
TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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THE QUR'ĀN AND ITS WORLD: VIII/2. WEST-ÖSTLICHEN DIVANS (THE QUR'ĀN IN RUSSIA)

Much has been written about the fate of the Qur'ān in Western Europe. The same cannot be said about the Qur'ān in Russia [1], although the geopolitical location of the country and the course of Russian history laid the foundation for a special attitude toward the sacred book of Islam. Archival materials indicate that the Qur'ān was included in the personal libraries of such Russian Tsars as Ivan the Terrible (1530—1584), Peter the Great (1672—1725), and Catherine II (1729—1796). The fate of publications, translations, and rare manuscripts of the Qur'ān was also bound up with the personal decisions of the supreme rulers of Russia.

Russians' first acquaintance with Islam came as the result of commercial and diplomatic contacts with the Volga Bulghārs, Khwārazm, Derbent, and Mawarannahr. By the mid-thirteenth century, a large part of Russian lands had been included in the sphere of the Golden Horde's political, ideological and cultural influence, which at that time was heavily influenced by Islam. Its full Islamisation was completed a century later. In those years in Russia, all things associated with the Horde enjoyed great social prestige. This extended to Islam — the Qur'ān sounded within the Muscovite Kremlin, which up until the end of the fifteenth century was home to the Tatar mission, official residence of the Horde's *bāšqāqs*, who controlled the collection of tithes in the metropolis. Characteristic of that period was the peaceful coexistence of Orthodox Christianity, which enjoyed absolute dominance in the Russian lands, and Islam, the religion of the Horde.

Even after the Russian state had become independent of the Golden Horde, many customs and practices, which went back to Islamic prototypes, continued to play a notable role in Russian life. Russia, which had inherited from the Horde vast territories, and to a significant degree, a state structure, found itself semi-encircled by Muslim states after the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453. In addition to the double-headed eagle, up until the middle of the nineteenth century Russia used as a state symbol in its relations with Eastern states a *tughrā* which included the formula *bi-'inayāti Rabbi'l-'ālamīn*. It is not surprising that until the middle of the sixteenth century many in Europe persisted in the belief that the Russian State was in the hands of an islamised Tatar elite. The famed Russian Church writer, Maxim the Greek (ca. 1470—1556), who came to Russia in 1518, lamented in one

of his works that residents of the Russian capital would in all likelihood soon be wearing turbans.

With the capture of Kazan by the armies of Ivan IV in 1552, Russia began to establish its dominance over its Muslim neighbours. The Islamic features of many Russian states institutions and culture gradually disappeared. The Byzantine spiritual legacy was acknowledged as an ideological buttress, even the idea of declaring Moscow the "Third Rome" became popular after Constantinople's fall into the hands of the Ottoman Turks. The idea of confessional unification of all subjects of the Russian state underlay many polemical religious-political writings, exerting a profound influence on Russian literature on the Qur'ān and Islam as a whole. On the other hand, the gradual inclusion in the Russian empire of ever larger territories populated by Muslims and the necessity of guaranteeing their loyalty required objective information about Islamic beliefs and traditions as well as respect for them. The history of the study and translation of the Qur'ān in Russia is indissolubly bound up with these two tendencies.

Translations of anti-Muslim treatises from Greek, Latin, and Polish long served as the main source of information on Islam and the Qur'ān in Russia. For many centuries, this distorted information on the Qur'ān, the Prophet Muhammad, and the basic tenets of Islam filled historical, literary, and popular works in Russian. On the whole, such works were shot through with religious intolerance. Anti-Islamic pamphlets provided the ideological foundation for the struggle with the Sublime Porte and its vassals. Among these were, for example, Maxim the Greek's "Answers for Christians against the Hagarites, who Defame our Orthodox Christian Faith" and "A Lay Revealing the Hagarite Temptation and Maomet", which resembled in their pathos the *Corpus Toletanum* of Peter the Venerable.

But already the works of Maxim the Greek's pupil, Andrey Kurbsky (1528—1583), and his contemporary, the publicist Ivan Peresvetov, both advocates of the annexation of the Kazan khanate, display a greater familiarity with Islam. Their views are, to a certain extent, close to those of such Western European theologians and publicists as Nicolaus Cusanus (1401—1464) and Juan de Segovia (1400—1458). Both Andrey Kurbsky and Ivan Peresvetov lived and worked in the West Russian lands and Lithuania, and it was in Lithuania, between the fifteenth and seven