

SHIRIN AKINER. *Religious Language of a Belarusian Tatar Kitab. A Cultural Monument of Islam in Europe* (With a Latin-Script Transliteration of the British Library Tatar Belarusian Kitab [OR 13020] on CD-ROM), Mediterranean Language and Culture Monograph Series 11, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009, xxvii + 458 pp. ISBN 978-3-447-03027-4 (Paperback)

Since the 17th century the Tatars (Slavic speaking Muslims) have had a manuscript tradition, which is a heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In recent years, it has received more and more consideration not only from scholars from various states, but also from the wider international society. In the mid 19th century, scholars started to pay attention to manuscripts that were written in the Turkish, Belarusian and Polish languages, but in Arabic script (Kitab, Chamail, Tejvid, Tefsir). However, only in the second part of the 20th century were comprehensive and successful studies started after Anton Antonovič published his monograph *Белорусские тексты, писанные арабским письмом, и их графико-орфографическая система* (Vilnius, 1968). When this rich layer of Eastern culture was further researched, graphic and textual analysis and the analysis of thematic manuscripts started (Drozd 1999; Jankowski, Łapicz 2000; Łapicz 1986; Miškinienė 2001; Miškinienė, Namavičiūtė 2009; Suter 2004).

These studies are insufficient, however, because the absolute majority of the graphic, literary, linguistic, religious and cultural characteristics of the manuscripts situated in archives are poorly known even to specialists of those fields. So far there have been only a few manuscripts transcribed (from Arabic script) and published.

Shirin Akiner's book, *Religious Language of a Belarusian Tatar Kitab*, is dedicated to a Belarusian Tatar manuscript (OR 13020) which is under the aegis of the British Library. This manuscript is ascribed to the Kitab genre. It was transcribed in 1831 by an unknown author. There were few publications (Akiner 1973; Akiner 1978; Meredith-Owens, Narson 1970) of this manuscript written. The content of the 125 pages of the manuscript is very multifarious. There are three main plots in the Kitab: 1) religious (fragments of the Quran, prayer, Islamic doctrinal interpretation, the creation of the world); 2) ritual (funeral, Ramadan); 3) pastoral (didactic story, conversation between prophet and God, sermons). The texts of the manuscript are written in Arabic, Turkish, Ruthenian and Polish. In most places the Arabic and Turkish written text has a translation into Ruthenian.

Shirin Akiner's book consists of a preface (pp. xiii–xxiii), four parts (pp. 1–356), two tables (pp. 343–60), four appendixes (pp. 361–403), maps (pp. 403–5), illustrations (pp. 407–9), bibliography (pp. 411–40), index of lexical entries (pp. 440–57), and a CD-ROM with a Latin-script transliteration of the British Library

Tatar Belarusian Kitab. In Part I, the author talks about research on the Tatars of Belarus, Lithuania and Poland from their beginning to the present time and about the aims and methodology of this work. The study has four main aims: a) to analyze the etymological characteristics of the manuscripts with reference to the Slavs as well as the 'oriental' (Turkish, Arabic, Persian) vocabulary; b) to examine the grammatical, phonetic and syntactical adaptation and integration of the non-Slavic elements; c) to map semantic differentiation in the use of the Slavic and non-Slavic elements as applied to religious concepts; d) to determine the nature and degree of the socio-linguistic interaction between the Slavic and non-Slavic heritage of the Tatars (pp. 9–10). The authors' methodology lets us identify dominant patterns of usage and highlight the considerable degree of orthographic and phonological variation.

In nonfiction literature, Tatars who came to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the Golden Horde are called Lithuanian, Polish and Belarusian Tatars, or sometimes Lithuanian–Belarusian or Lithuanian–Polish Tatars. In her book, the author title uses word Belarusian Tatars instead of Tatars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, having in mind that their descendants nowadays live in three states: Poland, Belarus and Lithuania.

Part II is dedicated to the history, religion, language and literature of the Tatars (pp. 11–80). The historical part consists of Tatar history in Central Asia, the Mongol Empire, and the Golden Horde till their arrival in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where they were affected by various integration and assimilation processes. Their religion, Islam, lets them survive like an ethnic group. Shirin Akiner examines the interaction between the Tatars and Islam in various historical periods. She also talks about the population and activities of the Muslim community in different places. For various reasons, in the 16th century the majority of Tatars in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania stopped using their mother tongue, and in this case religious literature appears, which is written in Ruthenian, but in Arabic script.

A very important remark made by the authors is about the original model for the origin of the Kitab genre. 'The original model for the kitab genre might well have been *Qisas al-anbijā'* (the Stories of the Prophets). This genre, a compilation of narratives drawn from various sources, including Jewish and Christian traditions, was very popular in the Muslim world. In Tatar writings one of the most frequently encountered narratives is that of the death of Jesus' mother Mary (see Appendix 2.4). The Tatars ascribe this text to Wahb ibn Munabbih (AD 654/55–c. 728/9), author of a well-known Arabic version of *Qisas al-anbijā'*. However, a more likely (or more immediate) source for the Tatar story was probably the *Qisas al-anbijā'* compiled by Rabghuzi in AD 1310' (p. 79). Russian scholar Nikolaj Katanov transcribed a version of *Qisas al-anbijā'* and its comparison with texts from a Tatar manuscript which could confirm Jakub Szykiewicz's suggestion that the Tatars inherited this

genre from their forebears in the Golden Horde (p. 80). However, nowadays it is not possible to confirm its validity. That can be proved by further research and the appearance of new texts.

Part III is dedicated to describing The British Library Kitab (pp. 81–134). The physical characteristics, the phonetics and phonology, the morphological characteristics of Ruthenian vocabulary and Ottoman Turkish loanwords, the lexical extension of Ottoman loans, the syntactic adaptation of Ottoman loans, and finally the contents of the British Library Kitab are presented there.

In part IV religious vocabulary is presented (pp. 135–335). The vocabulary is organized according to semantic fields: 1) Doctrine, Beliefs and Ethics; 2) Worship; 3) Proper Nouns; 4) Miscellaneous Ottoman Words. In these groups are subgroups: deity and divine attributes; angels, devils and other non-Humans; this world; mankind; Islamic law; community worship; names of places; etc. With every word is given the context where that word is dominant is given, and the translation of that word in English. We can find the equivalent of the word in Arabic or Ottoman Turkish if the word is a loanword, for example: divine epithets.

In part V, the author gives us conclusions (pp. 336–60). In her study, she identifies 1,094 words that may be regarded as constituting the religious vocabulary of the British Library Belarusian Kitab. Data is presented in two tables (pp. 343–4). The conclusion reached in this study is that the Tatars' religious vocabulary is basically Slavic with an admixture of a relatively small number of Turkish/Arabic terms to convey uniquely Islamic ideas.

In the end of the book, an exhaustive bibliography is provided (pp. 411–40). The bibliography consists of thematic groups and presents 450 entries.

A very important addition to this book is a CD-ROM with a Latin-script transliteration of the British Library Tatar Belarusian Kitab (OR 13020). The text in this CD is essential for scholars of various disciplines: philology, culture, ethnography, history, etc. Regrettably, there are no transliterated Arabic and Ottoman Turkish insertions in this CD. If these insertions had been included, they would have let us better compare texts from other manuscripts.

Shirin Akiners' excellent book represents an impressive academic achievement. She delivers a brand new Tatar manuscript for contemporary researchers. This book gives everyone a possibility to get acquainted with the culture, religion, and literature of the Tatars. It is rich in the transliterated text of the Tatar manuscript, the text analysis, the religious vocabulary, and its conclusions. The book is strongly recommended for academic society and for those who are interested in Tatar culture and literary heritage. It is a beneficial tool for further philological, historical and ethnographical research.

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