

AN UNKNOWN ARABIC MANUSCRIPT OF THE LIBRARY OF ORIENTAL DEPARTMENT: PRELIMINARY DESCRIPTION

The study of the manuscript heritage of the Muslim Orient is far from completion and is one of the most urgent tasks of modern oriental studies. According to a rough estimate of A. B. Khalidov (1929—2001), a famous expert on Arabic manuscripts, the overall number of Arabic manuscripts ever compiled approximates to five million units, whereas “today there are about 630 thousand manuscripts” [1]. Academician V. V. Barthold (1860—1930) puts it this way:

In the field of oriental studies the primary task of each branch of philological and historical science is far from being carried out — to make main monuments and historical sources accessible for researchers by means of printing and translating [2].

At the same time, though, a considerable amount of Muslim manuscript heritage has not yet reached us and is still to be revealed to the academic community. One of such examples of an unexpected acquisition of the new manuscript, in the seemingly well-studied collection, is the copy of *Uṣūl al-‘aqā’id al-dīniyya* (“Foundations of Religious Dogmas”), which is going to be discussed in the present report.

The copy of this work was found in the process of inventorying manuscript stock of the Oriental Department of M. Gorky National Library by M. A. Azarkina among reports of scientific efforts of the department for 1960–70. The copy had neither an inventory number nor a library pressmark and was not listed in the inventory books. And therefore it was not included in the catalogues of the Arabic manuscript stock of the library published by then [3].

The history of the copy's admission to the library is not yet ascertained. As follows from the main text (fol. 1a) the author of this work is Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Sa‘ad (or As‘ad) al-Ṣādiqī al-Dawānī (907/1501–2), who is the famous Muslim philosopher and theologian. Dawānī wrote more than 80 treaties on different issues of Islamic dogma, law etc. The collection of the library of the Oriental Department has another copy of this work [4]. Even the superficial analysis

which was performed allows for a confident view that these copies have serious differences.

The work of al-Dawānī is a work on Muslim scholastic theology (*kalam*) and the fundamentals of *taqlīd*. The introduction of this monument into scientific circulation, as well as the study of the subject matter of *ijtihād*, has a crucial urgency on account of discussions of place and role of *ijtihād* in modern religious practice that become more and more frequent in Muslim circles.

The idea of the necessity of stopping debates amidst Sunni theologians (*‘ulamā’*) with the purpose of ceasing the splitting of Muslim community (*umma*) by the 11th century AD led to the formation of the concept of “closing of the gates of *ijtihād*”, which in turn commenced the wide spread of the doctrine of *taqlīd* (Arabic for “assimilation”, and in religious context “absolute compliance with spiritual authorities on various issues”). Naturally, by the 11th century AD, when Islamic community already divided into a significant number of religious law schools (*madhhab*) and “sects” (*firqa*, *qawm*, *īā’ifa*, *ṣinf*), far from everybody adhered to the principle of “gate closing” [5]. At present, more and more Muslim authorities in various parts of the world consider the return to the practice of *ijtihād* to be a necessity, without which, they think, Islam may move away from the processes that take place in our modern society:

He who says that the doors of *ijtihād* are closed... pass Islam a death sentence. Out of Islam he makes a lifeless religion, removing any motion and development from it and depriving it of ability to seek solution to newer and newer issues, which come into existence with every new epoch [6].

However, the work that is presented in this report was compiled in the 15th century, i. e. in the time period when the conviction among adherents (*ahl*, *aṣḥab*) of a number of Sunni *madhhab*s, that *mujtahid* may reach only the level of *muqallid* was predominant. Correspondingly, there was an urgent need for guidance in *taqlīd*, which apparently is presented by the work of al-Dawānī. The author does not report anything regarding the motives for writing this piece; most likely it has