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QUR’ANIC MANUSCRIPTS AS BIRTH, DEATH, LAND AND LIBRARY REGISTER*

"After rummaging through the house, which was still surrounded by water, he discovered a Bible in English. The final page contained a history of the Gatrty family..."


The attentive researcher cannot help but notice a special type of marginia that occasionally appear on copies of the Qur’an, both in the margins (usually at an angle to the main text), on additional folios at the beginning and end of the manuscript, and on the inside covers of the binding. Some of these notes on margins may be characterised as family records. For example, fol. 1b (fig. 1) from a Qur’anic manuscript [2] — the main text is dated to the eleventh-twelfth century (fig. 2) — contains notes “of a family nature” in Persian and Turke:

موسود فرزند طول الله محمد بن الحسين بن جو کی شب ابنته دوازدهم ماهی محرم سنہ احتیاج و ستن و خمسماہی پنیشان سلطان از خلافہ عباس شب نوشیب دا یکی ([؟] در شب [...] خاتون تاریخ جھارم شهر رجب [...] برختم الیبرک سنہ تین [...] و سنہ خمسماہی [...] در شب ابنته یکششیه از شب [...] ربع الآخر سنہ سبیع [...] خمسماہی

The text refers to three people’s dates of birth, giving the exact dates of: the Friday evening in Muḥarram 561 A.H., the evening of the fourth day of Rajab 563 A.H., one of the Sunday evenings in Rabī’ al-akhir 56(?)/7 A.H. [3].

Another example, a Qumukh [4] manuscript of the Qur’an from the collection of the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography at the Russian Academy of Sciences Dagestani Scientific Centre [5], records more than 100 registration acts: notable records of the most varied transactions. These include records of land rentals, purchases and sales of land and house-buildings, and property inheritance. We also find here lists of things from bridal dowries, registers of credit operations, etc.

The earliest of these notes is dated to 1138/1726—27. The notes are often found on broad margins (pp. 3, 6, 215, 216, 231, 244, 246, 312) at an angle to the main text along with corrections to it (see figs. 5—10). The bulk of the registration notes are on the inner side of the binding cover and on folios before the beginning of the text of the Qur’an and after its end. Apparently, the notes were at first made on blank sheets. After they were filled in, they were used to form the inner covers of the binding. Some of the notes are damaged, cropped or smeared with ink. The Dagestani researcher, Prof. Kh. A. Omarov, has succeeded in deciphering 81 notes. He analyzes them in a series of articles [6]. To cite only some examples:

"Najm al-Dīn bīk granted a credit, approved by the sharī’a, without interest for profit (bīlā ribān) to Shshazīl-Mu‘āammad from Kuli in the amount of fifteen ‘abbāsi. This took place in the month of Ṣa‘īd 1152 A.H. [7] and was witnessed by ‘Abdallāh, who made these notes’ [8].

"Shikhāmir, son of Tsumu, entrusted Bagircha, son of Şunghur, with the sale of his hayfield, located in area of Marqīyārīn to Najm al-Dīn. He sold it for 16 tāmīns. The witnesses were: K’yaschal ‘Ali, ‘Ali Kishī, Muḥammadshīh, and the best witness is Allah’ [9].

"This is a notice to the present generation and information for the future. Najm al-Dīn returned the hayfield he bought from Shshamīr, son of Tsumu, to the latter, setting the condition that it not be sold to any third party. He also agreed with Shshamīr that he (Shshamīr) would report to the village and ensure calm, that Najm al-Dīn had returned his hill without complaints or quarrels. The witnesses were K’yaschal ‘Ali, Mamashī from al-Bājkhālī, and qādi, who made this record’ [10].

"Najm al-Dīn bought a mill for an entire day from Bughdān, son of ‘Abd, that he (Bughdān, son of ‘Abd) had bought from Musalav, son of Mahād, for 60 ‘abbāsī. Najm al-Dīn accepted this deal and received the mill as witnessed by ‘Abdallāh, who made this record, in 1146” [11].

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