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Pl. 2. Syriac collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy
of Sciences. MS. Sir. 26, f. 33v

Tatiana A. Anikeeva,
Ilona A. Chmilevskaya

Arabographic Manuscripts of the Akhty and Rutul Regions of the Republic of Dagestan¹

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Abstract: The paper presents the results of two field expeditions in 2022–2023 to Southern Dagestan: within the framework of these archaeographic expeditions, the manuscript collection of the Akhty State Museum of Local Lore (village of Akhty, the Akhty district of the Republic of Dagestan), including manuscripts, documents, lithographs and early printed books in Arabic, Turkic and Persian languages, as well as a small private manuscript collection in the village of Khlyut (the Rutul district of the Republic of Dagestan) have been fully described and digitized. Materials of these collections allow us to draw a number of conclusions about the specifics of the transformation of intellectual tradition in Southern Dagestan, its differences and similarities compared with other regions of Dagestan, and the peculiarities of the distribution of manuscripts from the Middle East, Shirvan and the Ural-Volga region in this area.

Key words: arabographic manuscripts; Turkic manuscripts; digitization; Southern Dagestan; private and state collections

Over the past two years, several expeditions have been conducted to various regions of Russia in order to identify, describe and digitize² Muslim Arabic handwritten heritage at places of its storage (within the framework of the RSCF project No. 22-18-00295 “Electronic library of arabographic

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¹ This research was carried out with the support of the Russian Science Foundation, project no. 22-18-00295 “E-Library of Arabic, Persian and Turkish Manuscripts from archival, library, museum and private collections of Russia”.

² For details about description and digitization of Dagestan manuscripts see: MUSAEV & SHIKHALIEV & ABDULMAZHIDOV 2021.

manuscripts from archival, library, museum and private collections of Russia”). Digital copies of manuscripts are placed in the public domain.³ This work with private, mosque and state collections contributes to preservation of manuscript collections, which are often at risk of disappearing due to fires, theft or improper storage, and also makes manuscripts located in distant regions of Russia available for study by specialists.

During two seasons of fieldwork in 2022 and 2023, a group of researchers from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Dagestan Federal Research Centre of Russian Academy of Sciences traveled to various regions of the Republic of Dagestan. In particular, our study covered villages in the southern part of the region. Thus, in 2022, two previously unknown private collections in the village of Alhajikent (the Kayakent district of the Republic of Dagestan) were described and digitized,⁴ and we also started working with a voluminous collection of manuscripts and printed books of the Akhty State Museum of Local Lore (the Akhty district of the Republic of Dagestan). In August-September of 2023, the work in the museum was fully completed. Moreover, it was possible to digitize a relatively small private collection in the village of Khlyut (the Rutul district of the Republic of Dagestan).

The manuscript and book collection of the Akhty State Museum of Local Lore

Not much is known about the formation of the manuscript and book part of the collection of the Akhty Museum, since no records about acquisition of manuscripts and books by the museum have been preserved or never existed at all. The museum was opened in 1937 in the Juma Mosque of the village of Akhty, and N. Daglarov became its first director. Apparently, it was during the years of anti-religious persecution that residents of Akhty and nearby villages donated libraries of mosques, *madrasahs* and private collections to the Museum. The collection was replenished under the next director of the Museum, F.N. Daglarov, and in 1996 it was moved to a new building. Currently, the museum is headed by the third representative of the Daglarov family of directors, Akhmet Fikretovich Daglarov. As we learned from

³ See: <http://manuscriptaislamica.ru/ru>.

⁴ ANIKKEVA & CHMILEVSKAYA 2022.

private conversations with him, the book and manuscript part of the Museum's collection has not been replenished in the last 20–30 years. Today, the Museum exhibits many artefacts of archeology, numismatics, ethnography, ceramics, as well as household items of the Akhty people, chronologically covering the period from ancient time to the present day.

As for the book and manuscript part of the collection, it is not exhibited to the public and is kept in the storerooms of the museum. It has about three hundred items of storage: arabographic manuscripts, lithographs, early printed books in Arabic, Turkic and Persian languages. The manuscripts of the Akhty Museum have already been studied as part of the annual archaeological expeditions of professor A.R. Shikhsaidov (1928–2019) in the 2000s. Brief information about them is found in two articles.⁵ However, a full description of the collection, its repertoire or individual manuscripts has not been published and, for sure, the collection has not been digitized. Moreover, while working directly at the museum, we found out that A.R. Shikhsaidov's group did not study some manuscripts, as well as individual documents and manuscript fragments (this was evident because they had no special numbered stickers attached).

In terms of genre, the collection is not very diverse. The Qurans make up about eighty-five percent: both complete copies and separate parts (*juzs* and *surahs*), there are also lithographed and early printed Qurans from Shirvan and Kazan. Among the separate handwritten *surahs*, the 2nd *surah* “al-Baqarah,” the 18th *surah* “al-Kahf” and the 36th *surah* “Ya-Sin” are very common, since they are the ones mainly used in religious ritual practices in Dagestan. Many copies of the Quran are decorated with rich geometric ornaments and provided with detailed colophons and additional external records that are linked, in particular, with *waqfs*. One of such notable records can be found on the pages of the Quran no. 178. It states that this Quran was handed over to the *waqf* of the Akhty mosque in 1237H (09/27/1821–09/16/1822) by Zuriyat b. Muhammad Qasim Afandi, the wife of *alim* and *qadi* Mirza Ali of Akhty (1770–1859), who was very widely known in Dagestan. We believe that the inscription on this copy of the Quran is made by her hand. Detailed and numerous colophons of Qurans can help to clarify lacunae in toponymy, the origin of *nisbahs* and the microhistory of individual Dagestan villages. The oldest manuscript in the collection is also the Quran under the number 286. It has no colophon, but judging from the features of its paper and handwriting, this manuscript likely dates to the 14th c.

⁵ SHIKHSAIDOV & NAVRUZOV 2011; SHIKHSAIDOV & NAVRUZOV 2014.

About thirty manuscripts in the collection are grammatical works in Arabic, mainly on morphology. They are distributed throughout all collections of Dagestan due to their inclusion in *madrasah* educational programs.⁶ They, both manuscripts and early printed books, include “al-Muqaddima al-ajurrumiyya fi mabadi' ‘ilm al-'Arabia” (“Prolegomena of Ibn Ajurrum on the Science of Arabic Grammar”) by Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Sinhājī Ibn Ajurrum (1273–1323), “Mi'at ‘āmil” (the treatise on Arabic grammar) by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078) and some others. The collection contains several works on *Shafi'i fiqh*, in particular, “al-Mukhtaṣar al-ṣaghīr” (“The Shorter Abridgment”) by the Dagestani *alim* ‘Alī al-Ghumūqī (d. 1528). There are also rare works on Sufism and ethics, logic, mathematics and astronomy, poetic works, Arabic-Ottoman Turkish dictionaries, separate collections of prayers, one *fatwa*, *tafsirs*, including one that is a subscript to the Quran.

A separate place in the collection is occupied by documents, mainly of the Russian imperial period.⁷ Some of them are quite rare and are associated with the work of the judicial system in the Dagestan region. In particular, we came across a small fragment of the judicial *defters*⁸ of the Akhty rural court (no. 278), dated 1910, which recorded the dates of the trials, the testimony of the plaintiffs and defendants, and the decisions made by *qadi*, certified by Russian stamp seals and personal Arabic-language seals of the members of the court. Equally interesting is the document of this type no. 258, a small (17.5×22 cm) notebook, copied in Dagestan *naskh* on Russian paper with the stamp of the Markov Society. It is a fragment of a personal *defters* of a *qadi* of an unidentified village which dates from 1915–1920. In it, the owner wrote out separate norms of *Shafi'i fiqh* (among them the conditions of loan, inheritance and donation, wills on *nazr*, conclusion of *nikah*, etc.), mainly with reference to *faqihs* and *alims* considered authoritative in Dagestan, for example, Ibn Hajar al-Haythami (1503–1566). Apparently, such records served as an aid for rapid adoption of legal decisions. There is also a decree dated to 1914, a small document of a *qadi* named Chupalav (who served in the Dagestan People's Court), in which he discusses several pressing issues of the work of the rural court using a special “question-answer” format typical for judicial texts in Arabic. For example, he explains the duties of a *qadi* of a rural court, the order of distribution of property between heirs, how to determine the fine for murder or mutilation, and he also describes judicial

⁶ KEMPER & SHIKHALIEV 2015: 599.

⁷ From the time when Dagestan was incorporated into the Russian Empire (1860) till 1917.

⁸ Registry book.

bureaucracy, records that should be kept by a *qadi* and much more. Researchers of law in post-reform Dagestan (1860s–1880s) have not encountered similar documents before, that is, internal local documents that are not projects of officials written in Russian.

Diversity of manuscripts in Turkic languages in the collection deserves special attention, since the presence of such texts is a striking distinctive feature of Southern Dagestan in comparison to other regions.

It is customary to distinguish several main historical and geographical areas of distribution of Turkic manuscripts: East Turkestan, Central Asian, Turkish (Asia Minor), Transcaucasian (Azerbaijan), Volga-Ural.⁹ The territory of the Transcaucasian (or the South Caucasian) area included the eastern part of Transcaucasia (modern Northern, or Soviet, Azerbaijan and Dagestan) and the northern regions of Iran (Southern, or Iranian, Azerbaijan). The main language of the area was Azerbaijani Turkic (known as *turki*).

In terms of genre, Turkic manuscripts contain various collections of prayers, divination on the Quran, poetic and folklore works.

Among these manuscripts in the Turkic language, the collection of prayers in Arabic (no. 277) is noteworthy: it precedes the story about Ashik Garib (“*Hikayat-i Aşik Garib*,” with the *unwan*) in Turkic. The manuscript is not dated, however, judging from paleographic features, it was likely created in the second half of the 19th c. The narrative about Ashik Garib existed in written and oral form and was spread by storytellers-*meddahs* very widely on the territory of Turkey, Crimea, and among Turkic-speaking peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is one of the popular, favorite plots of so-called folk narratives (*hikayats*), a special genre of Ottoman Turkish and Turkic folklore that combines features of fairytales and epics, fragments of *aşik* folk poetry and also borrows many plots from the Arab-Persian literary tradition. The story about Ashik Garib is set in Tiflis and Tabriz (the cultural center of Azerbaijan in the Middle Ages), which allows us to approximately localize the origin of this plot (South Caucasus).

Also, among the manuscripts in the Turkic language there is the Turkic divan of Fuzuli (1498–1556), copied in 1261H/1845 (no. 232), presumably in Azerbaijan or Iran. Copies of this divan are very commonly found in different collections of Turkic manuscripts.¹⁰

In addition, there is a notable absence of some didactical works in Turkic, which were widely known among *madrasah* students in Central Asia and

⁹ DMITRIEVA 1987: 408.

¹⁰ See, for example, DMITRIEVA 2002: no. 1198–1210.

more generally in Muslim territories of the Russian Empire during the 2nd half of the 19th cc. and the beginning of the 20th c. (“Thabat al-‘Adjizin”/ “The Support of the Weak” by Sufi Allah Yar), that is explained by the difference in the educational program of the *madrasahs* and, ultimately, the difference in the *madhhabs* (the Hanafi in the Volga-Ural region and Central Asia and the Shafi'i in Dagestan).

Turkic manuscripts copied in Dagestan, as well as lithographs and early printed books in Turkic printed there, still remain insufficiently studied, partly because there are relatively few of them in collections of state museums, archives and institutes outside the republic).

Private manuscript collection from the Khlyut village

The expedition participants were fortunate to gain access to the private collection of Latif Kurbanovich Kurbanov from the village of Khlyut (the Rutul district of the Republic of Dagestan). However, it was not possible to personally discuss the formation history of this collection with its owner. We have only learned some information about his family, several members of which spoke Arabic and had a traditional Muslim education.

In total, there are 16 items in the collection — manuscripts, lithographs and early printed books in Arabic and Turkic languages (in Arabic script). The Arabic-language part of the collection is quite typical: it includes fragments of the Quran, collections of prayers, “Sharḥ al-unmūdḥaj” (the commentary on brief treatise on the grammar of the arabic language by Mahmud b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhshari) by Muḥammad al-Ardabīlī (d. 1626). Dated manuscripts mostly belong to the end of the 19th and the first third of the 20th cc.

A third of the collection consists of manuscripts and books in Turkic. Among the works in Turkic language, there was a small manuscript (7 ff., 7×12 cm) which attracted our attention. Sewn from lined notebook sheets, it contains various prayers and appeals to Sheikh Mahmoud Efendi al-Almali (Mahmoud b. Muhammad al-Daghistani al-Shirvani al-Hanafi al-Naqshbandi al-Mujaddidi). A native of the village of Almali (Almalo; azerb. *Almali*) of the Zakatala district of Tiflis province, now the Qakh district of modern Northwestern Azerbaijan, Mahmud Efendi (1810–1877) was a sheikh of the *Naqshbandiyya* Sufi brotherhood, the founder of its *Mahmudiyya* branch,¹¹ poet and scholar. He was sent into exile to Perm, then

¹¹ SHIKHSAIDOV & KEMPER & BUSTANOV 2012: 140.

he moved to Hadji Tarkhan (Astrakhan), where he died and was buried. Religious authority of Sheikh Mahmud Efendi al-Almali was generally recognized in Southern Dagestan, as evidenced by this manuscript (we can date it to the first half of the 20th c.) in the private collection.

Summarizing the above discussion, it is worth to note that the work in the Akhty State Museum of Local Lore and some private collections of Southern Dagestan contributes not only to preservation of manuscript copies and making access to them easier, but also allows to evaluate the features of the intellectual tradition in this whole microregion. Thus, we see a profound influence of Shirvan on manuscript collections of Southern Dagestan, which is absolutely not observed in other collections of the Republic. An important distinctive element of these collections is the presence of manuscripts in the Turkic language. This reflects, firstly, a wide dissemination and usage of the Turkic language by the inhabitants of Southern Dagestan, and secondly, their interest not only in classical works on Arabic grammar or commentaries on the Quran, but also in poetry, historical works and collections of prayers. Although the collection of the Akhty State Museum of Local Lore is not very diverse in terms of genre, it provides specific information to researchers about the peculiarities of decorating Qurans in Dagestan in the 18th–20th cc., important information about the toponymy and origin of the *nisbahs* enclosed in colophons and much more. It also includes truly rare imperial documents clarifying the specifics of the judicial system in the Dagestan region. As for research on private collections in villages, the collection of the village of Khlyut allows us to confirm the hypothesis about the spread of Turkic literature in Southern Dagestan.

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