PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

NEW FOLIOS FROM “‘UThMĀNIC QU'RĀN” I.
(LIBRARY OF ADMINISTRATION FOR MUSLIM AFFAIRS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN)

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On the pages of our journal we have more than once written about the hijāzī Qur’ānic manuscript which throughout at least five centuries was considered by Middle East Muslims the original “‘Uthmān’s Qur’ān” — a sacred relic stained with the blood of the third of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (644—55). The manuscript, which, as it was believed by generations of Muslims, was copied by ‘Uthmān himself was considered the prototype for all copies of Qur’ān. The amazing history of this copy is connected with destinies of dynasties, states, ‘Īṣqiyya brotherhoods [1].

In the end of the 19th century, about a half of the manuscript was sold in parts. The greater part of it was brought to St. Petersburg, the rest — scattered among private collectors in Buhārā. The other half of the manuscript was still kept in the mażār of Katta-Langar qīshāq. In 1983 Prof. B. Babajanov succeeded in seeing in Katta-Langar sixty three folios of the ancient Qur’ānic codex. The 1983 resolution of the Central Committee of the Uzbek Communist Party to combat folk Islamic beliefs [2] played a fateful role in the history of the manuscript. In mażārs and mosques throughout the republic, sacred relics were confiscated and the graves of saints were excavated. Fearing for the manuscript, the chairman of the local qīshāq council brought it to his home, but was still unable to save it. The Katta-Langar holy relics were confiscated. According to eye-witnesses, on the very eve of the confiscation, one of the qīshāq’s elders, Tukhto-Baba Rajazov, succeeded in taking several folios from the manuscript [3]. Ten years ago, in 1993, T. Qadirov, bakīm of the Kaška Daryā wilāyat returned the twelve folios to the mażār.

I was sure that the remaining folios, which could have been bought by a local collector in the end of the 19th century, confiscated by KGB or saved from this fate by a believer, are still kept somewhere in Uzbekistan.

In the spring of 2003 during my trip to Uzbekistan together with students from Stanford University (USA), I again managed to visit the Library of Administration for Muslim Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan. To my great surprise, on the exhibition of rare manuscripts of the Qur’ān, I found folios, which undoubtedly belonged to the Katta-Langar copy. I had been to this library a year before during the shooting of my film about the history of the “‘Uthmānic Qur’ān”, but I had not seen these folios then. In reply to my question concerning the history of acquisition of the fragments I was interested in, the Director of the Library Mr. Abdulshukur Nabiev [4] explained that the folios had come into the library not long before that due to cooperation with customs authorities of the Republic.

The folios are in simple cardboard binding covered with cotton (alternating white-green and blue-white stripes). In the upper right corner of the inner surface of the upper cover of the binding, there is a stamp and a code attributed to the folios on their acquisition (fig. 1).

Under the binding there are four folios, two of which are fly-leaves (well-polished cream oriental paper), and the other two contain Qur’ānic texts. In the lower part of the fly-leaf (at the bottom and in the corner on the other side) there are Persian nasta’līq inscriptions in black ink (figs. 2—3).

Two-line inscription at the bottom:

“Kāfī script. Holy autograph of the sovereign of believers bucrat ‘Uthmān, the possessor of the two [sources] of light [5], let Allah the Most High be pleased with him!”

An inscription on the other side contains a distich:

“I gave several inanimate [coins, precious stones],
I bought a soul // Glory to Allah! I bought it amazingly cheap!”

The next folio is a fragment of a, supposedly, 30-volume manuscript of the Qur’ān. The folio size is 48.2 × 34.0 cm, the text field’s size is 37.6 × 27.6 cm, high quality polished oriental paper, a complicated multi-colour frame, five lines written in gold, calligraphic muḥaqqaq. Presumably — Iran, 14th—15th century.

The fragment contains the end of sūra 7: the front side (fig. 4) — the end of āyāt 7:202 — the end of āyāt 7:203; the other side (fig. 5) — the end of āyāt 7:203 and up to the end of the sūra. The dividers between the āyāt are complicated golden rosettes outlined in blue in a form of a “gear-wheel”. On the reverse side one of such dividers is placed on the margin together with a long “tail” nūn, and

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Fig. 1
Fig. 4
Fig. 5
there is a gap in the frame. Because of this, along the left edge of the folio there is an additional golden frame with an "envelope" for a nān and the āyāt divider. Along the perimeter of this frame bold red and blue lines were later made.

In the upper part of the folio a fragment (15.9 x 4.7 cm) of a bottom left corner of a handwritten page is glued on. It contains a nāsh inscription in black ink (part of a complicated multi-color frame is also preserved). The inscription (fig. 6) represents 28 consonants of Arabic alphabet arranged according to mnemonic principle (abjad, voces memorials) [6]. This combination was often used in magical acts, was part of talismans [7].

In the bottom left corner on the margin there is an inscription in black ink (fig. 7):

"Tholih, script of Jamāl al-Dīn Yāqūt [8], completed in the time of Muʿtaṣīm biʿl-lāh"

[9].

The front, as well as the reverse, sides of the folios contain brown stains on top (two) and at the bottom (one). The next folio presents the fragment of Qurʿānic manuscript from Katta-Langar in hijāzī script. 25.2 x 34.0 cm, Northern Arabia or Syria, end of the 8th century. The front side (fig. 8) contains a fragment of a Qurʿānic text (2:126 (ءَبِنَاءُ) — 2:140 (اءِلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْلِيْl (fig. 7).

There is the end of an āyāt 2:140 (ءَبِنَاءُ) — 2:144 (ءَبِنَاءُ) (fig. 8). The folio fills the gap in the fragment, which is very interesting, as it proves the magical use of the manuscript.

The inscriptions in nastaʿlīq were made much later. They fix the fact of the fragment’s acquisition, characterize and date it. However, the author of the inscription could not identify the script of the fragment, which dates to the 14th—15th centuries, correctly, ascribed it to the kalām of the legendary penman Jamāl al-Dīn Yāqūt, and made a mistake in his life dates, placing him in the time of Caliph Muʿtaṣim biʿl-lāh, which was four centuries earlier.

In connection with this we may assume that the folios which came into the Library of the Administration for Muslim Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan could be sold to a private collector in the end of the 19th century, just like one folio was sold by Muhammad Šarif-īn Mahdūd Sadrī Ẓāyī-qādī-kalān (supreme judge) to the last amīr of Buhārā, and two folios — to Hišmat (1857—1927), son of the Buhārān amīr Muʿṣaffar al-Dīn. At the time it was quite an expensive purchase: Hišmat made 30 sum (Rus- sian) [15]. It is the expensiveness of the purchase which is commented on the reverse side in the corner of the fly-leaf. Such purchase could have been made only by a well-off noble man.

When the present book was in preparation for publication, I found out from a trustworthy source that a private collector living in one of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States possesses several dozen folios in hijāzī script from the manuscript we are interested in. I was promised that photos of these folios would be sent to me. If this story is true, we will then have an almost complete codex of Qurʿān of the 2nd century after hijra. The appearance of the last large fragment (and this can only be the fragment confiscated by the KGB) will allow us to identify precisely the place of all the fragments which have been discovered in the history of the codex. That is why I permitted myself to add figure “I” in the title of the article. I really hope that it will be followed by another article on the subject.

N o t e s

The pathos of such resolutions as well as of fatwas of the Administration for Muslims’ Affairs of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan was often in tune with the main theses of Wahha model of Islam. Folk beliefs, customs and rites connected with Shi‘i tradition which could not be controlled by the state, were viewed as deeply inimical by communist ideologists who controlled the Soviet “official Islam” as well as by theorists of export of Wahhabi model of Islam.

3. Tukhto-Baba died in 2001 and is buried close to Katta-Langar ma‘zar.

4. I am really grateful to Mr. A. Nabiev for his kind assistance in photographing and preliminary study of the Qur‘anic folios to which the present article is dedicated.

5. Dhu ‘l-Nu‘ayr is an honourable nick-name (laqab) of ‘Uthmân b. ‘Affân which he received in connection with his marrying two daughters of the Prophet, first Ruqayyya and, after her death, — Umm Kūlthūm.

6. This combination differs from a usual one by the presence in its end of a lām-‘alif combination.

7. I am thankful to Dr. Maryam Rezvan for information connected with this fragment and for her assistance in translation of Persian texts.


9. Mu’tasim b’ilāh — Abbāsid Caliph (r. 833—42).


Illustrations

Fig. 1. Collection of Qur‘ānic fragments. No. 39. Library of Administration for Muslim Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent. Shelf-mark of the library.

Fig. 2. The same item. First nastā‘liq inscription on fly-leaf.

Fig. 3. The same item. Second nastā‘liq inscription on fly-leaf.

Fig. 4. The same item. Rector of the Qur‘ānic folio in muhaqqaq script, 48.2 × 34.0 cm, Iran, 14th—15th centuries.

Fig. 5. The same item. Verso of the Qur‘ānic folio in muhaqqaq script, 48.2 × 34.0 cm, Iran, 14th—15th centuries.

Fig. 6. The same item. Abjad fragment attached to rector of the Qur‘ānic folio in muhaqqaq script.

Fig. 7. The same item. Marginalia on rector of the Qur‘ānic folio in muhaqqaq script, 15.9 × 4.7 cm.

Fig. 8. The same item. Rector of the Qur‘ānic folio in hijā‘ī script, 52.5 × 34.0 cm. Northern Arabia or Syria, end of the 8th century.

Fig. 9. The same item. Verso of the Qur‘ānic folio in hijā‘ī script, 52.5 × 34.0 cm. Northern Arabia or Syria, end of the 8th century.