

RUSSIAN ARCHIVE SOURCES OF THE LATE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURIES ON MUSLIMS OF VOLGA AND CENTRAL ASIA

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The relevance of the problem at issue can be explained by the growing academic interest to studies of the image of Muslim peoples of Russia and the countries of the former USSR in the contemporary non-Muslim sources. The goal of this paper is to define the importance of several such sources for the present-day historical and ethnographic research and their introduction into the academic discourse. The primary approach to studying this problem is the method of description and comparison of the sources, as well as their linguistic, structural and stylistic analysis. We have studied several works, among them a historical and ethnographical study by physician A. Spasskiy, “Facts about Mishars. Ethnographic Study” by Orthodox arch-priest Y.A. Malov and “Report of Turkestan Teachers Seminary” by N.P. Ostroumov, and we came to a number of conclusions about the importance of these sources for Islamic Studies, as well as a conclusion that the most objective and valuable of these sources are Spasskiy’s and Ostroumov’s works. The sources in question are works of missionary orientalists of the late 19th – early 20th centuries, and they can play an important role in expanding the academic knowledge on the history, culture, traditions, customs, languages and lifestyles of Muslims (particularly Tatars of Volga) of Russia of that period, despite their subjectivity, their hostility towards Islam and their being largely focused on missionary goals and promotion of Orthodox Christianity.

Keywords: Volga Muslims ; Central Asia Muslims ; Russian sources ; missionary orientalism ; ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the Topic

The issue of studying history, culture, traditions and customs of Muslim peoples of Volga Region and Central Asia in the early 21st century is as relevant and important as ever. The Volga Tatars and other related Muslim peoples (primarily these are Turkic peoples) of Central Asian republics comprise a significant and very important part of the population of the post-Soviet area. The religion practiced by the absolute majority of these peoples’ representatives – Islam – is one of the universal religions, and the number of its followers is second in the world only to the number of Christians. Studying Islam today is one of the keys to understanding of today’s polycentric world.

This paper examines a number of archive sources on history, ethnogenesis and cultural history of Muslim peoples of the aforementioned regions and introduces these sources into the academic discourse. The key sources in question are “Report

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of Turkestan Teachers Seminary for the 25 Years of Its Existence (August 30th, 1879 – August 30th, 1904)” by N.P. Ostroumov (1904) and “Facts about Mishars. Ethnographic Study” by Y.A. Malov (1885). These sources are devoted to the issues of language, literary folklore, genealogy, history, lifestyle and education of the aforementioned ethnic groups.

The idea of uniting sources on Muslim ethnic groups of the Volga Region and Central Asia in the same article is determined by the fact that these people are related and have long-standing historic and cultural connections.

The State of Knowledge of the Archive Sources on Ethnography and History of Muslim Peoples of the Volga Region and Central Asia

The advancement of Islam in Central Asia began more than 13 centuries ago, and in the Volga Region – over 10 centuries ago. This religion, brought to these areas by conquerors and missionaries of the Arabic Caliphate, it also played an important role in the ethnogenesis of the peoples in question, namely Volga Tatars, Turkmens, Uzbeks, Tajiks, etc. However, the article is mostly devoted to Tatars living both in the Volga Region and Central Asia – for instance, in Tashkent. Their traditions, customs, mentality, rich spiritual and material culture formed during over a dozen centuries have been subjects of many large-scale studies of famous scholars – historians, linguists, ethnographers, experts on folklore, religion, lifestyle, etc. Among the significant contemporary works on the history and ethnology of Tatars are works of Zakiyev, 2008; Iskhakov, 2005; Iskhakov and Fakhruddinov, 1993; Khayrullin, 1998. Most of these scholars continue the traditions established by the outstanding scholars of the late 19th – early 20th centuries – Märçani, 1989; Nasyiri, 1974; Fakhretdinov, 1900; Validov, 1923, etc. The works of these prominent figures of Tatar historical, philological and social thought made a priceless contribution into studying Tatar culture.

However, another very important group of sources consists of works about Tatars of the same period (i.e. the late 19th – early 20th centuries) written by Russian researchers. These sources present an interesting “outside view” of the development of Tatar culture. A close parallel to the Russian sources can be seen in the works in Russian by representatives of other ethnic groups – for instance, the Chuvash scholar N.V. Nikolskiy (1878 – 1961) (Nikolskiy, 2009) or the outstanding German physician, ethnographer and historian Karl Fuchs (1776 – 1846), who lived a large part of his life to Kazan. The latter, in particular, devoted a lot of works to studying Tatar life and culture. He wrote that they are “proud, ambitious, hospitable, cleanly, born for trade, boastful, friendly between each other, inquisitive, somewhat ingratiatory in nature and fairly industrious..” (Fuchs, 2011). However, similarly remarkable surviving works by Russian researchers are few in this period – however, those of them that have survived deserve scholarly attention and in-depth study.

The image of Tatars in these archive sources deserves special studying. In the recent time there are new research works on this topic – for instance, the doctoral thesis of R.G. Miftakhov called “The Image of Tatar Muslims of Kazan Governorate in Works by Contemporaries of the 19th – early 20th centuries”, done at the^a. Märcani Institute of History (Miftakhov, 2007, 2011).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Goals of the Study

The following tasks were set while researching this problem: 1) defining a range of sources – works of Russian researchers devoted to the history, culture, customs, education, lifestyle of Muslim peoples of the Volga Region and Central Asia (primarily Tatars); 2) singling out the most remarkable specific features of each of these sources; 3) defining the stylistic features and characterize the authors’ view of the culture of the ethnic groups in question; 4) determine the importance of each of the sources for the contemporary academic discourse.

Theoretical and Empirical Methods

A set of various methods has been used:

- theoretical methods – analysis of academic literature, comparing empirical results to each other, their analysis and synthesis;
- empirical methods – description of the sources, comparing them to each other, their linguistic and stylistic analysis.

RESULTS

Several Russian Sources on Volga Region Muslims:

We have examined two works belonging to the period of the late 19th – early 20th centuries. One of them is a historical and ethnographical study by physician A. Spasskiy, who researched the customs of village Tatars. Namely, Spasskiy wrote that Tatars were “very hospitable”. “Their best trait is hospitality”, “the Tatars’ rate of literacy is higher than that of Russians”, “Tatars keep themselves and their surroundings very tidy”. The author comes to the conclusion that the Tatars’ level of culture and lifestyle “makes them the best of all non-Russians in that respect” (Spasskiy, 1916). Spasskiy’s study is notable for its significantly higher degree of objectivity and even some level of sympathy towards Tatars, compared to the majority of works by his contemporaries.

Another work examined in this paper is “Facts about Mishars. Ethnographic Study” by Orthodox arch-priest Y.A. Malov. This book, printed in the publishing office of Kazan Imperial University in 1885, is devoted to one of the sub-ethnic groups of Volga Tatars – *Mishars*, who at the time the book was published were

also often called *mescheryaks*. The author of this book is known as an Orthodox turkologist and missionary who worked in the Department of Anti-Muslim Subjects of Kazan Ecclesiastical Academy. This makes it obvious that the majority of his works on Tatars reflect a one-sided view of an Orthodox priest who is hostile towards Islam. Having said that, his works have certain objective elements as well. Despite Malov examining Mishars in comparison to “Mohammedan Tatars” and contrasting the former to the latter, he still singles out interesting facts concerning the lifestyle of Mishars, their traditional clothes and language. The main value of this work is probably the vocabulary compiled by the author and consisting of words of standard Tatar in comparison with their Mishar equivalents – both written in Arabic script and transcribed using Cyrillic alphabet. Beside that, the book lists differences between Tatar and Mishar names for days of the week and some other linguistic data. Significant attention is given to the genesis of Mishars, their places of residence (certain governorates of Russia are named, as well as districts within Kazan Governorate), and also their customs and religion. It is not entirely clear why Malov, comparing Mishars to other Tatars, calls the latter “Mohammedans” in spite of Islam being practiced by both groups. Later, however, he complains about Mishars having been more open to Christianity some time before, and about there being many Christians among them. But now, he says, they more often embrace Islam. Another interesting part of Malov’s book consists of various stories, fragmentary findings and even fairy-tales about Mishars, which are quoted by him without alterations from Tatar sources – the Tatar text is accompanied by the Russian translation.

This study is undoubtedly informative rather than appraising. In several places, where the author allows himself to express a definite opinion we can see a certain degree of sympathy to Mishars – at the very least it is clear that his attitude to them is better than that to “Mohammedan Tatars”. A very clear image is formed of Mishars as “kinder and compared to other Tatars. Складывается довольно явный образ мишарей как более «добродушных и благорасположенных к другим», чем прочие татары.

In terms of style Y. Malov’s work can be characterized as favoring simplicity while adhering to the norms of the standard literary language of that time. A distinct personality of the author is evident in his penchant to expressing his personal opinion while commenting the facts. At the same time these facts are presented objectively and impartially, whenever possible. The author allows himself to express his subjective attitude to them, sometimes without trying to conceal his joy or regret about this or that matter.

It is clear that the ethnographical study by Y.A. Malov has primarily missionary goals – however, many of its fragments can be used when studying the way Orthodox population of Russia treated Tatars and Mishars in the late 19th – early 20th centuries, as well as when researching the role of Tatar culture in the country

at that time. A. Spasskiy's work, by contrast, is of major interest as a more objective study of life and culture of Tatars in the beginning of the 20th century. Works by famous Chuvash scholar N.V. Nikolskiy can be referred to as more objective sources as well. **“Report of Turkestan Teachers Seminary” by N.P. Ostroumov as a Russian Source on Muslims of Central Asia:**

Among Kazan scholars who researched Islam in the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries a specific place is occupied by missionary Nikolay Petrovich Ostroumov (1846–1930). Just like Y.A. Malov, Ostroumov worked in the Department of Anti-Muslim Subjects of Kazan Ecclesiastical Academy. In 1877 N.P. Ostroumov moved with his family to Tashkent, where he begins his long-lasting service – first as an inspector of public schools, then director of teachers' seminary (since 1879), then director of men's grammar school (since 1889) and teachers' seminary again. From 1883 till 1917 N.P. Ostroumov was also the editor of “Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta” (“Turkestan Native Newspaper”). The Report on the Work of Turkestan Teachers' Seminary was published in 1904 and it comprises the whole period of the school's existence by that moment – from 1879 till 1904. The report is a detailed description of the Seminary's activity and work, its goals and tasks, the history of its establishment with quotations from copies of existing documents and letters, the Seminary's teaching staff, its curriculum, topics of written assignments, the school's material base, buildings and infrastructure. Separate reports on every academic year can also be found here, together with varied statistical data, a list of published works by the teachers and graduates and miscellaneous information.

However the most interesting fragments in the context of this article are the ones containing the information on the role of Turkic peoples in the history of the Seminary and vice versa – the role of the Seminary in the ethnic assimilation policy of the Russian state at that time. In particular, on page 23 of the book the author claims that “the goals of the Russian state and the aspiration of our Homeland towards the non-Russians include the russianization of the latter and the unification of all of them into a single Russian political organism” (Ostroumov, 1904). But on the very next page he adds that the aforementioned russianization will be implemented “exclusively by means of intellectual and moral reeducation of them”. In this context it is clear that he mostly speaks of Kirgiz and Uzbek people, whose assimilation with the Russian population was probably one of the main goals of the Seminary.

It should nevertheless be noted that Turkestan Teachers' Seminary, contrary to other seminaries of the Russian Empire, was the only one with obligatory learning of two “aboriginal languages”. The curriculum for the academic year 1903-1904 had one hour of studying Oriental calligraphy in the first year, five hours for learning the theory and practice of Persian in the second year with four hours for that subjects in years 3 and 4. Sometimes “natives” were engaged in teaching the local languages

as well as other Oriental languages – Kirgiz, Persian, etc. However, they were only allowed for the interns' positions.

Ostroumov's report includes some pieces concerning the education of Kirgizs, Tatars and other representatives of local Muslim population in the Seminary. Although there are no direct indications of that, it is very likely that many of them were converted to Christianity after joining the ranks of the Seminary students. There are certain fragments mentioning Kirgiz and Tatar students being expelled – namely, on p. 194: “was expelled from the Seminary, for family reasons and for certain ill habits not tolerated in the students' dormitory, second year student, a Kirgiz...”.

Finally, there is an indisputably valuable list of names of students who graduated after having received a full course of education in Turkestan Teachers' Seminary (p. 53 of the appendices). About twenty-five of 254 names on the list are of Turkic origin. Some of the students seem to have converted to Orthodox Christianity, judging by such unusual combinations of the first and last names as “Vladimir Kucherbayev”.

This source allows us to obtain some very important knowledge on the status of Muslim peoples in Central Asia in the late 19th – early 20th centuries, as well as the aims of Russian Orthodox missions in Turkestan. This book is a valuable historic artifact that needs to be studied in-depth.

DISCUSSIONS

The image of Tatars in Russian written sources of the late 19th – early 20th centuries was examined in a doctoral thesis by R.G. Miftakhov. Ethnic mentality of Tatars, Bashkirs, Chuvashs and other Volga Region ethnic groups has been researched by E.V. Nikitina, including using the sources from this period (Nikitina, 2014). A separate study devoted to the life and works of N.P. Ostroumov was carried out by L.M. Fayzrakhmanov (2008). However, the sources brought to light in this paper, have been researched in this context for the first time.

The necessity of introducing these archival sources to the academic discourse has been long overdue – in spite of many of the examined authors being biased to some degree, their works still give a certain picture of lifestyle and mindset of Muslim peoples of Volga Region and Central Asia and an outside perspective of the customs and traditions of these ethnicities. The separation of objective observations from comments of propagandist and missionary nature is the main task of a scholar who studies these sources. And this is where the key role can be played by the linguistic analysis of such archive works. Many of them are replete with inaccuracies, misbeliefs and prejudices in regard to Muslims that are common for Orthodox clergy of that period, and some of them also pursue the aims of the Tsarist state policy regarding ethnic and religious minorities. But, in spite of this, such works were among those that laid the groundwork for Russian Islamic Studies

and contributed much to the development of the ethnography of Volga Region peoples.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions have been drawn as a result of our study:

- 1) Russian sources on the culture, history, lifestyle, traditions and generally life of Muslim peoples of the Volga Region and Central Asia are not numerous, but on the whole represent a significant value for historical, ethnographical and Islamic discourse.
- 2) A large part of these sources was created by the representatives of the so-called “missionary” Oriental Studies. Their goals included the assimilation of Muslim peoples, among other things, and this fact is to be taken into account when working with these sources.
- 3) The scholarly work of A. Spasskiy should be considered among the more objective sources, while the books by Y. Malov and N. Ostroumov – among the less objective, although these ones are also valuable thanks to their bulk of factual data.
- 4) The sources in question deserve to be a part of the orientalist legacy studied by present-day scholars. The archive data contained in them represent value for the history of Tatar, Kirgiz, Uzbek and other Muslim peoples of the Volga Region and Central Asia. Considering the current cultural revival of these ethnic groups and their aspiration to study their origins there is an emerging necessity for an in-depth study of these sources.

Acknowledgments

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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