

Paying Tribute: Returning to the Story of the “Qur‘ān of ‘Uthmān”

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Abstract

Objectives: The Qur’an occupies a central position in a religious and philosophical system that has had a significant and emblematic impact on human history, influencing Arabic studies worldwide. Such is particularly true for Russian Arabic studies, where the ‘Uthmanic Qur’an, with copies in Saint Petersburg and Uzbekistan, has played a crucial role. This study aims to honour our teachers and the Arab community of Qashqadarya, who continue to preserve their language and culture.

Methodology: Synthetic, Comparative.

Findings: The history of these manuscripts spans over twelve centuries, providing rich material linked to the fate of human lineages, nations, cities, peoples, and Islamic civilisation since its emergence in the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century until the triumph of Islam. This Islam endured against the communist regime in the Islamic republics of the Soviet Union. The Russian School of Arabic Studies survived the 1917 Revolution due to its concentration on research areas that were of particular importance at the time. These included the study of Arabic sources on the history of the USSR territories and the living Arabic dialects used in the Central Asian republics. Such led to the publication of significant works on the language, ethnography, and history of the Arabs of Qashqadarya, whose ancestors brought the “Uthmanic Qur’an” from the Arabian Peninsula via the Silk Road to their land in Uzbekistan.

Originality: Today, advanced research techniques must be used to study and analyse the “Uthmanic Qur’an” manuscript and reconstruct the origin, culture, and dialects of the Arab population in Qashqadarya, Uzbekistan. These include DNA analysis and modern linguistic methods based on big data and artificial intelligence technology.

Keywords: “Uthmanic Qur’an”; Language; Ethnography and History of the Arabs of Qashqadarya

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إشادة: عودة إلى تاريخ «المصحف العثماني»

إفيم رضوان

أستاذ ورئيس المركز الدولي للدراسات الإسلامية في متحف كونتسكامارا؛ مدير متحف بطرسبرغ للثقافة الإسلامية-روسيا

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ملخص البحث

هدف البحث: يشغل القرآن الكريم مكاناً محورياً في منظومة دينية وفلسفية أثرت تأثيراً كبيراً ورمزياً في تاريخ البشرية، كما أثرت في الدراسات العربية في كل العالم. تنطبق هذه الحقيقة على الدراسات الروسية العربية فقد لعب «المصحف العثماني»، الذي توجد مخطوطة منه في مدينة سانت بطرسبرغ، وأوزبكستان دوراً مهماً في تلك الدراسات. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى تكريم معلمينا والمجتمع العربي القشقداري الذي ما زال متمسكاً بلغته وثقافته.

منهج البحث: التركيبي والمقارن.

النتائج: يمتد تاريخ المخطوطات إلى أكثر من اثني عشر قرناً؛ حيث أنتج لنا مادة غنية ارتبطت بمصير السلالات البشرية والأمم والمدن والشعوب، وأيضاً بمصير الحضارة الإسلامية منذ ظهورها في شبه الجزيرة العربية في القرن السابع حتى انتصار الإسلام، الذي صمد في وجه النظام الشيوعي في الجمهوريات الإسلامية في الاتحاد السوفيتي. إن بقاء المدرسة الروسية للدراسات العربية بعد قيام ثورة ١٩١٧ أتاح لها الفرصة للتركيز على الأولويات البحثية، مثل دراسة المصادر العربية حول تاريخ بلدان الاتحاد السوفيتي، واللهجات العربية الحية المستخدمة في جمهوريات آسيا الوسطى. وقد نتج عن ذلك إصدار أعمال مهمة تختص بلغة وإثنوغرافيا وتاريخ عرب قشقداريا الذين جلب أسلافهم «المصحف العثماني» من شبه الجزيرة العربية عبر طريق الحرير إلى بلادهم في أوزبكستان.

أهمية البحث: كي نحصل اليوم على نتائج مهمة ومختلفة لا بد من استخدام تقنيات البحث المتقدمة لتحقيق مخطوطة «المصحف العثماني»، ومعرفة أصل السكان العرب في قشقداريا بأوزبكستان وثقافتهم ولهجاتهم. ونقصد بذلك تحليل الحمض النووي، واستخدام الأساليب اللغوية الحديثة التي تعتمد على قواعد البيانات الضخمة وعلى تقنية الذكاء الاصطناعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المصحف العثماني، اللغة، إثنوغرافيا وتاريخ عرب قشقداريا

للاقتباس: رضوان، إفيم. «إشادة: عودة إلى تاريخ المصحف العثماني»، مجلة كلية الشريعة والدراسات الإسلامية، جامعة قطر، المجلد ٤٢، العدد ٢، ٢٠٢٤.

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© ٢٠٢٤، رضوان، إفيم. مجلة كلية الشريعة والدراسات الإسلامية، دار نشر جامعة قطر. تم نشر هذه المقالة البحثية وفقاً لشرط Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). وتسمح هذه الرخصة بالاستخدام غير التجاري، وينبغي نسبة العمل إلى صاحبه، مع بيان أي تعديلات عليه. كما تتيح حرية نسخ، وتوزيع، ونقل العمل بأي شكل من الأشكال، أو بأية وسيلة، ومزجه وتحويله والبناء عليه، طالما يُنسب العمل الأصلي إلى المؤلف. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

St. Petersburg boasts one of the largest collections of Islamic manuscripts worldwide. Their professional study began almost concurrently with the establishment of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in 1724. With the founding of the Asiatic Museum at the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera in 1818, the research and description of these manuscripts were established on a firm footing. The Muslim fund of the Asiatic Museum is founded on two collections by J.-L. Rousseau, a French diplomat and Russian intelligence officer who is a relative of the renowned philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His collections, amounting to 500 and 200 volumes, respectively, were acquired by the Russian officials in 1819 and 1825. Under the instruction of the government (Russian diplomats were charged with purchasing manuscripts), the museum's Muslim funds were replenished regularly and expediently incorporated into scientific circulation. Encouraging greater focus on the East became a significant political objective in Russia. On numerous counts, the history of Central Asia has been reassembled using manuscript collections held on the banks of the River Neva.

The manuscripts of the Qur'ān, created over centuries throughout the world of Islam, are the prized possessions of the St. Petersburg collections. These manuscripts are an exceptional historical source, and the stories behind the creation and existence of many of them could sometimes form the basis of adventure novels. The most notable manuscript within the collections of St. Petersburg is E-20, which is under the possession of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts at the Russian Academy of Sciences. The impressive resources of the Institute originate from the Asiatic Museum.

An examination of the manuscript in *hijāzī* script comprising approximately 50% of the complete Qur'ānic text (as typically fragments from this era are only obtainable in brief measures) enabled us to disprove various widespread theories asserting that the present-day text of the Qur'ān did not exist before the 9th century. The manuscript's text closely aligns with that presently published and distributed within the Muslim world, thus affording evidence to the early history of the Holy Book according to Muslim tradition. Dating back to the late 8th century, the manuscript underwent red ink corrections approximately sixty years after its inception. The decorative *sūra* separators were added during this period. These modifications hold significant scientific value. At one point, I authored a monograph dedicated to this manuscript¹. However, I discovered that the manuscript's acquisition by the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, along with its history, is wholly intertwined with the rescue of Russian classical Arabic studies, which appeared unnecessary following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Additionally, it is connected with the captivating history of researching the language and folklore of the Arabs in Uzbekistan. In the biographies of my teachers' teachers and in the history of the St. Petersburg school of Arabic and Islamic Studies, these events held great significance. It is evident that

1 For details see Efim Rezvan, "*The Qur'ān of 'Uthmān*" (St. Petersburg, Katta-Langar, Bukhara, Tashkent). Vol. 1. (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Centre For Oriental Studies, 2004).

international collaboration is necessary for ongoing research on this complex subject matter, as highlighted by the impetus for this article.

In autumn 1936, an elderly woman visited the Institute, hoping to sell some unusual Qur’ānic folios. She was met by I. Yu. Krachkovsky (1883—1951), an outstanding Russian Arabist and Islamic scholar. However, Krachkovsky’s attempts to find out the origin of the manuscript encountered an obvious unwillingness of the lady to discuss the issue. It was unsurprising that those who sold manuscripts during the Stalinist era refrained from disclosing any familial relations to former owners of extensive libraries or associations with once-prominent families. Subsequently, the woman brought additional folios from the same manuscript, as well as several books, and Krachkovsky ascertained that they came from the library of Irinei (Salim) Nauphal (1828—1902), a relatively well-known Lebanese bibliophile¹ and literary figure (author of critical articles, political essays, and a biography of the Prophet Muhammad in French²). Born into a rich Arab-Christian family in Tripoli, he had received the usual Levantine education and spoke French fluently. He arrived in Russia around 1860 and integrated there so well that his children never returned to their father’s homeland. He enjoyed a successful career in the Russian Ministry of Foreign affairs, achieved high rank and held many decorations. For many years he was a professor of Arabic and Islamic law at the School of Oriental Languages of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “The fate of his library is, unfortunately, a sad one. Half-Russified, half-Gallicised, his sons were educated in elite schools and belonged to the famed ‘golden youth’ of the time. Interested neither in scholarship nor literature, they did not make careers for themselves, preferring to live at their father’s expense. They gradually reached the point where, taking advantage of his advanced years, they secretly sold off his library piecemeal to booksellers. After his death, the entire library was disposed of.”³

In June of 1998 I published an article with a detailed description of E-20 Qur’ānic manuscript⁴. Several months after that Prof. François Déroche was kind enough to send me a note on Qur’ānic fragments from the mountainous Uzbek *qishlaq* (village) of Katta Langar⁵, photocopies of which he had received thanks to the efforts of J. J. Witkam and M. Szuppe. A comparison of the photographed folios from Katta Langar

1 St. Petersburg collections have preserved several other manuscripts from his library. In addition to the Qur’ānic manuscript, the collection of the Institute of Oriental studies, Russian Academy of Sciences holds four other manuscripts (B 2485, B 3971, C 2332–2333); they are, for the most part, works on Muslim dogmatics and examples of Arabic prose.

2 See Fīlīb dī Tarrāzī, *Ta’rīkh al-khilāfa al-‘arabiyya*. Vol. 2 (Beirut: Al-Maṭba‘a al-‘adabiyya, 1913), 171–175; Louis Cheikho, *La littérature arabe au XIXe siècle*. Second edition. Vol. 2 (Beyrouth: Imprimerie catholique, 1926), 139–140; Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1951), 330.

3 Ignatius Yu. Krachkovsky, “Nad arabskimi rukopisyami” [“Above the Arabic manuscripts”], *Izbrannye Sochineniia [Selected Works]*. Vol. 1, (in Russian) (Moscow; Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955), 116–118.

4 Efim Rezvan, “The Qur’ān and Its World: VI. Emergence of the Canon: The Struggle for Uniformity.” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 4, no. 2 (1998): 13–54.

5 François Déroche, “Note sur les fragments coraniques anciens de Katta Langar (Ouzbékistan), Patrimoine manuscrit et vie intellectuelle de l’Asie Centrale Islamique.” *Cahiers d’Asie Centrale* 7 (1999): 65–73.

with the photographs and information about manuscript E-20 which we published¹ allowed Prof. Déroche to identify the extant Katta Langar folios as belonging at one time to the same copy as fragment E-20. He mentioned yet another folio from this copy, today held in the collection of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences Institute of Oriental Studies in Tashkent.

The information changed fully my hypothesis of the manuscript appearance in St. Petersburg as I believed that Nauphal brought it with him from his homeland. The discovery of 12 folios from the same copy in Katta Langar² and one folio Tashkent indicated that the manuscript arrived in St. Petersburg via Central Asia. This information necessitated an immediate journey to Uzbekistan. Two journeys undertaken in 1999 and 2001, with invaluable assistance from Prof. Vincent Fournier, who was then the Director of the Institut français d'études sur l'Asie Central, significantly transformed my comprehension of the manuscript's history.

The primary objective of my journey was to visit the small *qishlaq* of Katta Langar. It is located 100 km south of Samarqand, in the Kūk-sū ravine on a spur of the Zarāfshān mountain range on the right bank of *sāy* (mountain river) called Langar. N. N. Beliavskiy (1846—1920), a colonel of the Russian General Staff, visited the site twice in 1889 as part of a reconnaissance mission. He noted that Langar, Būwa-shādī, and Tūt-ak are the sacred mountains of Bukhara, and revered as a place of pilgrimage. The mosque and *mazār* (a mausoleum or shrine) with the 'Ishkiyya *shaykhs* tombs in Katta Langar are genuine masterpieces of medieval Muslim architecture. They have continuously drawn the attention of both travellers and experts. Russian military engineer B. N. Kastalskiy (1868—1943) could potentially be the first European to have recognised the beauty and importance of these monuments, as he captured photographs of local landmarks. Their first description is attributed to B. N. Litvinov, an officer-artist (1872 — after 1948)³.

An all-terrain vehicle with French diplomatic plates granted me passage through numerous roadblocks that marked the start of the American invasion of Afghanistan. I relished the chance to explore Katta Langar, where I made a copy of the parchment folios and visited historical shrines. I was delighted to unearth 19th-century documentation that affirms the manuscript I was researching as the esteemed "Qur'ān of 'Uthmān". In the Ibn Sīnā Bukhara regional library, I uncovered two further pages of the manuscript, gradually unravelling its story.

Starting from the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century it belonged to the 'Ishqiyya brotherhood.' In the times we are speaking about previously unlimited Timūrid power was growing weaker

1 Efim Rezvan, "Les premiers Corans." In *De Bagdad à Ispahan. Manuscrits islamiques de l'Institut d'Études orientales, Filiale de Saint-Petersbourg, Académie des Sciences de Russie*, edited by Yuriy A. Petrosyan (Lugano: Fondation ARCH; Paris: Paris-Musées; Milan: Electa, 1994), 84–85.

2 At present, folios from Katta Langar are preserved in Spiritual administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan (Uzbek: O'zbekiston musulmonlari idorasi) in Tashkent.

3 For details see Rezvan, "The Qur'ān of 'Uthmān", 39–41.

and weaker. Meanwhile, the status of the Naqshbandiyya brotherhood closely connected with Tīmūrīd also diminished. It is well known that for decades another copy of the “Qur’ān of ‘Uthmān”¹ was one of the most important relics belonging to local Naqshbandiyya brotherhood. Existing traditions insist that its appearance in Mā warā’ al-nahr² is connected with the name of Khwāja Aḥrār (1404—1490), one of the most prominent religious and political leaders of the region of Tīmūrīd times. The elevated stature of Naqshbandiyya was inextricably linked to his persona.

On the contrary the position of Muḥammad Shaybānī-khān (d. 1510) consolidated one day after another. Shaybānī-khān was engaged in preparations for the conquest of Mā warā’ al-nahr and was seeking an ally comparable to Khwāja Aḥrār and the Naqshbandiyya brotherhood. It is hardly a coincidence that Shaybānī-khān, on seizing Samarqand in 1500, confiscated the vast fortune of Khwāja Aḥrār’s family and destroyed his sons. At that time, the ‘Ishqiyya brotherhood and its shaykhs quickly gained influence and economic power. Among their *murīds*³ were many representatives of the Turkic clan nobility and ‘Ishqiyya shaykhs played an active role in political events. It was then that they began constructing the costly mosques and *mazārs*. The fall of the Shaybānīds reduced the influence of the ‘Ishqiyya shaykhs to nil, once again affirming the tie between them. Russian specialist in Central Asian history A. A. Semenov described in detail this interesting period in the history of Central Asia and analysed the most important sources connected with it. He writes about the fierce struggle between the *sūfī* brotherhoods characteristic of Mā warā’ al-nahr at the time.⁴

But we are going back to the turn of the 15th — 16th centuries. The ‘Ishqiyya shaykhs retreated farther from Samarqand, the realm of Khwāja Aḥrār, and closer to Afghanistan, with which they already had ties. The alliance with the Shibānīds was probably formed at that time. In 1513, the Uzbek *sultāns* who had by then occupied northern Khurasan and Balkh were compelled to “cleanse” the areas they had conquered. *Sultān* ‘Ubayd Allāh resettled the residents of Marw to Bukhara, and Jānībek resettled the residents of Balkh, Shuburghān and Andkhoy, a region in northern Afghanistan inhabited by Arabs, to his domain on the other side of the Amu Darya. Documents show that the migrants needed a patron in their new location; moreover, the concept of *ihimām* (payment for care) existed.

In the traditional tale of how the mosque was built in Katta Langar told to me by its *imām* ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Ibrāhīm, it is constantly stressed that the mosque was constructed collectively, with each of the

1 For details see Efim Rezvan, “The Qur’ān and Power in Russia. I: Manuscript.” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 14, no. 2 (2008): 21–27.

2 The term that has been used since the 19th century to refer to a region in Central Asia known as ancient Transoxiana or Transoxania.

This area was located between the Amu Darya river to the south and the Syr Darya river to the north and includes parts of modern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan.

3 In Sufism, a disciple at the first (lowest) stage of initiation and spiritual self-improvement.

4 Aleksandr A. Semenov, “Sheibani-khan i zavoevanie im imperii Timuridov” [“Shaybānī-khān in his Conquest of the Tīmūrīd Empire”], *Materialy po istorii tadzhikov i uzbekov Srednei Azii [Proceedings of the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR]*. Vol. 12, iss. 1, 39–85, (in Russian) (Stalinabad: Izdatel’stvo AN Tadzh. SSR, 1954), 81.

neighbouring tribes responsible for some aspect of the construction: preparing or delivering construction materials, providing livestock and cooking food for the builders, etc. The mosque, which they began to build only a few years after their move, was intended to unite Muslims regardless of their ethnic origins, and also to integrate the migrants into local society. Arabic resettlers appealed ‘Ishqiyya shaykhs for support and the ancient copy of the Qur’ān as well as the other relics brought by them were the “payment for care.” Probably among the relics they brought there were also such significant items as a *tasbīh*, a string of yellow rosary beads which allegedly belonged to the Prophet Muḥammad himself; *mūy-ye mubārak*, sacred hairs from the beard of the Prophet Muḥammad; and, finally, a *khirqā* or *jānda-chapān*, which was also supposed to have belonged to The Prophet. The influence of a brotherhood and its shaykhs was to a great extent determined by the presence of sacred relics, which were intended to confirm the traditions that accompanied the history of the *silsila* (spiritual genealogy). It was the violent struggle among Tīmūrīds and Shībānīds. Naqshbandiyya was the ally of the first, ‘Ishqiyya — of the second. Both brotherhoods used the relics they had as the banner in this struggle. Ancient Qur’ānic manuscripts became important argument in the political struggle. Their careful preservation guaranteed the result.

As we have seen in the late 19th century, Russian officers noted the unique material culture of the Central Asian Arabs. One of them acquired nearly half of a Qur’ānic manuscript, which was later sold to Irinei Nauphal. According to Ishānzāde Jura-Khan Asamov, a resident of Shahr-i Sabz¹, who belongs to the lineage of the Katta Langar *īshāns*², in 1941, as a child, he saw 140 folios which are part of the Qur’ānic manuscript under discussion. In 1983 our Uzbek colleague B. Babajanov succeeded in seeing them too, but the 1983 resolution of the Central Committee of the Uzbek Communist Party to combat folk Islamic beliefs played a fateful role in the history of the manuscript. The initiator and executor of this resolution was the then UzSSR minister of culture, R. Abdullaeva. In *mazārs* and mosques throughout the republic, sacred relics were confiscated and the graves of saints were excavated. The results of the digs, in which leading Uzbek scholars were forced to participate, were shown frequently on local television. Fearing for the manuscript, the chairman of the local *qishlaq* council brought it to his home, but was still unable to save it or other relics. Kibilov, deputy director of the KGB administration for the Qashqadarya region of Uzbekistan and a native of Jizzakh³ (which was of crucial significance in the system of local clan competition and mutual assistance) personally ordered that the Katta Langar holy relics be confiscated. According to eye-witnesses, on the very eve of the confiscation, one of the *qishlaqs*’ elders, Tukhto-Baba Rajazov, succeeded in taking several folios from the manuscript. In 1993, T. Qadirov, *hākim*⁴ of the Qashqadarya *wilayat*⁵ returned to

1 The district-level city in the Qashqadarya region in southern Uzbekistan.

2 An honorific title given to Sufi leaders in Central Asia.

3 The city and the centre of the Jizzakh region in Uzbekistan, located in the northeast of Samarkand.

4 Head of the local executive authority in Uzbekistan.

5 One of the 12 regions into which modern Uzbekistan is divided.

the *mazār*, the twelve folios, which I was happy to see and publish. In 2001, Uzbekistan customs officials seized two additional folios from the manuscript during an attempted export. This suggests that a portion of the manuscript confiscated in Katta Langar in 1983, was not destroyed and remains in private ownership on Uzbekistani territory.

As mentioned above, during our work in that time, we produced a monographic study on the manuscript, published facsimiles of folios that are conserved in St. Petersburg and Uzbekistan, and crafted a documentary that chronicles its history.¹ In Katta Langar, I learned of the Arabs who brought the manuscript, as well as the fact that their descendants still reside in Uzbekistan. At that time, my knowledge of their history and the multiple waves of migration were limited. Of course, I was aware that the initial Arabs arrived in Central Asia during the 7th century AD, alongside triumphant Muslim armies. Additionally, I recalled the vital role played by Arabs of Central Asia to safeguard classical Arabic linguistics in the 1920s.

I am thankful for the chance to pursue my expeditions to Uzbekistan, which were crucial in completing the research I present. In 2004, my inquiries led me to Jeynov.² On my initial visit, I was certain I would make every attempt to revisit the location, and subsequently returned in 2005 with fellow companions. Upon speaking with Uzbek *qishlaq* residents about the local Arab community, the name of Muradulo Saidov was frequently mentioned with recommendations to meet him. Finally, in 2004 while in Jeynov, I had this opportunity. Muradullo Saidov (1935—2013), a well-known public figure, a prominent agricultural producer, Hero of Labour of the Republic of Uzbekistan, founder and head of the Arab National Cultural Centre (Jeynov). He was an important state and communist party official in Soviet times and comes from a respected Arab lineage. Among his ancestors were the descendants of the Prophet, who came here together with Arab tribes at the turn of the 15th—16th centuries. The woman who greeted us on his doorstep in 2004 was his wife, Saltanat Saidova. She is the Honoured Teacher of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Cand. Sc. in Education and the granddaughter of Naşr al-Dīn Khān, the last ruler of the Khanate of Kokand (1865—1875). They have six children, 22 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. The Saidovs family history can be a guide to the history of Uzbekistan.

In 2005, experts in material culture, ethnography, physical anthropology and Islamic studies participated in an expedition to Jeynov. The team acquired a wealth of captivating materials, including ethnographic collections, hours of video footage and hundreds of photographs. After the team’s return, the materials were expeditiously processed. From 2004 to 2006, in St. Petersburg and Tampere (Finland), we curated an

1 See Rezvan, “*The Qur’ān of ‘Uthmān.*”

2 An urban settlement in Uzbekistan, situated in the Mirishkor district of the Qashqadaryya region, with a population of approximately 50,000. The majority of the population, around 80%, identify as Arab.

exhibition on local Arab culture and traditions.¹

The materials we discovered allow to conclude that, at the turn of the 7th—8th centuries, they left the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula and in the course of the great Arab conquests they found themselves on the Iraqi-Syrian border; then they migrated to Khurasan through Asia Minor, Iraq and Southwestern Iran, moved on to North Afghanistan in the 13th—14th centuries and finally came to the Qarshi region of the modern Uzbekistan. The Silk Road has historically served as a route for migration. A series of historical and ethnographic observations enabled us to infer that the Arabs, whose descendants presently reside in Jeynov of Qarshi region, originated from the southern region of Arabia. Evidence of their presence in the aforementioned regions of the Near and Middle East is apparent in their folklore and the patterns incorporated in carpet making.

Several legends about the migration of peoples in Central Asia share a common paradigm. For example, the Salars, a people of Turkic origin, believe that their ancestors once moved there from Samarkand. According to local legends, during the Mongol conquests, two Salar brothers fled from their native city in search of a new home. They loaded a wineskin with Samarkand water, a bag with soil from their homeland, and a manuscript of the Holy Qurʾān onto the back of their camel. They set off along the Great Silk Road towards China and eventually reached the area of Xunhua town, situated now in the eastern part of Qinghai Province. They settled on the hills, despite the locals' belief that they were infertile and unsuitable for cultivation. However, the Salars regarded these areas as comparable to their homeland and made it their home. According to legend, they halted at a location where the weight of the local soil and water matched that of Samarkand.²

An intriguing story is associated with the resettlement of shaykh Muḥammad Sādiq (1460—1545), the grandson of the 'Ishkiyya Brotherhood's founder, from Astana-Ātā to Katta Langar. As a young *murīd*, he was responsible for providing his teacher with heated water for pre-prayer ablutions. One day, he found himself out of fuel, so he carried a *qūmgḥān*³ of cold water under his arm and dozed off; a miracle occurred, and the water began to boil. The teacher recognized that his *murīd* had attained the *Ḥaqīqah*, the final stage

1 For details see exhibition catalogue: Efim Rezvan, *Jeynov – “We arrived”. Arabs of Uzbekistan: Images of the Traditional Culture* (St. Petersburg: MAE RAS, 2004). See also: Maryam E. Rezvan, “Early Qurʾānic MS from the Collections of St. Petersburg Kunstkamera (Preliminary Report).” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 10, no. 3 (2004): 59–65; Elena G. Tsareva, “Kovrodelie Arabov iuzhnykh Raionov Uzbekistana, Konets XIX –Nachalo. XXI Veka (po Kollektzii MAE i REM)” [“Carpet weaving of the Arabs of the Southern Regions of Uzbekistan. End of the 19th — Beginning of the 21st century (According to the MAE and REM Collections)”], *Sbornik Muzeia antropologii i etnografii*, vol. 62, *Obrazy i znaki v traditsiiakh Iuzhnoi i Iugo-Zapadnoi Azii [Collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, vol. 61, Images and signs in the traditions of South and Southwest Asia]*, 270–357 (in Russian), St. Petersburg: MAE RAN, 2015.

2 Efim Rezvan, *Between Turkestan and Tibet: The Salars*, (in Russian) (St. Petersburg: MAE RAS, 2010), 226—251.

3 A *qūmgḥān* is a narrow-necked water jug with a spout, handle, and lid, commonly found in Central Asia for washing and cleaning purposes.

of the mystical path.¹ With the words, “There is nothing for the two of us to do here,” he instructed him to seek another place to reside and preach. Upon parting, the teacher stated: “Make the place where your camel falls from fatigue and is unable to get up for three days your permanent abode.” Muḥammad Ṣādiq diligently searched the place for his *langar*’s² suitable location. During his travels, his camel, carrying a chest with the manuscript of the Holy Qur’ān on one side and the *khirqa* of the Prophet on the other, grew exhausted and collapsed in different places. After a day’s rest in one place and two more in another, the camel continued until it arrived in what would become the territory of Katta Langar. There it lay exhausted for three days. The Katta Langar *mazār* of Muḥammad Ṣādiq was the site where the ancient Qur’ān folios I described were safeguarded and venerated for centuries.

Returning to the problem of the origin of the local Arabs, it should be noted that it remains unclear what continuously propelled the Qashqadarya Arabs’ forefathers towards the East along the Great Silk Road’s paths. However, it is evident that an initial impetus stimulated centuries-old migrations.³ The preservation and transportation of ancient relics by these people illustrate their once lofty standing, making this a crucial point.

The link between the Katta Langar manuscript of the “Qur’ān of ‘Uthmān” and the people of Jeynov with the southern region of the Arabian Peninsula was established during an international historical and ethnographic expedition to Oman following the project *The Material World of the Qur’ān (the Everyday Life of Arabia in the Prophet’s Time)* in 2017. The geometric patterns found in the decorative illuminations that separate the *sūras* of the “Qur’ān of ‘Uthmān” are reminiscent of those featured on traditional Omani camel harnesses. The individual motifs shared among these patterns also appear on doors, metal products and jewellery (in 2018 very close ornaments I managed to see in Qatar as well). In the south of Oman, in Dhofar, we incidentally discovered a similar female tradition of wearing a metal ring with an amulet bead threaded through the hole in the nasal septum. In Oman, the septum nose ring is referred to as *khizāma*, which shares its general design norms and protective function with the *izmām*, septum nose ring from Jeynov. The *khizāma* also historically serves as a marker of changes in the status of girls during rites of passage. Apparently, in this region, as in Jeynov, the girl’s nasal septum was pierced, through which a ring

1 According to one of several interpretations, *Ḥaqīqah* is one of “the four Sufi stages”: *sharī’a* (exoteric path), *tarīqa* (esoteric path), *Ḥaqīqah* (mystical truth) and *ma’rifa* (final mystical knowledge). According to another opinion *Ḥaqīqah* means the finale of spiritual self-improvement.

2 A *langar* is, literally, an anchor (etimologically – “crook”), place of stay. It is widely spread as a name of the final retreat of a saint.

3 For example, there is a vague reference to their involvement in events connected to the demise of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the Prophet’s grandsons. Nonetheless, this could be a fabricated claim concocted by opponents of the ‘Ishqiyya brotherhood with an ulterior motive of undermining the importance of relics presented by their Arab counterparts.

was threaded to be worn when she became a married woman.¹

New opportunities to investigate the history and heritage of the Qashqadarya Arabs arise from the material gathered by I. N. Vinnikov (1897—1973), a distinguished Russian ethnographer and expert in Arabic linguistics.² In 2005, his unpublished monograph on the subject was discovered at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Among Vinnikov’s mentors were distinguished academics like I. Yu. Krachkovsky, L. Ya. Sternberg (1861—1927), a respected ethnographer, and P. K. Kokovtsov (1861—1942), notable as the founder of the Russian School of Semitic studies. The diligent and talented young man was invited to join the Department of General Ethnography at the Faculty of Ethnology and Linguistics at Leningrad State University in 1925. From 1929, Vinnikov worked at the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences (presently known as the Kunstkamera museum) which he headed in 1941 and 1942 during the dire years of the Leningrad Siege (in this period, an estimated 600 thousand to 1.5 million city residents perished due to starvation). In the university he founded and led the Department of Ethnography from 1938 to 1949, and also headed the Department of Assyrian and Hebrew Studies during the same period. In addition, he served as a professor of the Department of Arab Philology from 1955 onwards. He taught my teachers, and in Russia it is deemed necessary to commence studying the history of Arabia during the era of the Prophet by consulting his crucial contributions.³

The Vinnikov’s book, titled *The Qashqadarya Arabs: Language, Folklore, Ethnography* comprised sixty folklore texts written in the Arabic dialect spoken by the Qashqadarya Arabs, a Russian translation of

1 For details see: Efim Rezvan, “A Contribution Towards the History and Origin of the Katta Langar / St. Petersburg ‘Qur’ān of ‘Uthmān’.” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 23, no. 2 (2017): 3–9; Anna Kudriavtceva, “Bībī Hājar, Izmām and Zamzam: Myth and Ritual Among the Qashqadarya Arabs.” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 29, no. 1 (2023): 49–57. <https://doi.org/10.31250/1238-5018-2023-29-1-49-57>.

2 For more details about I. N. Vinnikov and his works ref.: Ignatius Yu. Krachkovsky, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi arabistiki* [*Essays on the History of Russian Arabic Studies*], (in Russian). (Moscow; Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1950), 225, 238, 252–253, 266.

3 See, for example: Isaak N. Vinnikov, “Dozhd, voda i rastitelnost na mogile doislamskih arabov” [“Rain, Water, and Vegetation at the Grave of Pre-Islamic Arabs”]. In *Zapiski Kollegii Vostokovedov pri Aziatskom Muzei AN SSSR* [*Notes of the College of Orientalists at the Asian Museum of the USSR Academy of Sciences*]. Vol. 5, (in Russian) (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1930), 367–377; Isaak N. Vinnikov, “Legenda o prizvanii Muhammada v svete etnografii” [“The Legend of the Vocation of Muhammad in Light of Ethnography”]. In *Sergeyu Fedorovichu Oldenburgu: k 50-letiyu nauchno-obschestvennoi zhizni (1882–1932): Sbornik statey* [*To Sergei Fedorovich Oldenburg: on the 50th Anniversary of Scientific and Social life: A Collection of papers*], (in Russian) (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1934), 125–146; Isaak N. Vinnikov, “Koranicheskie zametki; Koran 96:1–2” [“Qur’ānic Notes; Qur’ān 96:1–2”]. *Issledovaniia po istorii kultury narodov Vostoka* [*Research on the History of Culture of Eastern Peoples*], (in Russian). (Moscow; Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1960), 309–312.

these texts, and a glossary with around 3000 entries with valuable ethnographic observations by the author.¹ The book was written during the early post-war years, coinciding with the commencement of the “anti-cosmopolitan campaign” aimed at preventing “kowtowing to the West.” The movement aimed to combat pro-Western attitudes among the Soviet intelligentsia. Such leanings were deemed unpatriotic and received active discouragement.

There are three versions of the monograph in the Archive²: a hand-written and two type-written manuscripts. The Arabic words in the hand-written and the first type-written manuscripts are in Latin script. This approach ensured the relevance of the publication not only in Russia but also abroad. However, the editorial and publishing policy of the time required that the text be Russified, so I. N. Vinnikov prepared another version with the Russian transcription. In the detailed foreword the author explains his approach to the record of the folklore texts and the underlying system. In the edition currently prepared for publication we follow the first version of the manuscript, devoid of the political implications.

The mere presence of this work is linked to the disaster that occurred in Russia in 1917. The Bolshevik revolution required a paradigm shift in all spheres, including Russian Oriental studies, which now fell in line with the practical political agenda. The prime subject for research was the national liberation movement, classes and class struggle. By that time, Russian Orientalists, members of the Academy of Sciences, who had founded schools of thought of international significance, were mainly scholars of language and literature, so their main interest centered around oriental manuscripts, xylography, epigraphic and dead languages. Included within the agenda was the preservation of the classic tradition to study the culture and history of Eastern countries. Adjusting to the new realities, I. Yu. Krachkovsky, the leader of the Russian school of Arabic studies in those times as mentioned above, suggested that the main focus should be laid on such priority research areas as studying Arabic sources on the history of the territories that had become part of the USSR, on studying the living Arabic dialects then spoken in Soviet Central Asia, and on studying the material culture and history of the native speakers of those dialects. It was two enthusiastic and young scholars, I. N. Vinnikov and G. V. Tsereteli, who implemented Krachkovsky’s ideas.³ They undertook

1 Georgian specialist G. Chikovani conducted expeditions to the Arab villages in the Bukhara and Qashqadarya regions during 1980, 1986, and 2000. Furthermore, he published research about the Qashqadarya Arabic dialect. See Guram Chikovani, *Kashkadar’inskii arabskii dialekt Central’noi Azii* [*The Qashqadarya Arabic Dialect of Central Asia*], (in Russian) (Tbilisi: Tsereteli Institute of Oriental Studies; Tbilisi Institute of Asia and Africa, 2008); Guram Chikovani and Zviad Tskhvediani, “Dialectological Expedition to Central Asia October — November, 2018, Studies on Arabic Dialectology and Sociolinguistics.” *Proceedings of the 13th International Conference of AIDA, June 10–13, Kutaisi, Georgia* (Kutaisi: Akaki Tsereteli State University, 2020), 83–108.

2 St. Petersburg Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences Archive. Fund 1045. Inventory 1. No. 115.

3 Due to these works G. V. Tsereteli (1904—1973) became the founder of the Georgian school of Arabic studies. Brief review of the current situation in the field see: Olga A. Bernikova, “Qashqadarya Dialect of the Arabic Language: A Viewpoint from the 21st century.” In *Jeynov – “We arrived” (The Language and Material Culture of the Qashqadarya Arabs)*, edited by Anna Kudriavtceva & Efim Rezvan, 415–422, (in Russian). St. Petersburg: MAE RAS, 2023.

several expedition trips and, based on the outcomes, composed numerous analytical works on the Bukhara and Qashqadarya dialects of the Arabic language in Central Asia. Following a few expeditions, Vinnikov defended his doctoral thesis entitled *Arabs in the USSR* on June 19, 1941, three days before the war with Nazi Germany started.

All of the aforementioned resources, in conjunction with studies by additional Russian scholars regarding the Qashkadarya Arabs, demanded a thorough examination culminating in a consolidated publication. Currently, such a publication is being prepared for release. In general, the book titled *Jeynov — “We arrived” (The Language and Material Culture of the Qashqadarya Arabs)* analyses the unique practice of maintaining the native language and cultural identity of a small ethnic group amidst a mixed Turkic–Iranian language environment prevailing at different levels. The central aspect of the book comprises the above mentioned chapters authored by I. N. Vinnikov. His work provides an overview of the Qashqadarya Arabs, folklore and ethnographic records in the local Arabic dialect and features a vast dictionary with linguistic annotations for texts recorded in 1938, 1943, and 1944. They remained inaccessible to a wide range of researchers for over seventy years.¹

The book also presents the original research by St. Petersburg academics, museum collection descriptions, and materials from our ethnographic expeditions during the 1980s and 2000s. This is, first of all, the article entitled *Ethnic Peculiarities of Qashqadarya Arabs of Jeynov Settlement* written by B. Z. Hamburg (1930—1986), a brilliant ethnographer and archaeologist, long-term staff member of the Museum of the Ethnography of the Peoples of the USSR (present day the Russian Museum of Ethnography). In 1981, he went on an expedition to the Qashqadarya region of Uzbekistan and brought back to his museum an interesting collection on the ethnography of Arabs. The abovementioned article was never published, as in the 1980s one of the pseudoscientific functionaries found the surname of its author incompatible with the fact that the paper was devoted to the culture of Arabs. As a result, the text of the article was excluded

1 It is important to observe that the Qashqadarya Arabs were much less “lucky” than the Bukhara Arabs, as I. N. Vinnikov went to the area of settlement of the Bukhara Arabs — *qishlaqs* Jovgari in Gijduvon District and Arabxona in Qipchoq Council, Vobkent District during his first expedition to Uzbekistan (1936). His works devoted to the language and folklore of the latter were successfully published. For details see Isaak N. Vinnikov, “Materialy po yazyku i folkloru bukharskih arabov” [“Materials on the Language and Folklore of the Bukhara Arabs”], (in Russian). *Sovetskoye vostokovedenie* 6 (1949): 120–145; Isaak N. Vinnikov, “Obraztsy folkloru bukharskih arabov. 1” [“Samples of Folklore of the Bukhara Arabs. 1”], (in Russian). *Archiv Orientalni* 25, no. 2 (1957): 173–189; Isaak N. Vinnikov, “Obraztsy folkloru bukharskih arabov. 2” [“Samples of Folklore of the Bukhara Arabs. 2”], (in Russian). *Archiv Orientalni* 25, no. 3 (1957): 426–451; Isaak N. Vinnikov, “Folklor bukharskih arabov” [“The Folklore of the Bukhara Arabs”], (in Russian). *Acta Orientalia* 6, nos. 1–3 (1957): 181–206; Isaak N. Vinnikov, *Slovar’ dialekta bukharskikh arabov* [A Dictionary of the Bukharian Arabic Dialect], (in Russian) (Moscow; Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1962); Isaak N. Vinnikov, *Iazyk i fol’klor bukharskikh arabov* [Language and Folklore of the Bukharian Arabs], (in Russian) (Moscow: Nauka, Glavnaia redaktsiia vostochnoi literatury, 1969). Ref. also: Georgi V. Tsereteli, *Arabskie dialekty Srednei Azii, 1 (Bukharskiy arabskiy dialekt)* [Arabic Dialects of Central Asia, 1 (Bukhara Arabic Dialect)], (in Russian) (Tbilisi: Akademiia nauk Gruz. SSR, 1956).

from the collection of papers prepared for publication.¹ These materials include information about the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera and the Russian Ethnographic Museum’s collections, as well as research on the history and ethnography of the Qarshi Arabs and the place of Vinnikov’s valuable work in the history of Arabic dialectology. The findings are crucial in exposing the aspects of Uzbek Arabs’ cultural identity that are vital for safeguarding their heritage. The video footage attached to the edition is connected with our projects devoted to Uzbek Arabs and is available with QR-codes.

The research to which I. N. Vinnikov devoted over ten years of his life goes to press in 2023, almost 85 years after he had begun his study of the Qashqadarya Arabs. The book is the result of the work by four generations of Russian scholars who conducted their studies in or around Qarshi, particularly in Jeynov.

Vinnikov notes that the general answer given by the local Arabs to the question of what is their tribal origin sounds as “*firqatna Shaybān*” or “*qabilatna Shaybān*” (“We are from Shaybān”).² Our team heard the same answer in 2005. In fifty years after Vinnikov, Chikovani’s informants from the *qishlāqs* of Jeynov and Qamashi consider themselves to be direct descendants of the first Arab conquerors, from the Hāshim branch of the Quraysh tribe.³ It is difficult to reconcile the conflicting reports. On one hand, it is a fact that *sayyids* were among the ancestors of Qashkadarya Arabs. However, on the other hand, there is an evident attempt to elevate the significance of their ancestors.

Conclusion

The Qur’ān holds a central position in a religious and philosophical system that has played a significant and symbolic role in human history. Centuries passed since the appearance of the very first Qur’ānic copy have seen mankind endure a multitude of ideological shifts and cultural revolutions: mass political and religious movements have followed one after the other, philosophical conceptions and schools have become popular only to be forgotten, cultural orientations and priorities have changed. In one fashion or another, the history of manuscripts, editions, translations of the Qur’ān found its expression in major events, shaking the world. The history of the “Uthmānic Qur’ān” manuscript spans at least twelve centuries, a remarkable tale bound up with the fates of dynasties and states, cities and people, the fate of Islamic civilization from its emergence in Arabia in the 7th century to the triumph of Islam, which survived and outlasted communism

1 Boris Z. Humburg, “Ethnic Features of the Qashqadarya Arabs (the Village of Jeynov),” In *Jeynov – “We arrived” (The Language and Material Culture of the Qashqadarya Arabs)*, edited by Anna Kudriavtceva & Efim Rezvan, 467–479, (in Russian). St. Petersburg: MAE RAS, 2023.

2 Isaak N. Vinnikov, “The Qashqadarya Arabs (Language, Folklore, Ethnography).” In *Jeynov – “We arrived” (The Language and Material Culture of the Qashqadarya Arabs)*, edited by Anna Kudriavtceva & Efim Rezvan, (in Russian) (St. Petersburg: MAE RAS, 2023), 35–411, at 39. In pre-Islamic times, the Shaybān tribal group inhabited the region neighbouring to Qatar. See François Déroche et al. *Les origines du Coran* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2015), 29.

3 Chikovani, *Kashkadar’inskii arabskii dialekt*, 77–78, 101–104, 146, 170–173.

in the Muslim republics of the former USSR.¹

The same can be said about the history of European Arabic studies, and naturally, Russian Arabic studies are no different as we have seen. In numerous instances, the study of Arabic originated from the necessity to comprehend the Muslims' Holy Scripture. Similarly, the rational progression of scientific inquiry frequently directed Arabist scholars towards the Qur'ānic text, its manuscripts, or interpretations.

The prominent French physiologist Claude Bernard (1813—1878) is the author of a wonderful aphorism: “Art is I; science is we.” This is how I understand the quote: science is a collective action not only now and today, but also through time; without the ‘dynasties’ of our professors and teachers, the scholastic life of me and my colleagues working now in Russia would have been completely different, if at all.

As was mentioned above I had the opportunity to make an exhibition project about these people and a documentary about them — something I had dreamt about. However, I failed to mention something crucial. The Arab descendants residing in Uzbekistan close to Qarshi did more than just keep ancient Islamic relics safe; they also had a hand in the state of classical Arabic studies within the USSR. All Russian scholars of Classical Arabic Studies owe a debt of gratitude to these people.

The forthcoming publication referenced earlier, along with the present text, aims to pay honours and tribute to our teachers and continue what they began, what they preserved and augmented, often in harsh fieldwork conditions and under stressful life circumstances. Today, considering the significant and diverse findings, it is imperative that advanced research techniques be employed to investigate the manuscript of the “Qur'ān of ‘Uthmān”, the local Arabic dialects, and the material culture of the Arab population in Uzbekistan. Specifically, we refer to the DNA analysis and novel linguistic methods relying on big data and AI technology. I have a strong conviction that this endeavour will yield intriguing discoveries. During my visit to Qatar in 2018, I was struck by the commonplace construction site fences enclosing the Education City in Doha, which were adorned with the phrases, “Achieve. Wonder. Think. Discover. Innovate. Explore.” This left a lasting impression on me. I look forward to the insightful contributions of our Arab colleagues, with a particular emphasis on the younger members, in the forthcoming study.

¹ Before the Russian president's visit to Saudi Arabia (February 2007), a Qur'ān was made in Russia on thin gold plates costing “tens of millions of roubles”. 14 kg of triple-nine gold was used in the manufacture of the “book” (163 gold pages around 14 cm high and around 10 cm wide) at the Russian Mint. In 1915, Vladimir Putin presented Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme and spiritual leader of Iran, with a precise replica of the manuscript during a private meeting.

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