
23. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
24. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
25. Путеводный памятник.
26. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
27. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
28. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
29. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
30. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
31. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
32. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
33. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
34. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".
35. ibid., "Izbr. sbornik".

Illustrations

11. Anne Blunt (1837—1917) is the author of the following well-known works: Bedouin tribes of the Eastern Deserts (London, 1879); A Pilgrimage to Najd (London, 1881); some of her works are written in co-authorship with Wilfred Scawen Blunt (1840—1922).
12. As mentioned above the ideas put forward by Muhammad ‘Abdī encountered adverse criticism in orthodox and conservative circles.
13. One fact worth mentioning here. Beginning with 1901 Muhammad ‘Abdī publishes his “Comments to the Qur’an” (Tafsir al-Qur’an al-‘alām) in the magazine Al-Munawwar. These comments were published separately in 1904 (see more in: Kirillin, op. cit., p. 128). In argumentation to the ideas expressed in Commentary Muhammad ‘Abdī makes references to European authors of the late 19th and early 20th century, alongside with Ch. Darwin and H. Spencer he also mentions L. Tolstoi (see more in: Dolinina, op. cit., pp. 23—4).
14. From his student years L. N. Tolstoi was familiar with the Arabic language and in one of the manuscripts he even left some letter-combinations in Arabic. However it is hard to assume that L. Tolstoi had enough knowledge of Arabic to get over the stylistic peculiarities and individual manner of the naffi’s handwriting. If there had been no English translation, the Russian writer would have had to use the services of an Arabic translator.
15. In the above mentioned publication by S. Qub’ayn no information about the date and place of the letter creation is given.
CONTENTS

TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH .......................... 3

A. Fedeli. Relevance of the Oldest Qur'anic Manuscripts for the Readings Mentioned by Commentaries. ......................................................... 3
A. Ambartsumian. On the Manuscripts of Pahlavi Work “Ayyadgar i Zarafsh” .......................................................... 11
A. Grib. In-Between the “Elite” and the “Pagan”: Qur’anic Boards from West Africa .......................................................... 22

PRESENTING THE COLLECTION .......................................................... 35


PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT ......................................................... 41

A. Kudelin. Muhammad ’Abdi’s Letter to Leo Tolstoy (History of Russian-Arabic Cultural Dialogue in the Beginning of the 20th Century) .......................................................... 41
M. Dehqan. Malal Muhammad Sharif Qui’s Account on the History of Kurdistan: a Unique Manuscript from the Central Library of Tehran University .......................................................... 50

ORIENTAL PANTHEON .......................................................... 53

I. Afimov. “Tai-ping guang ji”: Motives Related to the Dead Souls .......................................................... 53

BOOK REVIEWS .......................................................... 66

IN MEMORIAM .......................................................... 71

Karen Nikitch Yuzbashian (1927—2009) .......................................................... 71

Front cover:
Plate 1. Sacrifice at a home altar of ancestors before a wedding ceremony. Watercolour on pith, 33 × 21 cm, China, 19th century. MAE RAS, No. 311-1-12 (7e). Photo by S. Shapiro. Courtesy of the Museum.

Back cover:
years of exile in the ice and dirty states of New England, the intellectual frigidity and provincialism, the horrible weather and dismal light, the evil personal isolation gradually tore apart what was left of my life, yearly trips to St. Petersburg became my only link to authentic culture and human warmth. I stayed often at Karen's apartment on Orbeli Street, and as he reclined on his chaise longue we had long and intricate conversations about Russian and Armenian literature and politics. Roundabout midnight Karen would rouze me from my reading: James June, K'ntres? "Dear James, will you have supper?" and we'd sit down in the tiny kitchen for a snack and a glass of vodka. Karen was thin as a rail. I write these lines in a bed in Jerusalem, Israel, where I am recovering very slowly from a terrible motorcycle crash. Gradually I am restoring the muscles of my shattered leg, but then the poor thing was first released from its casts and bandages and stared in horror at its matchstick proportions it reminded me of Karen's skeletal limbs. He used to look up from his meals and tell me he had the zapasnoi appetit blokudshien, "the reserve appetite of a Leningrad blockade survivor".

Karen was not just a warm friend, not just a captivating scholar, not just a fascinating Russian Armenian intellectual. He was also the centre of a large circle of friends that began in Petersburg and radiated outward across the planet. His goodness warmed more people than he knew. That warm heart has ceased to beat here on earth, and this is a colder place for it. Karen believed always in the essential affinities of Jews and Armenians. After all, he grew up in the Soviet Union, not the Middle East. He was entirely free of the anti-Semitic, hyper-nationalist virus that has disfigured Armenian life and scholarship in recent years; and despite his venerable stature and imposing credentials, the yellow press in Erivan attacked him. His friendship with foreigners was a mark against him. "James", he used to tell me, "Our enemies have everything on their side... except the truth". Karen visited Israel and liked this country. In the last couple of years he was far too weak to travel; so my hope of his visiting the home here I hope to have will be one more item for the days of the coming of the Messiah, I guess.

Dear Karen, may the earth, as Russians say, rest as lightly as a feather over your earthly remains. And for all of us left behind, ubyve gorem — "slain by grief" — God grant us strength to live out our lives in the light of his bright memory and he granted the consolation of being reunited with his enfranchised soul in the regions of the truth beyond space and time.

_Barukh Dahan ha'Emet_. Blessed is the one true Judge.

_James Russell_

---

**AUTHORS**

Dr. Igor A. Alimon — Head of the Department of East and Southwest Asia of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences (St. Petersburg), specialist in Far Eastern ethnico-cultural texts. Author of the series of monographs in the field.

Mr. Arthur A. Ambartsumian — Independent researcher, graduated from Department of Iranian Languages at the Faculty of Asian and African Studies (St. Petersburg University), made postgraduate research at the Department of the Ancient Near East in the Institute of Oriental Studies (St. Petersburg Branch). Main interests — Old and Middle Iranian languages, culture and history of Ancient Iran. Author of the series of articles in the field of Iranian studies.

Mr. Mustafa Debun, MA — specialist in Kurdish Studies with an interest in the literature and religions of Kurdistan. He earned a bachelor's degree in Historical Studies and a master's in Historical Linguistics from the University of Tehran. Author of the numerous articles in the field.

Mrs. Anastasia S. Grib — post-graduate student of the Oriental Department at the State Hermitage Museum. Specialist in the Qur'anic calligraphy and indigenous art in West Africa. Author of the internet-based Guide to Islamic Calligraphy (www.khart.net), formerly a special reporter in Cairo for the "Around the World" magazine, an intern at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Department of Islamic Art), managing editor of the "Hermitage Magazine".

Dr. Alba Fedeli — Lecturer in Arabic at the University of Milan (Università degli studi di Milano, Italy). PhD student in the Sorbonne Nouvelle University (Paris 3) on the earliest Qur'anic manuscripts.

Prof. Dr. Shimon M. Jacobson — Leading researcher at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, specialist in the History of Hebrew manuscripts and incunabula, author of a series of monographs and articles.

Prof. Dr. Alexander B. Kadelin — Full member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Director of the World Literature Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, specialist in the history of the Arabic literature; author of the series of monographs in the field.

Dr. Larisa P. Pavlinskaya — Head of the Department of Siberia of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences (St. Petersburg), specialist in ethnography and history of Siberia, history of Russian ethnology and Kunstkamera Museum collections. Author of the series of works in the field.


Dr. Igor N. Wojnowski — Chief Librarian in the library of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, specialist in Semitic studies, author of several articles dealing with the history of Islamic and Judaic culture.

---

**Notes to Contributors**

Manuscripts must be written in English.
Manuscripts must be clearly typewritten with numbered pages, double linespacing and wide margins throughout. The title should be as brief and informative as possible. The institute at which the work has been done should be indicated at the head of each paper. Authors are requested to include their e-mail address.

**Submissions**

Manuscripts should be sent in duplicate to the Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Efim A. Rezanov, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences, 3 Universitetskaya nab., 199034, St. Petersburg, Russia, e-mail: rezvan@kunstkamera.ru.