
PRESENTING THE COLLECTION

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CATALOGUE OF MANUSCRIPTS AND OLD PRINTED BOOKS IN ARABIC, PERSIAN AND TURKIC LANGUAGES FROM KABARDINO-BALKARIA [1]

Over 70 years ago, the renowned Russian scholar I. Iu. Krachkovskii posed to Russian Orientalists the task of studying local oriental sources on the history of Russia and its borderlands. He attached special importance to collecting and introducing into scholarly circulation materials in Arabic and in Arabic script from the Caucasus, in a number of regions of which Arabic (along with Turkic and Persian) remained the main language of written culture, law and government from the Middle Ages to the 1920s [2]. For a whole number of reasons, including the militant atheist policy of the state and the persecution of Islam in the Soviet period, in most Muslim regions this task was not fulfilled.

The study of Islam in the former eastern outskirts of the USSR leaves much to be desired. With few exceptions, they remain outside of academic Islamic studies in Russia, the near and distant abroad. Important Islamic realities of these regions were not reflected in authoritative international reference books, such as the English-language "Encyclopedia of Islam", the third edition of which is starting in Leiden, and the encyclopedia "Islam on the territory of the former Russian Empire", which since 1998 has been published in Moscow under the editorship of S. M. Prozorov [3]. These "blank spots" still include mosque and private collections in the Northwest Caucasus.

Serious study of Muslim societies in this region is only beginning. One of the first steps in this direction was the historic-ethnographic expedition led by I. L. Babich (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAS, Moscow) in Kabardino-Balkaria in July 2002 [4]. Although this expedition aimed at the study of modern religious practices of Muslims in the republic, during the investigation interesting archive material was gathered, among which special mention should be given to small but valuable collections of old printed and manuscript books and documents in Arabic, Old Ottoman and Persian. They make it possible to present the circle of reading of an educated Muslim in pre-revolutionary Kabarda. The copies of Arabic-language and Arabic script manuscripts and old printed books were presented by the head of expedition I. L. Babich to the author of the present article.

Based on photocopies made at the Kupov Collection in Nalchik (Archive of the Kabardino-Balkaria State Institute of Humanitarian Research, hereinafter: KBSIHR Archive), and also in a number of mosque and personal collections from the town of Tyrnyauz, the villages of Bylym, El'brus, Ianikoï and others [5], I identified all the oriental manuscripts and old printed materials of the 18th — early 20th centuries gathered by the expedition trying as far as possible to establish their authorship, time of writing or publication, to divide them by theme, and finally compile a catalogue, reflecting the types and themes of the collected narrative and document materials. The nature of the article predetermined its division into three parts: the catalogue or archeographical description of materials: (i) manuscripts; (ii) old printed books; (iii) preliminary conclusions and possible areas of subsequent research, which could be done by a comparison of the works and documents described in the first part.

The work offered to readers is the first attempt at cataloguing Muslim old printed books and manuscripts from the Northwest Caucasus [6]. Right up to the present day, archeographical work on the territory of Kabardino-Balkaria and other republics and provinces of the Northwest Caucasus was not conducted. Owing to the lack of training Orientalists in the republic, the expedition was not able to make a detailed description of the collections and gather all the information necessary for a description of the texts in them. In many ways there was an accidental initial selection, which does not fully reflect the full complex of book production in pre-revolutionary Kabarda. Many materials were preserved in defective copies, without a beginning or an end.

Materials of the catalogue are described according to a single generally accepted scheme: (i) the author and brief information about him (if known); (ii) the work; (iii) its copy or publication, scribe / publisher; (iv) completeness or defectiveness of the copy, place and time of copying / publication (if determinable), format, handwriting, artistic design, carry-over words and pagination, glosses; (v) bibliography (if necessary and in existence).