

INSTEAD OF INTRODUCTION

Last year I was glad to receive unexpectedly series of messages from my young colleagues mostly from Europe and Middle East. Each contained a request to send her or him one of my articles published many years ago and devoted to different aspects of the Qur'ān realization in the Muslim manuscript tradition. Findings contained in them, were, in one form or another, summarized in my books [1]. However, the requests repeated over and over again, and finally I promised to put the articles in the WEB. While discussing the idea with my close colleague and daughter Maryam, I found out that she shares the same experience. The book, which is offered to your attention, is the fulfilment of our promises.

The end of 1980ies and the beginning of 1990ies was the time of understanding that a substantial number of the Qur'ānic fragments which have reached us contain unique and the only reliable information on the initial period of the Sacred text's existence. They preserved for us the most important elements of the authentic history of the text fixation. It was Prof. Sergio Noja Nosedá who in the very end of 1990ies initiated and started realization of the bold and ambitious project entitled at the beginning "Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique" and having the aim to publish most important early Qur'ānic manuscripts [2]. A closely related project was started at the same time in the Soviet Union, but the collapse of the country put the brakes on its realization. The goal was to publish early Qur'ānic manuscripts mostly from Leningrad and Tashkent collections [3].

First two texts published in this volume — "The Database on Early Qur'ān MSS: New Approach to the Text History Reconstruction" (1992) [4] and "The Qur'ān Between *Textus Receptus* and Critical Edition" (1992) [5] — were presented at scholarly conferences exactly at this time.

Following essays — "Les premiers Corans" (1994) [6] and "Les Corans réalisés sur commande" (1994) [7] appeared as the result of the exhibition project "From Bagdad to Isfahan. Miniatures and calligraphy from the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of the Oriental Studies Russian Academy of Sciences" (Paris — New York — Lugano — Salzburg)", and were published in its fundamental catalogue. The exhibition — first of this kind in the history of St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of the Oriental Studies Russian Academy of Sciences (now Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences) was the great challenge to all of us and our great success. I would like to stress that the second essay never have been written without the kind help of Oleg Akimushkin (1929—2010), a prominent expert on Islamic manuscript tradition. In the time of the exhibition preparation he generously shared with me his experiences and knowledge connected with the Persian MSS tradition. *O. A.* acronym, which stands next to the *E. R.* (Efim Rezvan) under a number of the manuscript descriptions, means Oleg Akimushkin.

One of the exhibition pearls was the Qur'ānic manuscript E-20. The manuscript records the high point of

development in one of the two early traditions of copying Qur'āns, namely, that closely linked to Northwest Arabia and the area around the Syrian border. Its description in the exhibition catalogue reflects the very first steps of my manuscript study. In those times I have no idea that manuscript E-20 kept in Saint-Petersburg was venerated in Central Asia as true 'Uthmānic Qur'ān [8]. Five articles in this volume ("Yet Another 'Uthmānic Qur'ān' (to the History of Manuscript E-20 from the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies)" (2000) [9], "On the Dating of the 'Uthmanic Qur'ān' from St. Petersburg" (2000) [10], "New Folios from 'Uthmanic Qur'ān' (Library of Administration for Muslim Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan)" (2004) [11], "Mingana Folios: When and Why?" (2005) [12] and "The Qur'ān and Power in Russia. I: Manuscript" (2008) [13] are in this way or another connected with my study of the manuscript.

Another one — "Oriental Manuscripts of Karl Fabergé. I: The Qur'ān" (2001) [14] — is the first chapter of my unfinished book devoted to the history of manuscript collection once belonged to world famous Russian jeweller [15].

Three articles of Maryam is the continuation of our work in the field of study and presentation of the Qur'ānic MSS from world famous St. Petersburg collections [16].

The article "Qur'ānic Manuscripts as Birth, Death, Land and Library Register (2002)" [17] deals with type of the Qur'ānic manuscripts, handed down from generation to generation and served to register what we call today "items of public record". Later on I have met the same tradition spread in the Tatar community in Finland. Their ancestors came from Volga region in the end of 19th — beginning of the 20th century and brought the Qur'āns of this kind to their new motherland [18]. All this allows us to state with some degree of probability, that such practices were once common at least across the Volga and the Caucasus region.

And finally the article "The Qur'ān by Pëtr Stolypin (?)" (2004) [19] was devoted to the interesting copy of the Qur'ān from Saint-Petersburg private collection. Its owner believed that the copy once belonged to Pëtr Arkadievich Stolypin (1862—1911), famous state Russian 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. After the publication of the article we found out that this is not the case. This fact, however, does not make the manuscript, whose fate is closely connected with the history of Russia, less interesting.

In conclusion, we would like to thank my young colleagues for their interest in my early texts. I am glad that today, when the speed of the flow of information and its volumes have grown dramatically, they are still in demand.

Notes

1. E. Rezvan, *The Qur'ān and Its World* (St. Petersburg, 2001) (Russian edition available at: <http://kunstkamera.ru/lib/rubrikator/02/978-5-85803-183-3>, English edition at: <http://kunstkamera.ru/lib/rubrikator/02/978-5-88431-178-7>).

2. It was started by Prof. Nosedá together with Prof. Déroche, see: *Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique. I. Les manuscrits de style hijazi. Volume I. Le manuscrit arabe 328a (a) de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, 1998, ed. by F. Déroche and S. N. Nosedá, Fondazione Ferni Noja Nosedá (Lesá) and Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, *Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique. I. Les manuscrits de style hijazi. Volume II. Tome I. Le manuscrit Or. 2165 (f. 1 à 61) de la British Library* (2001), Fondazione Ferni Noja Nosedá (Lesá) and British Library (London).

After the publication of the second volume Prof. Nosedá decided to change the title of the project for “Early Qur'āns. The Era of the Prophet, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and the Umayyades” and continued it mostly alone. New series should have started with the volume “Fragments”. It comprehended the fragments scattered in various libraries (Vaticana, Leiden, Philadelphia, Cairo, Chicago, Wien, Berlin). The volume was ready to be printed; Prof. Noja finished the introduction to it, but on January 31, 2008 he was killed in a car accident. He just returned back from the British library where he discussed the details of the publication of the second part of the British Library MS. It was Dr. Keith Small who after the death of Prof. Noja, continued the preparation of this volume. Another goal of Prof. Noja was the publication of the existing papyri fragments. This volume also remained half finished. He was also working on the famous palimpsest of Ṣana‘á, and the other two early codices which were photographed by his team in October 2007 (Palimpsest 01-27.1 + MS 01-25.1 + MS 01-29.1). The entire Yemeni project was continued by Prof. Christian Robin after his death. The work is continued on now in cooperation between the French and the German (“Corpus Coranicum”) sides. The publication of Ṣana‘á palimpsest and British Library volumes were announced in 2012 by Brill as a part of the new series “Documenta Coranica”.

3. The goal was to publish early Qur'ānic manuscripts mostly from Leningrad and Tashkent collections (see: E. Rezvan, “*The Qur'ān of 'Uthmān*” (St. Petersburg, Katta-Langar, Bukhara, Tashkent) (St. Petersburg, 2004)). The second part of the task was realized by F. Déroche in 2009, see: F. Déroche, *La Transmission Ecrite Du Coran Dans Le Debut De L'Islam: Le Codex Parisino-petropolitanus (Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān)* (Leiden — Boston, 2009).

4. *Proceedings of the 3rd Conference on Bilingual Computing in Arabic and English* (Durham, 1992), pp. 3.3.1—3.3.18.

5. *Les problèmes posés par l'édition critique des textes anciens et médiévaux* (Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1992), pp. 291—310.

6. *De Baghdad à Ispahan. Manuscrits islamiques de la Filiale de Saint-Petersbourg de l'Institut d'Etudes orientales, Académie des Sciences de Russie* (Paris, 1994), pp. 81—9.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 273—85.

8. See: Rezvan, “*The Qur'ān of 'Uthmān*”.

9. *Manuscripta Orientalia* VI/1 (2000), pp. 49—68.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 19—22.

11. *Ibid.* X/1 (2004), pp. 32—41

12. *Ibid.* XI/4 (2005), pp. 18—21.

13. *Ibid.* XIV/2 (2008), pp. 21—7. Continuation of the series see in: E. Rezvan, “The Qur'ān and Power in Russia”, *Christianity and Islam in the Context of Contemporary Culture. Perspectives of Interfaith Dialogue from Russia and the Middle East* (St. Petersburg — Beirut, 2009), pp. 41—56 (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001852/185275M.pdf>).

14. *Manuscripta Orientalia* VII/1 (2001), pp. 40—61.

15. For details, see: E. Rezvan, *Oriental Manuscripts of Karl Fabergé* (http://kunstkamera.ru/lib/rubrikator/08/08_02/978-5-88431-180-0).

16. M. Rezvan, “Qur'ānic Fragments from the A. A. Polovtsov Collection at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental studies, Russian Academy of Sciences”, *Manuscripta Orientalia* VII/2 (2001), pp. 20—35; *eadem*, “Qur'ān Manuscript A 1638 from the Collection of the SPIOS and the Practice of *Istikhāra*”, *ibid.* IX/1 (2003), pp. 4—19; *eadem*, “Early Qur'ānic Manuscript from the Collections of St. Petersburg Kunstkamera”, *ibid.* X/3 (2004), pp. 60—6.

17. *Ibid.* VIII/3 (2002), pp. 17—25.

18. For details see: E. Rezvan “Five-Ended Star on the Qur'an”, *60th Parallel* III/26 (2007), pp. 26—37 and my documentary with the same title (2007), which is available on YouTube.

19. *Manuscripta Orientalia* X/3 (2004), pp. 50—9.