

THE QUR'ĀN AND POWER IN RUSSIA. I: MANUSCRIPT

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 Noya [2]. An article on “the Qur'āns of ‘Uthmān” circulated in Arabic Spain and Northern Africa is being prepared 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 *khirqā* 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-Aḥmar, the founder of the Kingdom of Granada and which he gave as a present to the Almohad *sulṭān*. The Cordova manuscript was lost when

the ship carrying it from Tunis to Morocco sank in the 14th century.

In 1243, the Egyptian *sulṭān* 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 incrustated 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 (*lawḥ*) 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 Tīmūr, and subsequently with the names of “religious masters” — famous *ṣūfī 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 *ṣūfī* brotherhoods.

The history of the first one, so called “Samarqand *kūfī* 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 Naqshbandiyya brotherhood. Existing traditions insist that its appearance in Mā warā' al-nahr is connected with the name of Kh^wāja Aḥrār (1404—1490) one of the most prominent religious and political leaders of the region of Tīmūrid times. He was incontestable authority. He brought up Tīmūrid princes, was in friendly correspondence with such famous poets as Nawā'ī and Jāmī. Kh^wāja Aḥrār was an influential political figure and one of the richest persons of his time. The rise of Naqshbandiyya influence both in Mā warā' al-nahr and beyond its frontiers as well as