



## Source Critical Studies and Historiography. Islamic Tradition Традиционное источниковедение и историография в исламе

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*Оригинальная статья*

### The General Fund<sup>1</sup> of Arab-graphic manuscripts and books of Russia and its importance for world science, culture and education

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**Abstract:** the importance of the study of the manuscript and cultural heritage of the Turkic Muslim peoples of Russia from the 17<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> cent. is still awaiting its full acknowledgement. Although there is a general understanding of the necessity of this task, still there is no agreed plan of moving forward, not at least because of the complexity of the problem. Among others, the complex task includes such aspects as the source critical studies, bibliographical, theological and many others. Along with these aspects there is an important task, which is although preliminary, however, inevitable. It consists in creating a checklist of the survived books in Arabic script, both handwritten and printed, which pertain to this period. The author of the present article stresses the importance of this task, which is going to result in creation of an electronic resource, which would comprise the records of the survived Islamic written heritage in the Arabic script, which originates from the territory of the former Russian Empire.

**Keywords:** Islam, culture of; Islam, scholarship of; Islam, science of; script, Arabic; Islam, heritage, written, of; Islam, heritage, written, resource, electronic, of

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<sup>1</sup> The term «fund» is used here in the broadest sense. It describes the collections of manuscripts which had been written in Arabic script. The term «general» describes generally all collections, which sit in different archives and/or libraries.



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## Общий фонд арабографических рукописей и книг России и его значение для мировой науки, культуры и образования

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**Резюме:** статья акцентирует внимание научного сообщества на проблеме формирования единого каталога арабографического книжного фонда мусульман дореволюционной России для дальнейшего систематического изучения культурного и научного наследия ислама Евразии. Проблема изучения тюрко-мусульманского научного и культурного наследия XVII – начала XX в. до настоящего времени не осознана в полной мере. При общем понимании того, что таковое изучение необходимо и что процесс этот уже развивается, нет четкого согласованного на каком-либо уровне плана этой работы. А между тем эта проблема при ее науковедческом анализе распадается на составные: источниковедческую, историографическую, археографическую, библиографическую, культурологическую, историологическую и этнологическую, теологическую и даже педагогическую. Но главное, никто до конца не представляет себе границ и масштабов этого наследия. Оно же – мусульманское научное и культурное наследие – собрано, главным образом, в арабографическом книжном фонде. В представленной статье автор делает попытку анализа именно этого вопроса и постановки проблемы создания информационного ресурса для дальнейшего планового изучения «Общего фонда» арабографических изданий мусульман дореволюционной России.

**Ключевые слова:** алфавит; арабская графика; ислам, культура; ислам, наследие; книжный фонд; наука; образование

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The Arabic script<sup>2</sup> became the major vehicle for transmissions of the texts and ideas on the territory of the former Russian Empire since Islam was embraced at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> cent AD by the population of the Itil (Volga) Bulgaria. Although some scholars think that this did happen much earlier, i.e. in the 7<sup>th</sup> cent AD, there is no record of a single source, which originated in this region prior to the officially accepted date. The earliest texts, which deal with the Islamic population of the Itil were written by the Arab geographers and travelers and originate from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>3</sup> AD.

A period of around one thousand years, which passed since the 10<sup>th</sup> cent. AD has not been marked by a great output of the texts written and preserved in Arabic script. The number of survived manuscripts is negligible in contrast to the huge number of Muslims who lived on the territory of the Russian Empire. In fact, Muslims represented around 11.1% (13,889,421 people) of the population of Russia and were after the Orthodox Christians second largest religious community in the Muscovy Russia (the Moscow Kingdom)<sup>4</sup>.

This obvious paucity of the texts written in Arabic script has several reasons. In the first instance, this paucity was influenced by the historical formation of the the Moscow Kingdom (the Russian Empire), which was both bloody but also well-balanced and frequently peaceful. The Russian State gradually incorporated the areas with traditionally Islamic population, such as the Volga region, the southern Urals, Siberia, Caucasus and Central Asia. The Russian power, however, was not particularly interested in preserving the writings of the non-Christians, the so-called “busurmen” (i.e. infidels). This was also exacerbated by the historically utilitarian attitude to the texts in the Muslim societies. Secondly, the incorporation of the neighbouring states into the Russian State was still frequently accompanied by the external and internal revolts, violence, etc., which was at that time a normal process of the Empire formation. As a result, many texts just perished in the course of this historical development. Thirdly, the Arabic printing in Russia took place only in the middle of the XVIII century. The hand-written books, compared to the printed editions, were produced at a much lesser scale. These three reasons to our mind explain the discrepancy between the huge number of Muslims who lived in Russia and comparatively modest number of survived texts written in Arabic script.

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<sup>2</sup> Also: “arabographic” is used here describing the fact that in Russia until 1917 the Arabic script served to record the texts as in Arabic as well as other languages, e.g. the Old ( not ancient) Tatar, or Old Turkic, Persian and some others. In a number of instances, the Arabic alphabet was adapted to the local needs featured some new signs and letter combinations. In the 1920-s and 30-s, the Islamic population in USSR (including Tatars, Bashkirs, Azerbaijanis) were using the Arabic script. In 1928 by the decision of the International Congress of Turcologists (held in Baku) it was replaced to Latin. After another 10 years, it was changed again; this time it was replaced by Cyrillic.

<sup>3</sup> There are numerous historical and religious works on this topic: [1–6].

<sup>4</sup> The Russian Imperial Census. In: *The General Corpus of the Data Obtained During the First Imperial Census Carried Out on the 28th of January 1897*. Vol. 1-2. St Petersburg; 1905.



One would of course expect the Central and Low Volga regions, the Southern Urals, Crimea and Caucasus to be the centers of the vibrant arabographic book culture, which they indeed, were, however, the texts produced there did not survive. The lack of interest for the “busurmen” book production led to the fact that the book depositaries were frequently destroyed like those in Kazan seized by the army of the Czar Ivan the Terrible in 1552<sup>5</sup>. The fate treated better the documents related to the Crimean and Nogai khanates, which were better represented and preserved in the Moscow archives [9–12]. Many texts, written both in Russian and European (predominantly Latin) languages supply enough evidence that the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the embassies of Crimean, Nogai, Astrakhan and Kazan khanates were active in Moscow. The records on these embassies (in fact – Khan residences) survived in the archives of the Foreign Ministry, along with the correspondence between the khans and Moscow government. Diplomatic letters of the Crimean and Nogai khans to the Moscow princes and tsars, as well as documents and treaties between Moscow and the khanates of the “Post Golden” Horde period are very well preserved [13; 14]. The texts survived in the ambassadorial books and the so-called “stolbtsy” (i.e. texts written in columns and preserved in rolls) of the Foreign Ministry [15]. Although most of the documents were translated into Russian, the originals written in Arabic script along with complete political and legal texts did accompany them.

Many more texts in Arabic script entered the Russian archives only in the 18<sup>th</sup> cent. It was reflection of the expansion of the Russian Empire into Asia. Equally at this time Islam was officially recognized as a religion of a large number of the Russian subjects. On the initiative of Catherine the Great in 1787 was created the Muslim Spiritual Assembly in Ohrenburg. This coincided with introducing a study of the East as an academic discipline in the Russian Universities, which was followed by establishing of specialist book collections to facilitate the scholarly work. Scores of the well-known Russian and European researchers became directly engaged in collecting and describing the books written in Oriental languages.

The first institutions, which dealt with the Oriental “curiosities” were the so called “Kunstkammer” (russ. “Kunstkamera”) and the Asiatic Museum. The

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<sup>5</sup> M. G. Khudyakov – a well-known historian – describes this loss in the following way: “The history of the Kazan khanate will hardly ever be investigated to the desired degree. The reason is that the main sources – the state archives of the Kazan khanat were lost. We know that diplomatic relations between the Khazan khanate and foreign States have always taken the form of written agreements and extensive diplomatic correspondence, similar to that which was left from the relations of the Nogai Principality and the Crimean khanate with the Russian government. Civil relations within the state were constantly regulated with the use of record management – lawsuits, trade contracts and transactions, agreements and acts were always made in written form; extensive registers and lists in the form of census books were maintained by the government for the purpose of residents’ taxation. There were archives that stored papers and documents. Unfortunately, those archives were destroyed by the conquerors. The key sources were lost, and the history of the khanate now has to be reconstructed from the minor fragments of secondary sources, which will never be able to fully compensate for the loss”. In the XX century (exactly as M. Khudyakov expected) the meagre corpus of the sources on the Kazan khanate history did indeed broaden but not to a great extent. For further information, see: [7; 8].



“Kunstkammer” later a kind of ethnographic museum was established by Peter the Great. The Asiatic Museum founded in 1818 by the Russian Imperial Government became an academic body. From the very beginning the books written in Arabic script became one of the major targets in its collecting activities.

The Asiatic Museum was rivalled by the Moscow Institute of Oriental languages (the so called «Lazarev Institute»), founded in 1815 by the rich Armenian merchants and philanthropists. For the centuries to come this Institute was one of the centres where the Russian diplomats received a thorough training prior to be posted to the “foreign” East. Its collections grew simultaneously with the development of the teaching activity. Apart from the private funding by the Lazarev family, they were supported by donations from the alumni of the Institute. Many books were on purpose purchased in the Middle East, Ottoman Empire and the Central Asia.

Between the 18<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> cent., large collections of the books written and printed in Arabic script were established in other Russian state and private libraries, museums and archives. Among them the Public Library in St Petersburg (nowadays the Russian National Library), the Count Nikolaj Roumiantseff’s personal archive, collections and a subsidiary library (after 1828 the Public Library, now the State Public Library [16]), the what is now State Central Historical Archive in St Petersburg and the State Historical Museum in Moscow<sup>6</sup> to name just a few.

Along with these depositories located in the two Russian capitals there were other important collections established in provincial centres of the Russian Empire. The most important among them were in the city of Kazan, which historically was the centre of Islamic culture in the Russian Empire. One should name here the library of the former Orthodox Theological Academy, which was founded in 1797<sup>7</sup>. Along with other materials, the library collected handwritten and printed books in Arabic script on various subjects, viz. history, art, literature, medicine, astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, and Islamic theology in Tatar, Arabic, Persian and many other languages of the East. After the 1917 Great October Socialist Revolution, and the subsequent abolition of the Kazan Theological Academy, a significant part of these materials was fortunately not lost but transferred and stored in the State Historical Archive of the Tatar Autonomous Republic (now the National archive of the Republic of Tatarstan).

Today this unique collection, which among others comprises many valuable handwritten books in Arabic script, such as the work by the world famous Arabic grammarian Sibawayhi (VIII., Basra, Iraq) [22], the works by Tatar Muslim theolo-

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<sup>6</sup> *The Unknown Pages of National Oriental Studies*. Moscow; 1997, p. 182; Two Arabic manuscripts (Fund 77, No. 156, 140). About them see: [17].

<sup>7</sup> There was an eastern mission department at the Academy where missionaries who spoke Oriental languages (including Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Tatar) were trained. Due to that numerous arabographic manuscripts and books were collected and preserved at the Academy’s library. See also: [18, pp. 7–8; 19–21].



gians, scientists and even the artists of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> cent., Sh. Marjani<sup>8</sup> [23], Q. Nasiri [24]<sup>9</sup>, the Khalfins<sup>10</sup> and many others. A large collection of handwritten and printed books in Arabic script is also housed in the Library of the former Kazan Imperial University (nowadays – the Kazan (Volga region) Federal University). Its collections were built up by the famous faculty professors of the 19<sup>th</sup> cent., such as C. M. Fraehn, G. N. Akhmarov, A. K. Kazem-Bek, N. F. Katanov and many others. The earliest manuscripts book preserved there, dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. The subsequent five hundred years (up to the 17<sup>th</sup> cent. AD) are represented rather sporadically. The largest and the most important part of the collection comprises the manuscripts and printed books from the 18<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> cent. Some of them are unique indeed<sup>11</sup>. Among them are the copies of the works by Abu Ali Ibn-Sina, al-Farabi, al-Ghazali, al-Arabi and other Arab and Persian scholars. The library also houses the works by the prominent Tatar theologians, such as Abdelnaser al-Kursavi, Gabdrahim Utyz Imani, Shihabuddin Marjani, many of which are still awaiting their publication. During the Soviet era, various texts originally preserved in other Tatar academic and public libraries as well as in private collections were transferred (or donated) to the Kazan University

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.millattashlar.ru/index.php/> Mardzhani Sh. “*Mustafad al-akbar fi ahwali Kazan wa Bulgar*” [The Sources on the History of Kazan and Bulgar]. This two-book corpus of historical sources in Tatar is a bibliographical rarity. The first book was published in 1885, 1895; the second in 1890. The work contains information on the history of the Bulgar, Khazar, Tatar and other Turkic peoples. Another work by Mardzhani “*Wafiyat al-aslyaf wa tahiyyat al-akhlyaf*” [About the Predecessors in Full detail. Their Salutations to the Descendants]. A bibliographical corpus of materials on some of the well-known social, political, cultural and scientific personalities of the Muslim world. A seven-volume manuscript is preserved at the Research Library of the Kazan Federal University.

<sup>9</sup> Bibliographical index. Qayum Nasiri. 1825–1945. (The materials of the scientific sessions commemorating the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary). Kazan, 1948, pp. 129–131.

<sup>10</sup> Sagit Khalfin was a Tatar language teacher at the 1st Kazan Gymnasium, where the “Asiatic Printing House” was opened later. He was the author of the first Tatar language textbook for Russian educational institutions, published in 1778 and the two-volume Russian-Tatar dictionary. Ishak Khalfin replaced his father at the Kazan Gymnasium and taught Oriental languages. He is known for his translation of the “*Ustav Upravy Blagochiniya*” [the Charter of the Police Department] and “*Uchrezhdeniye o Guberniyah*” [the Statute of Provinces] into Tatar. Those legal provisions were published in the “Asiatic Printing House” in Saint Petersburg. The most famous personality in the field of historiography and linguistics, however, was Ibrahim Khalfin, who worked at the same Gymnasium. After the Kazan University had been established he had a steady career starting from the ordinary teacher and finishing with an ordinary professor. He also became the first editor and the supervisor of the “Asiatic Printing House”, after it was transferred from St. Petersburg to the 1<sup>st</sup> Kazan Gymnasium. I. Khalfin is known to have written (written in Tatar) the “The Alphabet and the Etymology of the Tatar Language”, “The Brief Russian History and Geography”, “The History of Abul-Ghazi Bagadur Khan about the Mongols and Tatars”, “The Life of Genghis Khan and Aksak-Timur” (with additions of some history-related passages given in alphabetical order for students’ purposes). He organized the publication of a valuable source – the treatise called “The Genealogical tree of the Turks” (“*Shezhereit-tereq*”) by Abulgazi Bahadur-Khan with his own comments. And that is not all! See: *Biograficheskiy slovar professorov i prepodavateley Imperatorskogo Kazanskogo Universiteta: Za sto let (1804–1904)* [25, pp. 193–194].

<sup>11</sup> The term “*spisok*” in Russian source critical studies is used to describe such copies from original sources, which were made at the time when the printing press was not existent. Then there was a tradition of hand-copying books and other documents.





Library. This collection management resulted in a significant growth of the Library's fund of arabographic manuscript and printed books, which eventually became the largest in Tatarstan. Nowadays consists of more than 3,500 texts<sup>12</sup>.

Another centre of the book production in the Arabic script in the former Russian Empire became the Northern Caucasus and especially Daghestan. The major part of the texts, which originate from this area were written in the local languages, mostly Turkic. These texts were, however, used also in non-Turkic communities by the Laks, Avars, Lezgins, Rutuls, Dargins and other Caucasian peoples. Nowadays these holdings are preserved mainly in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents (RSAAD, Moscow), the Central State Archive of the Republic of Daghestan (CSARD), the State Archives of the Astrakhan Administrative Division (Oblast) and the Stavropol Area (Krai) (SA AO and SA SK), the archives at the Daghestan Research Centre of the Russian Academy and the Research Library of the Daghestan State University (NB DSU).

Although there is still no check-list of the books written in Arabic script, their approximate number is around some dozens of thousands, since the central State Archive of the Republic of Daghestan alone houses over three thousands of items [27].

The advent of Arabic printing in Russia was significant to the formation of the Oriental holdings of the Russian libraries. The first texts, which appeared in the Arabic print were two Petrine "manifestos". One of them appeared during the so-called "Pruth River Campaign", a part of the Russo-Ottoman war of 1710–1711; another one was printed almost ten years later during the Russo-Persian war of 1722–1723. Although these manifestos were technically speaking not actual books, yet for their production were used movable fonts. No other activity in Arabic printing in Russia is recorded until the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> cent. The beginning of a full-scale book-printing in Arabic in Russia started in 1787 in St Petersburg, when the so-called "Asiatic Printing House" of I. Schnor received the Imperial order to print the full text of the Holy Qur'an. By doing this the Russian Empress Catherine the Great did show Her Imperial favour to Islam and her Muslim subjects. This edition of the Holy Quran was reprinted for several times. The "Asiatic Printing House" gradually became the specialist typography where other Oriental texts were produced.

The monopoly of the Asiatic Printing House came, however, to an end with the establishing in the city of Kazan of the so-called Tatar typography. Incessant appeals to the Russian Empress from the Volga region Muslims to establish the Oriental typography finally received the Royal favour, however during the reign of her son the Emperor Paul I. In 1799 he ordered the transfer to Kazan of two printing presses as well as a set of Arabic movable fonts. This equipment was taken from the I. Schnor's printing house, which was formally under the rule of the Governing Senate in St Petersburg. The printing equipment was subsequently transferred to the Kazan Gymnasium where a new printing shop, however, under the same name, viz. the "Asiatic Printing House" (russ.: "Asiatskaia tipografia") was eventually established.

<sup>12</sup> For more information on the library and the collection see: [26].



The The privileges listed in the Imperial decree included among others the paragraph as follows: "...the Kazan Gymnasium is herewith entrusted with the right of censorship of all books in Tatar as well as other Asian languages either imported or produced locally, ...it is also granted a permission to print the required number of Alqurans [22]<sup>13</sup> (i.e. the copies of the Holy Qur'an). With the transfer of the printing press to the city of Kazan the printing in Arabic was mainly conducted there and only sporadically in St Petersburg. Kazan therefore finally became one of the most important cultural centres in the former Russian Empire; it justly claimed the status of Russia's "third capital" along with St Petersburg and Moscow.

This is well illustrated by the fact that only three years after the official begin of Arabic printing, in Kazan was founded a University, which by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. was among others a renowned centre for Asian and oriental studies.

The "Asiatic Printing House" of Kazan played a very significant role in the printing and distribution of the copies of the Holy Quran. The Holy Book was published in various formats, i.e. both as the whole work and as selections of certain *suras*, the so-called "khaftyak-i-sharif" and "juzamma" (*suras* 78–114) or even separate *suras*. These selections were intended for the purposes of education, in the first instance, the coranic studies. One has to mention here for example a unique edition of the Holy Qur'an in 30 parts (10 volumes) for a specific target group, the young children<sup>14</sup>. The research by A. Karimullin shows that during only the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the «Asiatic Printing House» at the Kazan Gymnasium published seven different titles; the total issue amounted to 31 200 copies [28, p. 122].

By the 1830s, the Imperial Kazan University and the "Asiatic Printing House" already played a central role in the printing in Arabic in the Russian Empire. Soon after it became a truly unique institution: Along with Arabic the books were printed in many languages of the East, including Chinese and Sanskrit, as well as the West in Cyrillic and Latin. This astonishing fact already allows some scholars to argue that at this period this was the world's only typography, which could cater for so many tastes.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the number of printing houses in Kazan was already twenty. Altogether they printed up to 70% of all books in Arabic script published in Russia. Along with those in Kazan, in the cities of Ohrenburg, Ufa, Troitsk, Uralsk and Moscow were also set up typographies, which printed and distributed books in Arabic script. This very fact gave the later specialists in the bibliography of printed books in Arabic the right to identify this period as the "golden age of Muslim book culture". We would add by calling it the golden age of the "arabographic" book culture in Russia as well.

<sup>13</sup> Here you can find fragments of the mentioned Emperor's decree of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1800.

<sup>14</sup> The printing house's curator T. G. Burashev writes at the end of this edition: «Әтфальләр очен ошбу Кәламе Аллаһ шәрифнең тәркиб вә низамы илә басма улмакына фәрмане һөмәюнә сәбеб улдыкымыза укыялардан вә мәнфәгать аланлардан хәер-дога илә яд улмакымыз мәржүдер» (the text is presented in D. G. Abdullina's interpretation).





It is still not possible to give the exact number of books published in the Russian Empire in Ottoman and Arabic languages. The estimates provided by the scholars who research this subject are also not very precise. One can only say that between the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the printing houses in Kazan alone could have published altogether around several millions copies of several thousands of titles. Following the research by R. R. Safiullina by the Imperial Kazan University were published around 2000 titles purely in Arabic [29]. Also, 1600 titles were published in Arabic and Tatar, 80 titles in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish, 60 titles in Arabic and Persian. It is known also that in this period there were published other 200 titles, however, we do not possess the records about the language the books were originally written in. Simultaneously, the publishing activity was recorded in other cities, such as Ohrenburg, Ufa and Troitsk [30].

One should not also forget that at that time among the educated population and especially in the religious universities (*madrasas*) still was flourishing a tradition of preparing manuscript copies, including the production of custom-made bindings. By copying a book by hand, one was aiming to achieve several goals, among which were the improving of writing skills, enlarging the library or even making money, when a book was transcribed on request [31].

Of course, in terms of rarity the printed and hand-written books from the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries cannot be compared to those preserved in the St Petersburg Asiatic Museum, the Moscow Rumyantsev Museum or the collections from the Lazarev institute in Moscow. However, by the quirk of fate even these books soon after the 1917 Great October Socialist Revolution will be classified by librarians and bibliographers as “rare”. This was due to the then cultural politics of the Soviets and especially its the so-called “militant atheism”. In fact, all the “religious” books had to be destroyed and many of them were indeed. Another blow was the compulsory change of the alphabets. In 1928–1937 many languages on the territory of the former Russian Empire, which employed the Arabic script had to use Latin and subsequently Cyrillic. Although these innovations had some obvious reasons (like, for example, the normalization and unification of the library titles in the Soviet Union as well as creating the script for some languages, which originally did not have it), with regard to the so-called “non-Russian national minorities”<sup>15</sup> it was in a way detrimental. This exercise had cut off the younger generation from the cultural and historical heritage, making ever less people capable of reading, e.g. Old Tatar books written in Arabic script. Already by 1950 such books were considered to be pretty much “archaic”. Moreover, an Arabic script and everything written in it by that time was perceived as “religious”, i.e. even “dangerous” in the then officially atheist state. Therefore every-

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<sup>15</sup> In rus. – *natsmeni*. The Russian term “natsmen” was introduced to scientific vocabulary after the 1917 revolution, when the tradition of acroabbreviations was particularly popular. Thus the words “*natsionalnoye*” (national) and “*menshinstvo*” (minority) were combined into the word “natsmen” (sing.) or “natsmeny” (plur.) which might mean both a person belonging to a national minority and just a non-Russian person.



thing written in Arabic had to be relegated to the attics, sheds or even not unfrequently burned as fuel.

The cultural heritage written in Arabic script was preserved (and occasionally saved!) by those, who knew its true value, i.e. scholars, librarians and teachers. They encouraged those who kept the books to donate them to the libraries and museums both in the capital and provinces. Fortunately, the number of such museums, founded and supported by the State mostly after the Great October Socialist Revolution was at that time gradually increasing.

The “Archaeographic Commission”, a scholarly body established in the USSR played a special and active role in preserving the old books written or printed in Arabic. This commission organized and supported research trips of the USSR Academy of Sciences specialists in ethnography, folklore, language and literature in their endeavor to identify, collect and preserve the “dying out” folk culture, which among others included unique and unusual books and manuscripts. The Commission’s local branches became instrumental in creating depositaries and research centres in the former Soviet Republics (including the Central Asia) as well as the Autonomous Republics, such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Chechnya, Azerbaijan and in Siberia (Russian Federation).

Due to these activities nowadays a significant number of educational bodies and museums of Bashkortostan (former BASSR) preserve some rare books and documents written in Arabic. Among them is the A.Z. Validi National library (Ufa). The library itself was founded in 1921 as the then “Central Research Library” of the Governorate of Bashkortostan. Subsequently it received the status of the Republican Public Library of the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialists Republic (BASSR). In the early 1930s, the rich collection of books from the former Muslim library (“The Harp of the East”), were added to the National Library’s collections. Those books have formed the core of the manuscript and rare books section of the Library. Nowadays the whole collection comprises over 200 manuscript books and about 13 000 printed books in Arabic script from the 15<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Old Tatar<sup>16</sup> (or -turk. – Iske tatar) – that means – «former». The Tatar, or more precisely the common Türkic literary language of Russian muslims, in the texts was based on Arabic script (alphabet). It was called the «Old» in Soviet times. See note 2.) languages.

The second important collection of texts produced in Arabic script in the Republic of Bashkortostan is preserved in the Book Chamber of the Republic (established in 1928). The rare books collection, which houses around 3000 publications in Arabic script takes there the pride of the place.

The third important collection of the books in Arabic script is preserved in the National Museum of the Republic of Bashkortostan. Among others, there are more

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<sup>16</sup> A Book Tries on an Electronic Outfit. (An interview with the director of the Scientific Library of the Republic of Bashkortostan A. Ibragimov). *Respublika Bashkortostan = The Republic of Bashkortostan*. No. 225; [32].



than 20 handwritten texts and about 500 items (books, articles, narrative texts) in Arabic script.

In the 1960s, were established three more collections, which house the texts executed in Arabic script. The issue regarding establishing a separate research library became apparent at the time when the Bashkir Branch of the Academy of Sciences (BBAS) of the USSR (nowadays the Ufa Federal Research Center – UFRC / RAS), was founded. Its core became the collection from the Institute of History, Language and Literature, one of the oldest Bashkortostan institutions, founded in 1920es. When the Institute became a part of the Academy of Sciences the 12,280 items were transferred to its Bashkir Branch. A significant part of that collection formed the books in Arabic script published in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Library of the Bashkir Branch of the Soviet/Russian Academy continued to grow; nowadays it houses over one million items. Due to the constant growth of the library funds and in order to distinguish between the historic and recent funds, the books were classified also according to the date of publication. Those published before the mid-1920s nowadays form the rare books collection. Its number of handwritten and printed books in Arabic script amounts to 9,000 items.

Again, during 1960s-1980s the Institute of History, Language and Literature of the Bashkir Branch of the Soviet/Russian Academy, among others following the guide-lines and instructions by the Archaeographic Commission collected another set of the items written in Arabic script. Nowadays in this collection are preserved around 5,700 items (handwritten and printed books and documents) in many languages, such as in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Tatar and Bashkir. Among them there is a unique collection of 63 *shezhers* (genealogies) as well as rare copies *Qisa-i-Yusuf*, *Kisekbash*, *Dastan-i-Sultan-i-Jumjuma*, “*Hikmetler* and many others<sup>17</sup>.

Along with the gradual formation of this collection, was formed another collection, which subsequently formed the part of the Bashkir Branch of the Academy of Sciences Archive. Its funds were built up by collecting the items from personal archives of the local scholars and researchers. Nowadays there is housed a significant collection of handwritten and printed books in Arabic script (200 items). Its most valuable part forms the literary heritage of R. Fakhretdinov and M. Umetbayev.

Other collections hold the material in Arabic script on a much lesser scale up to one dozen items). Among them is the Nesterov Museum of Arts (Ufa), the Museum of Archeology and Ethnography within the Institute of Ethnological Research and the rare books collection preserved at the Bashkir State University library. Altogether the items in Arabic script amount there to under 100 items.

The National Historical Archive of the Republic of Bashkortostan, which inherited the holdings from the archive of the former Ohrenburg Spiritual Council of “Mahometans” is nowadays in possession of perhaps the most unique collection the handwritten and printed books as well as the documents in Arabic script from the

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<sup>17</sup> The Ufa Federal Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which earlier was the Bashkir Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences.



period between the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to the 1930s. This archive miraculously survived the abolishing of the Ohrenburg Spiritual Board in 1937–38. Subsequently, in the early 1960s it was transferred to the stacks in the Central State Historical archive of BASSR (now the Central Historical Archive). Subsequently it was transformed into a special fund of the Central Historical Archive (И-295 «ОМДС», or – «OSCM») [33]. The total amount of items in this Fund (including the documents in Russian) is near 72 000 files. At least half of the Fund's documents are written in Arabic script, such as acts, deeds, letters, receipts, and financial documents. The birth registers housed there are among the most valuable sources. They cover all the Muslim settlements in Russia from the mid. 19<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Another rare collection of the items written in Arabic script is the library of the former Ohrenburg Spiritual Council of “Mahometans”. It was inherited by the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the European part of the USSR, the Baltic States and Siberia (now the Central Spiritual Board of Russian Muslims). It contains more than 10 000 items, which include the handwritten and printed texts in Arabic script<sup>18</sup>.

In the early 1990s, began the revival of the system of spiritual education in Russia. The first post-Soviet *madrasa* was opened in the city of Ufa under the auspices of the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims (CSBM). In 2003, it served as a basis for establishing the Russian Islamic University of CSBM. The acute need to improve the University's educational process and the need to preserve historical traditions in the science, culture and education of Russian Muslims, led its teachers and staff members to investigate not the archive but the book collection of the former Ohrenburg Spiritual Council of “Mahometans”.

Following this decision was formed a purpose designed book collection, which holdings originated from the book collections of the already mentioned former Ohrenburg Spiritual Council. This collection housed holy and sacred texts as well as commentaries and dogmatic literature. The collection started to grow by the donations, gifts, targeted collecting, etc. In the early 2015, the collection has officially recognized as the basis of the Scientific Archive of the Russian Islamic University. Nowadays it houses among others around 500 rare and unique items. Its scholarly catalogue is currently being prepared.

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The tasks arising in course of revival of the spiritual, historical and cultural heritage of Muslims on the former Soviet territory as well as purely academic interests and needs of the Russian and international scholars formed an acute need for unifica-

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<sup>18</sup> There is not much known about on that collection yet. In 2015 the Russian Islamic University started to study and systematize the library's fund. It is obvious that the fund is heterogeneous and contains different collections. According to the pieces of information that we have, including those provided by M. Gallyamov (the *imam-khatib* of the Ikhlas mosque in Ufa and a former curator of the library fund in the Central Spiritual Board in 1990s as mentioned above), it is a collection of *waqf* endowments and the collections put together in Ufa by the Spiritual Board's *mufti* in different years. See: [34].



tion and normalization of the data of the texts written in Arabic script and preserved on the territory of the Russian Foederation and the former Russian Empire as well.

This task is considered to be crucial for the successful subsequent development of the whole number of humanities branches, such as history, archaeography, Arabic studies, Oriental studies, general linguistics, literature, theology, philosophy and law, to name just a few. It should be stressed that many of these branches overlap with each other as well as with some exact sciences

The access to the cultural heritage of the Russian Muslims is generally provided by historical sources, written in various languages of the Islamic East. Therefore, its thorough study should be considered as one of the main tasks of the Islamic and Islamicate scholars in Russia. Such a study, however, cannot be successfully conducted prior to creating a detailed check-list of all Islamic texts preserved on the territory of the Russian Foederation or in a wider context on the territory of the former Russian Empire.

Once created, such a check-list would supply the scholars with reliable information regarding their research topics and even help to introduce new, hitherto forgotten or unjustly neglected historical sources. By its very existence it would be an immense help to everybody involved in Islamic studies, regardless of researchers' specific interests. It goes without saying that the Islamic education then would become one of its major beneficiaries.

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The systematization and, in particular, cataloguing of handwritten and printed books in Arabic script has a long standing tradition in Russia. In this regard, should be first of all mentioned the efforts of C. M. Fraehn, who embarked on the project to systematize the holdings of the Asiatic Museum [35]. In his capacity of the first Director of this Institution, C. Fraehn had to create the master entries for cataloguing of printed books and manuscripts thus laying the foundations for the principles of cataloguing items in Arabic script [36].

His efforts found their completion in the works by his successor B. Dorn. His catalogue published in German [37; 38] for a long time remained a unsurpassed reference-book, a reliable aid for further research. In particular, this catalogue provided a description of around 500 books in Arabic script published in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Kazan in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was held in high esteem by the subsequent generations of scholars, for example, Professor I. Yu Krachkovsky who left very favourable comments [39]. Both C. Fraehn and B. Dorn along with the academic tradition have also made efforts to widely disseminate the knowledge about East and its treasures in such a way appealing to wider range of scholars, collectors and learned public [40]. Although in St Petersburg the cataloguing activities for some reasons (in the first instance, the retirement of these scholars) have slowed down their efforts did not remain unnoticed. Their templates for book description were used by other institutions. In Kazan, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century became an established centre



for Oriental Studies, professor V. Smirnov started a catalogue of recent prints in Arabic. Results of his work were published in the He published his works in the “Memoires” of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society (ZVORAO) [41]. However, V. Smirnow was aiming for a different goal rather than C. Fraehn and B. Dorn. In fact, he made an effort to list both the old and new prints. Although the value of his results can according to some scholars be arguable, he precisely mapped the then collections of texts preserved in Arabic script. The results by V. Smirnov were followed by those by other scholars who catalogued new and recent publications. Particularly in the city of Kazan they were N. F. Katanov [42–45] and others [46; 47], which altogether shaped a trend in the scholarly cataloguing in Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Along with the catalogues of new publications, there were clear attempts to catalogue the collections of various institutions, where were housed also rare handwritten books [48; 49].

A significant amount of work in this direction has been done in the 20<sup>th</sup> century [50–52]. Cataloguing became one of the urgent needs, since the oriental, and, in particular, Islamic and Arabic studies in Russia were undergoing some significant structural changes. As a consequence of this exercise the old libraries and book depots were given different management and not unfrequently they became parts of different institutions<sup>19</sup>. Only few collections remained intact: these of the Asiatic Museum, the Russian Geographic Society, the department of rare books in the State Public Library in Moscow, as well as some other.

During the Soviet era, the collections still continued to be developed and managed in accordance with new scholarly and bureaucratic demands, like that of the former Asiatic Museum (nowadays the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences). In the 1960s–1980s were published various thematic catalogues as well as check-lists and review catalogues, which reflected this trend [53–57]. One should name here the “Short-title catalogue...” of the collections in the Asiatic Museum edited by A.B. Khalidov, which by some scholars is even regarded as a standard work [57; 58].

The Arabic and Islamic studies on Russia are held internationally in great esteem. Nevertheless, in some regards (especially the systematization) they somewhat fell behind global trends. This fact was particularly mentioned during the international Forum «Oriental manuscripts: current state and prospects of study», which took part in Kazan in 2011 [59]. After almost a decade there is still no universally agreed standards neither a check-list, which would reflect the Russian holdings. There are many reasons for this; the most important among them seems to be that the written tradition in Arabic has ceased to exist on the Russian territory almost one hundred years ago (in 1920) and was re-instated only towards the very end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although nowadays there are still available new acquisitions, however, they are fundamentally

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<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the only collections that remain unchanged are those of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences and of the State Public Library's collection of rare books and manuscripts.





different from what is traditionally called the “old” fund, not at least because the books in Arabic script are being printed abroad. One cannot call this new fund any longer “Russian”.

The community of scholars in Russia, however, still awaits the re-introduction of the old books printed in Arabic script, which are physically sitting in various institutions, even in various places in the Russian Foederation alone. The creation of a new electronic resource, which would virtually bring all these books together will be a kind of restoration of links between the generations interrupted in the 1920s. To begin, one should start with compiling of a detailed check-list.

On this background one has to stress some recent trends in this development. Scholars started paying more attention to the less known collections, which up to one hundred of items. New catalogues of such collections of books in Arabic script started and continue to appear<sup>20</sup>. The relevant meetings constantly take place [61]. One can name in this regard two areas, where the library holdings receive constant specialist attention, namely Moscow [62; 63] and Ufa [64].

The collections from Bashkortostan are not sufficiently known even in the Russian Federation [65–69]. And there is still much preparatory work to be done before one can embark on creation of a check-list and electronic resource. One should note in this respect that the collections of books written and printed in Arabic script preserved in the libraries in the Southern Urals are very rich.

This richness owes its existence to several factors. Bashkortostan is the second important after the Volga region, where the Muslim [p]opulation did historically settled. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the formation of the Spiritual Council of the Russian “Mahometans” it also the political center of Islam in Russia. To this is firmly connected the fact that this area had a rich and well-developed tradition of Islamic education. In the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the teaching institutes in Bashkortostan contributed to the distribution of handwritten and later printed books among teachers and students. The area was fortunate to have learned academic workforce, which during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did actively participate in collecting and preserving of the handwritten material under the auspices of the Archaeographic Commission. These people turned the *ad hoc* activities of the local libraries and museums into the well-regulated and standardized collecting policy.

In order to illustrate the wealth and richness of the manuscript and intellectual holdings preserved in the Bashkortostan libraries we offer here a detailed illustration of one of the collections, namely that from the Russian Islamic University (RIU of CSBM) in the city of Ufa.

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<sup>20</sup> The electronic catalogue of arabographic sources was created by the members of staff of the Central Scientific Library of the RAS Kazan Scientific Centre. According to the “Tatar-Inform” agency, hundreds of books and 45 Arabic manuscripts dated back to XV–XX centuries are listed in the catalogue. One can request information regarding a certain text and read it in Russian, Tatar and Arabic. The catalogue is based on Microsoft SQL Server 200 and presented on the library’s website Available at: <http://tatcenter.ru/print/23519/26.02.2015> [60].



This collection of rare books is quite diverse. It comprises the publications from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – mainly the books written in Arabic script in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Tatar languages. The majority of this collection are the books printed in Russia. There are also books published in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt as well as the manuscript copies, which originate from Russian Empire and foreign countries.

The collection includes various editions of the Holy Qur'an. The earliest dates back to 1864. This is a printed book in a good condition. There are also *tafsirs* by Islam al-Hamidi, Muhammad Fahrud-din ar-Razi, Alyautdin al-Bagdadi, Muhammad al-Imankoly and Imam al-Alrusi. There is also a number of commented collections of *hadith* with commentaries. The major part of preserved *tafsirs* and *hadith* collections was published in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Along with this the collection of rare books preserves selected periodicals, normally bound together in form of books / almanacs. They include periodicals in the Ottoman Turkish language – *Sirat al-mustaqim* and *Sabil al-Rashad*, published in Turkey, as well as the *Shura* magazine published in the old Tatar language and edited by Rizaetdin bin Fahreddin.

There are also convolutes of articles and shorted monographs. They are both a kind of a typographic curiosity as well as an interesting and underestimated historical source. Occasionally such convolutes comprise texts written in different languages<sup>21</sup>.

The collection of rare books includes also works by famous scholars of Islam, such as: Abdullah Bubi, Ziauddin Kamali, Abdullah Shnasi, Musa Bigiev, Tadjuddin bin Yalchygol, Habiburrahman az-Zabiri, Jakub Khalili, Shihabuddin Marjani (al-Kazani) and others [77–85].

Recently, the scientific department of the RIU started a project of cataloguing manuscripts and books preserved in their own department of rare books. This is the first step to summarize the information regarding the pre 1917 texts written in Arabic script and preserved in the Southern Urals.

A welcome has been extended to other centers of Islamic centres and education institutions to support this initiative. If accepted, one can hope that in some time a detailed check-list of all handwritten and printed books in Arabic script in Russia will finally be published. Moreover, the digital technologies and modern printing systems can significantly expedite the whole project thus making the future result of a great significance not only for Islamic theology and Islamic studies, but also generally for historical studies on the territory of the Russian Federation.

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<sup>21</sup> For example, the following compilation contains works in Old Tatar and Arabic, including: [70–76]. That was common for pre-revolutionary book collections and personal libraries. Each of such compilations in the Fund and therefore in the catalogues has its own number and is regarded as an individual book.



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