

Contested Minorities of the Middle East and Asia

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Edited by

Attila Kovács and Katarína Šomodiová

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0772-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0772-2

Dedicated to the Memory of our friend Dr. Mohsen Jafari-Mazhab (1958-2017), an eminent scholar of Iranian studies and expert of Eastern European studies in Iran.

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INTRODUCTION

The relations of various religious, ethnic, political and other minorities and majorities have always been a determinant for the various social processes taking place in individual geographical, political and cultural settings. The relevance of such factors even increases in regions with a complex social composition and a recent history of serious armed conflicts, such as the Middle East and certain parts of Asia. The presented collection *Contested Minorities of the Middle East and Asia* attempts to approach selected aspects of these phenomena. Obviously, there is already available a relevant array of existing publications on these issues, since conflicts in the region have been widespread for a longer period of time and, furthermore, the Middle East has already been a significant area of focus of international interest for several decades. Thus it is obvious that questions like “what new can the authors of this collection offer in this issue?” shall arise.

First, similarly to many other social relations, the “minority versus majority” dynamics continuously keep evolving, adjusting and reshaping. Along with well-known general historical developments and changes, the collection takes into consideration especially the formative events of the past decades e. g. the two Gulf wars and the so-called Arab spring as well as the events and conflicts that followed, such as the civil wars in Syria and Libya. These all have had an especially significant impact on the minorities of the regions and their mutual relations with the majority populations. In other words, these events and their consequences have presented important new fields of study, research and analysis for researchers and academics.

Second, the authors of this collection come from Central and Eastern Europe and are affiliated with Universities or research institutions located in this region. The relations among minorities and majorities in Central and Eastern Europe are in many aspects as complex as in the Middle East and this phenomenon offers the collection a specific and unique authors' viewpoint.

Another crucial factor besides this affinity is the fact that Central and Eastern Europe has long played an important role in the study and research of the Middle East and its religions, cultures and languages. It is the

birthplace of several prominent scholars and researchers of Oriental studies such as the famous travellers Ármín Vámbéry (1832 – 1913), Aurel Stein (1862 – 1943) and Alois Musil (1868 – 1944) as well as the father of modern Islamic studies Ignác Goldziher (1850 – 1921) and the excellent and renowned scholar of Semitic studies Rudolf Macúch (1919 – 1993). The heirs of the heritage which these men established in Oriental studies in Central and Eastern Europe are also among the authors of this collection.

Of special importance for this collection is the work and personality of the internationally acclaimed linguist and scholar of Semitic studies Rudolf Macúch (1919 – 1993), professor of the Freie Universität in Berlin who particularly excelled in the research of Middle Eastern ethnic and religious minorities. His works on Syrian Christians, Samaritans and especially the Mandaeans are of a determinative character for academics and researchers all around the world specializing on these minorities. Apart from their eminent academic value, these works were of a high influence on the ethnic and linguistic development of these minorities themselves. Therefore, this collection aims to commemorate and pay tribute to the life work and memory of Rudolf Macúch. Also, the majority of the papers collected here are among the outcomes of the conference titled “Minorities and Majorities in the Middle East and Asia” organized at Comenius University in Bratislava in September 2016 in the memory of Rudolf Macúch.

As for the thematic orientation of the presented papers, it is rather varied. Although each of them elaborates upon issues concerning minorities and majorities or closely related researches, the individual presented texts are, much like the regions in focus, quite differentiated.

The essay of Miklós Sárközy (Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, Budapest) titled “Meeting the Otherness – Wladimir Ivanow's Memoirs and his early encounters with Iranian minority groups (Sufis, Ismailis and Gypsies) before 1920” offers a valuable insight into the life and work of a renowned Orientalist. The text of Admira Delić from the University of Sarajevo “Is there a female theology in Islam? Case study of Fāṭima bint ‘Abbās al-Baghdādiya” presents another minority: she introduces the reader to an outstanding personality of the medieval female Islamic theology, while Martin Klapetek (University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice) elaborates on the position of Muslims in Europe in his paper “The Near Orient? The Transfer of “Otherness” to European Contexts” and the text “Christian Sannyasis at the Edge between (Religious) Minority and Majority in India” of Matej Karásek (Comenius University in Bratislava) allows insight into the relations among Christians and Hindus. Marko Jovanović (The Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade)

analyses the religious, cultural and political identity of the Chinese Uyghur minority in “Uyghur Separatism: A Fight for Cultural or Religious Identity”. The essay “Minority and Majority Representations of Jerusalem in Islamist Ideology” by Attila Kovács (Comenius University in Bratislava) also moves along the borderline of religion and politics while introducing the interpretations of Jerusalem by Islamist ideologies and Katarína Šomodiová (Comenius University in Bratislava) presents a lesser known but very intriguing minority of Iraq and Iran in her paper titled “The Mandaean: An Endangered Minority of the Middle East”.

Even though the image of Middle Eastern and other minorities created by this collection is far from complete, the mosaic created by the authors effectively represents the variability of the relations of the majorities and minorities in the researched regions and can be viewed as a unique and valuable addition to the growing number of academic publications on the issue.

The editors

Notes on transliteration

We use the commonly accepted simplified forms regularly used in written English for the transliteration of foreign expressions which have become adopted within the English language (e. g. Islam, Sunna, Shia), as well as for the names of well-known personalities, dynasties (e. g. Khomeini, Mamluk), movements (e. g. Hamas) or geographical names (e. g. Baghdad, Khuzestan).

As for the Arabic transliteration of less common personal names, toponyms, terminology, cited expressions or titles of any kind we have opted to use a slightly altered standardized method of transcription based on the ALA-LC Romanization system. The Arabic transliteration system used in this book is as follows:

ا	ā	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	ḥ
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m

ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ	ء	'
ض	ḍ	ة	a

All Quranic quotations are based on the Saheeh International translation.

MEETING THE OTHERNESS:
WLADIMIR IVANOW'S *MEMOIRS*
AND HIS EARLY ENCOUNTERS WITH IRANIAN
MINORITY GROUPS (SUFIS, ISMAILIS
AND GYPSIES) BEFORE 1920

MIKLÓS SÁRKÖZY

Wladimir Alekseevich Ivanow¹ (1886 – 1970) played a crucial role in the development of Islamic science as a founding father of Ismaili studies. He spent most of his life in exile in India and Iran (Persia) after 1917 due to political reasons and – to a lesser extent – due to his own personal decisions. His vast oeuvre in the field of Ismaili studies as well as his contributions to Ismaili-related researches in Ismaili archaeology, philology and history are milestones and are of great importance for those interested in Ismaili studies and Shia history. His constant interest in Ismailism successfully challenged the mainly Sunni-based scholarship of Islamic studies in the first half of the 20th century.

The present essay aims at presenting hitherto neglected data on the beginnings of Ivanow's scientific interests especially his earliest Ismaili connections before his forced exile from Russia. It is perhaps a lesser known fact that besides the Ismaili community, Ivanow published papers on other ethnic or religious minorities such as the Roma of Iran (or as he called them: Gypsies) and Sufis, which makes him an early pioneer of minority studies within the field of Iranian studies. However, in the light of his long-awaited and recently published personal memoirs, we can raise several new aspects concerning his earliest contacts with these minority groups of Iran at the dawn of his scientific career.

¹ His name is spelt variously in different sources, in our article we follow the transcription of the Encyclopaedia Iranica, s. Daftary 2007a.

Young Ivanow and Ismaili Studies in Russia

Undoubtedly, the late 19th century Russian scholarship played an eminent role in the beginnings of Ismaili studies. Due to the well-known Russian ties to Central Asia after the Tsarist conquest, Russian scholars travelled widely in the region during the second half of the 19th century. This opportunity enabled them to have direct access to hitherto unprocessed sources and manuscripts of diverse Central Asian communities such as Ismailis. The most important experts of the early Ismaili studies were almost exclusively Russian scientists of the late 19th century. Count Aleksey A. Bobrinskoy (1861 – 1938), Ivan I. Zarubin (1887 – 1964) and Aleksandr A. Semenov (1873 – 1958) all specialized in Ismaili studies and thoroughly studied Ismaili manuscripts of Central Asian origins. Their collections of Ismaili manuscripts (which were the most significant ones of the time in Europe) and their papers published on Ismaili subjects paved the way for later generations of scholars in the field of Ismaili studies. For instance, the tiny yet significant Zarubin manuscript collection from the Shugnan and Rushan districts of Badakhshan was catalogued by Ivanow in 1915 shortly before his departure from Russia (*Memoirs*: 20 – 21).

As known from his official biography, Ivanow developed a deep interest in manuscripts from his early youth and was sometimes called a “fanatical manuscript lover” (Daftary 2007a: 298 – 299). His expertise in this area and his early studies in St Petersburg in the Zarubin collection of Ismaili manuscripts before 1918, the year he left Russia, represent the theoretical and scholarly background of his later achievements. However, the newly published memoirs of Ivanow also confirm his great talent in conducting anthropological field works during his early encounters with different minority groups in Persia before 1916.

The *Memoirs* of Ivanow

Ivanow spent most of his life after 1918 at the periphery of the Western academic circles. Decades spent in India, mainly in the city of Bombay and in Iran however resulted in a rich scientific output of numerous important publications on Ismaili literature, texts and history.

He transferred his residence to Tehran in 1959 due to his advanced age and the unwelcoming climate of India, and spent the rest of his life until his death in 1970 here (Daftary 2007a: 298 – 299). The scientific swansong of Ivanow were his *Memoirs* which he completed in Tehran in 1968, shortly before his death. Ivanow very much wished to publish his *Memoirs* in his own lifetime, however, his efforts for its publication

proved to be fruitless. Although he made painstaking efforts and forwarded the typescript of the Memoirs to Moscow to the *Nauka* (Science) Publishers in 1968, his draft was refused by this state controlled Soviet publishing house causing much distress to the elderly exiled Russian scholar in Tehran. Nevertheless, Ivanow's *Memoirs* kept circulating among Soviet scholars interested in his works. Distinguished Soviet scholars of Oriental studies such as Kamol Ayni or Oleg F. Akimushkin did get access to the *Memoirs* during the Soviet period despite their unpublished nature. Plans of an early English translation and publication of the Russian original eventually failed, though His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, the spiritual leader of the Nizari Ismailis, also expressed his wish to publish it in Ivanow's lifetime. Finally, the typescript of Ivanow's Memoirs was donated by eminent Soviet Tajik scholar Kamol Ayni² in Dushanbe to Farhad Daftary, the director of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London. The original translation was made by Sergey Andreyev in the 1990's and was later substantially reworked and re-edited before its publication in 2015 by the Institute of Ismaili Studies (*Memoirs*: 5 – 7).

The *Memoirs* of Wladimir Ivanow is a very important source for several reasons. First of all, it reveals many interesting facts and hitherto lesser known events about the life of a distinguished scholar, but it also helps us to understand his original motivations and inspirations which remarkably shaped his career and his later scholarly interest.

Ivanow and His First Inspirations for Minority Studies

As demonstrated above, Ivanow's merits in rediscovering the Ismaili spiritual heritage in the Islamic world are rooted in the works of his Russian predecessors in Central Asia. Ivanow's own passion for manuscripts and his own brilliant skill in the field of Arabic and Persian philology (trained by eminent scholars such as Vasiliy Barthold) were successfully complemented by his classes in the field of Persian dialectology by Valentin Zhukovsky, a well-known expert of Persian dialects. However, it was mainly Barthold who had the most serious influence on Ivanow according to the latter's memoirs. Yet, Ivanow followed the footsteps of Zhukovsky and in 1910 he was awarded with a three months scholarship in Persia to improve his own practical knowledge of Persian. On his way to Persia he travelled through Bukhara and

² It is important to note that Kamol Ayni was one of the few Soviet scholars who certainly met Ivanow in Iran before 1970. See *Memoirs*: 6.

Samarkand as well. Ivanow successfully extended his first ever trip to Persia with two extra months. During his first stay in Persia, especially in the weeks he spent in Isfahan, Ivanow was particularly impressed by the Sufis of Isfahan, as he noted in his diary:

“Like many incipient Orientalists, I was very interested in Sufism in my student years. I must confess that its amorphous nature and lack of precise organisational structure confused me greatly and I ended up none the wiser. However, (in Persia) I attempted to find Sufi Dervishes. The two-month stay in Isfahan in the summer of 1910 was enormously useful for me in getting to know the Dervishes. They were poor and simple Sufis who did not have anything in common with philosophical Sufism. Indeed, this popular form of Sufism had an ideology in terms of messianic beliefs. As I delved deeper into Sufism, it was not difficult to identify it essentially as a crude form of Ismailism.” (*Memoirs*: 103)

It appears that the very first inspirations for Ivanow to make further acquaintances with non-majority groups of the early 20th century Iranian society were his words about the Sufis he met in Isfahan in 1910 as it was explained some sixty years later in his *Memoirs*. His assumptions about the alleged common views of Sufis and Ismailis seem to be slightly exaggerative, but nevertheless are remarkable in reflecting his emerging early interest in Ismailism. These brief notes, however, have a much deeper meaning which can be regarded as a constant thread in Ivanow's narrative throughout his book. It appears that Ivanow's main interest lies in the study of pre-modern societies and the social status of its different layers. In this regard, he attempted to study these non-mainstream groups living on the fringes of the Persian society, which already started disappearing from the scene at the beginning of the 20th century. This anxiety, the fear of “degeneration” of the pre-modern society and the sharp decline of minority groups of early 20th century Iran is eminent in his account on the Dervishes of Isfahan as well (*Memoirs*: 102 – 103).

On the other hand, Ivanow is right, since it is well-known that Sufi (more specifically *Ni^cmatallahi*) and Ismaili circles in Kirman had maintained especially close social and religious relations in the 18th and 19th centuries (Daftary: 2007b). Ivanow's interest in Sufis and wandering Dervishes as early as 1910 when he was only twenty-four years old had a deep impact on his later career. In Ivanow's eyes Sufis were an important but already declining group of the Iranian society at the time as it was demonstrated by his following notes:

“Once I was taken to their 'nest' in the Takht-e Fulad cemetery near the Khaju Bridge, on one or the other side of the Zayande-rud. Dervishes

sprinkled the round with water to cool the air, made the inevitable tea and we sat down to discuss pious subjects. I was particularly eager to hear their life-stories, even doctored versions of them. I met many Dervishes in Birjand, Kerman, Meshhed and Sabzewar. It is difficult to regard their influence on the local population as completely negative. In the past there were large and strong Dervish organisations, but in my time here remained only one, the Gunabadi Brotherhood in Bidukht, an organisation to which all the servants as well as higher officials belonged. And I always regretted that I had no knowledge of shorthand to write down this material. I have been planning to write a comprehensive book on this subject, but unfortunately something more urgent always came up. It seems that it is already too late to start it now. By now, due to the advance of culture and economic difficulties, parasitical Dervishes, who in the recent past used to sing religious poems in every bazaar, have completely disappeared in Persia. But there are still many people who remember these 'people of religion', in white or coloured turbans, wandering the streets and living off all sorts of *waqfs* and religious institutions. The Iranian government wisely made provisions to reduce their number.” (*Memoirs*: 102 – 103)

Once again, the elderly Ivanow recalled his first exciting encounters with groups of Dervishes in the outskirts of Isfahan in 1910. These were his first enthusiastic meetings with quasi-ostracised groups of the contemporary Iranian society. We feel that reasons behind his increasing personal interest in these minority groups at this very early stage might have been twofold. First, his own scientific background in the field of ethnography and dialectology inspired by Zhukovsky – as Ivanow himself acknowledged in the *Memoirs* (*Memoirs* 101 – 102) – could have led him to the study of the “Other” in the Iranian society. On the other hand his possible anti-modernist feelings could also have played a certain role in the formation of his viewpoints and attitudes towards the radical changes he had witnessed among the early 20th century Iranian society and its later developments of the Pahlavi period which Ivanow seemed to oppose personally. Ivanow's interest towards Iranian Dervishes was mainly anthropological and to a lesser extent linguistic.³ He was deeply fascinated by these wandering groups which represented a somewhat alternative and premodern society for him.

Ivanow's personal attachment to Iranian Sufis very clearly induced him to conduct further studies in other alternative groups, i.e. partially nomadic or partially ostracised communities. It looks like this early encounter clearly inspired him to make further steps in several ways. The Iranian

³ Later he dedicated a few papers to the poetry and dialectology of Iranian Dervishes: Ivanow 1927a, Ivanow 1927c.

Roma communities of Khurasan were in the forefront of his interest during his second stay in Persia in 1912. His researches of Khurasani Roma culture and language are clearly linked to his interest in the questions of "Otherness" which had fascinated him during his meetings with various groups of Dervishes in 1910. Besides shared elements and crossroads of their identities, both the Romas and the Dervishes were already dwindling communities in the early modern Iranian society.

Upon his return to St. Petersburg, Ivanow went through a difficult period since he had been neglected at his University. He considered several other offers and in 1911, upon his graduation, he finally accepted the offer of the State Bank of Persia to join its Persian mission as a member of staff of this financial institution.

Ivanow's First Encounters with Ismailis and Romas in Persia After 1911

Ivanow's decision to move to Persia and to work for a Russian bank caused surprise among his contemporaries. One must note that a great deal of personal frustration could have been behind this decision, since Ivanow failed to gain a position at the University of St. Petersburg. His personal comments are rather controversial, he stated he disliked teaching, yet he regretted that somebody else was chosen for this position. (*Memoirs*: 51 – 52)

His departure to Persia was therefore caused by financial needs and his unfulfilled ambitions in the academic world. Ivanow spent four years in Persia altogether, and it was this period where one can detect his first true encounters with several important ethnic and religious minorities of the country. He was first stationed in north-eastern Iran around the town of Birjand. It was because of the multi-ethnic character of this region that Ivanow was surrounded by different ethnic and religious groups, causing a resounding fascination and youthful enthusiasm in his memoirs written more than fifty years later:

“My first year in Birjand – 1912 – was the happiest time in my adult life, and was never to be repeated. I was completely immersed in my studies and field research, read much in Persian and Arabic, collected specimens of the local variant of colloquial Persian, rural poetry and tales, and explored an area of about 30 km in the surroundings, where I found Dervishes, Ismailis and Baluchis. I lived my life to the full.” (*Memoirs*: 54 – 55)

Ivanow's notes reveal his enthusiasm over his several encounters with minority groups around Birjand. Despite of the shortness of these notes, these lines nevertheless show his strong passion for the anthropological study of different religious and ethnic minorities, notably the Ismailis and Baluchis living around Birjand. Furthermore, signs of his later ardent individualism were already present in Ivanow's personality. Far away from academic circles of Russia, Ivanow now felt completely free to conduct his own researches in an area where he enjoyed complete academic and personal freedom.

On the other hand, Ivanow made relatively brief notes about his first encounters with Ismailis in his *Memoirs*, though he published a more detailed report in 1922, both in English and in Russian, about the Ismailis of Persia based on his own visits to these communities (Ivanow 1922b). This much longer report is beyond the scope of our present essay, though its importance cannot be overestimated, since it contains reports about his earliest encounters with the Ismailis of Khurasan. Here Ivanow gives a very detailed overview about the social status of Ismailis carefully mapping their communities in north-eastern Persia. A vast number of linguistic data had been collected during these months in Khurasan, since Ivanow published a large number of papers on the dialectology of various Khurasani ethnic groups in the 1920's.⁴ It is however not exactly known how Ivanow's early notes found their way to India in the light of the very turbulent period of his life between 1917 and 1922.

His interest in non-Persian and non-Twelve-Shia groups of the Persian society was further strengthened in 1913 – 1914 when Ivanow was dispatched to the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. In his *Memoirs* he briefly referred to his meetings with Armenians, Jews, Kurds and Azeri Turks as well as “*all sorts of riff-raff elements*” as he noted sarcastically in his *Memoirs* (56). Not long before the outbreak of the First World War Ivanow sailed to India via Ottoman-controlled Iraq, visiting Karachi, Bombay, and Calcutta, where he stayed only briefly. This Indian sojourn also foreshadowed his later decades to be spent in the Calcutta and Bombay. As early as 1914 Ivanow already got access to several manuscripts stored in the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (*Memoirs*, 56 – 60).

Ivanow's personal attachment to Iranian Sufis evidently induced him to conduct further studies of other communities of partially nomadic or relatively ostracised character. It appears that this early encounter clearly inspired him to study the Roma communities of Khurasan while in Persia

⁴ Papers published by Ivanow dedicated to the dialectology and folk poetry of Khurasan are as follows: Ivanow 1923, Ivanow 1925, Ivanow 1926, Ivanow 1927b, Ivanow 1927d, Ivanow 1928.

in 1912. His interest in Khurasani Roma culture and language are clearly linked to his interest in the questions of “Otherness” which had fascinated him during his meetings with Dervishes in 1910.

“This is a good example of a traditional, patriarchal society. It may look rather repulsive, as it was in the case of the attempt to 'catch the brigands', but sometimes it appears attractive and even touching. I shall never forget a gypsy wedding which I saw in Birjand. Gypsies from the whole district came to the town for the celebration which was on a small harvested field near my home. The gypsy women looked really exciting in their traditional long colourful dresses. To a degree, they reminded me of the pictures of the famous Russian painter Maliavin, and I regretted that choreographers could not see them dancing. Perhaps nowadays only a few gypsies still remain in Persia. In 1937, I tried to collect samples of the dialect of the gypsies of Kerman, but I could not find anyone who could speak it well. Fifty years ago they were still considered members of one of the traditional bazaar trades and even had their own place in the bazaar. But later they were unable to compete with industrially manufactured goods. Some of them were really talented people who made the most beautiful objects with their primitive tools. Women made sieves of different styles. Gypsies could be found everywhere, but in 1957 when I was passing through Birjand I saw only one young gypsy at the site of their camp. They had these camp sites in many cities. I tried my best to study their dialect, or rather jargon, and published a few articles on it. Later on, when I tried to check a few things, I was unable to find a single gypsy who could speak the dialect; even the old people had completely forgotten their idiom.” (*Memoirs*: 106 – 108)

Both the Roma and the Dervishes were dwindling communities in early 20th century Iran, both had scattered groups in Khurasan and both were of mainly wandering unsettled background making their living from storytelling, and other non-orthodox ways of ritual practices on the fringes of the majority. Therefore there is no wonder that Ivanow's first scientific publication in 1914 was about the Roma dialects which he collected around Qainat in Khurasan (Ivanow 1914).⁵ Another one of Ivanow's early essays attempted to connect the two communities by means of linguistics when he wrote about “Gypsy-Dervish jargons” (Ivanow 1922a). At one point the proximity of Iranian Gypsies and Dervishes was clearly emphasized in the *Memoirs* themselves.⁶

⁵ Another early paper of Ivanow about the linguistical peculiarities of the Roma communities of Khurasan was published somewhat later: see Ivanow 1920.

⁶ For the history of Iranian Roma communities see Digard 2002.

“They (the darwishes) were closely associated with Gypsies (ustakar, qirishmal, kauli).”(Memoirs: 102).

Besides the Roma of Khurasan, Ivanow's early encounters with Sufi Dervishes greatly enhanced his interest in Ismaili studies as well. As it has been shown, Ivanow strongly believed in the close relationship among the ideas of Sufism and Ismailism. This alleged connection as well as the peripheral position of both groups brought him close to the study of the Ismaili communities of eastern Iran. Of course, personal fortune played its own significant role, since Ivanow as a financial officer was dispatched exactly to an area where he could visit these tiny Ismaili villages around Birjand. Here, as it was demonstrated, Ivanow met Sufis as well as Ismailis, Baluchis, Kurds, and Romas. These encounters eventually strengthened his personal view on the similarities and the shared common values as well as the misrepresentation and misinterpretation of these communities both in their social status and their religious beliefs and practices.

Ivanow and His Iranian Minority Contacts in 1918 – 1920

In early 1918 Ivanow returned to Persia. Before that he had joined the Asiatic Museum of the (Imperial) Russian Academy of Sciences led by Karl G. Zaleman and in 1915 he was sent to Bukhara for collecting manuscripts. In St. Petersburg he catalogued the Zarubin collection, itself an important group of Central Asian Ismaili manuscripts and started working on the edition of *Umm al-Kitab*, a book widely used and revered by Central Asian Ismailis (though not exactly of Ismaili origin and content). After years of vicissitudes caused by the political turmoil of the First World War and the political events following the fall of the Russian empire, in the spring of 1918 Ivanow was once again sent to Bukhara from St. Petersburg to collect further Islamic manuscripts and to visit the Yaghnoobi valley. But serious political events, the rising Basmachi movement and the outbreak of civil war in Russia made his researches completely impossible. Unable to return to Russia, Ivanow suddenly decided to move back to Khurasan, where he had got to know local conditions due to the period he had spent there in 1911 – 1913.

Life was miserable for him and he made his living mainly as a Persian and English interpreter for local wealthy persons of Khurasan but also for the British forces. As an expert of Persian he served there in 1919 – 1920 to Major-General W. E. R. Dickson, the commander of the Anglo-Indian forces in Eastern Persia in the First World War. His attempts to apply for different scientific positions (though it is not exactly clear at which ones

and where) meant that by 1920 he gave up the idea of returning to his beloved homeland after 1918. Soon Ivanow left for India with the withdrawing British forces from Iran and Central Asia in 1920, the events of which are beyond the scope of this paper (Memoirs 2 – 3).

Daftary hints that Ivanow revived his contacts with Ismailis and perhaps with other minority groups while serving the British in 1918 – 1920.⁷ Yet, Ivanow does not reveal relevant details of these encounters in his *Memoirs*. He briefly mentions his dealings with Afghans, Kurds, Turks, and Persians, but interestingly he did not specify details of his alleged meetings with Ismailis at all.⁸ It is perhaps because of his numerous other papers dedicated to the medieval history and literature of Iranian Ismailis that Ivanow does not write extensively about his earliest encounters with the Ismailis of Iran after 1918.

On the other hand, in the English foreword of the edition of the so called *Dīwān-i Qā'imīyyāt* Badakhchani briefly quotes an Ismaili source about a visit of Ivanow to an Ismaili community of Khurasan. These are the words of a certain Mr. Barzgar, a local Ismaili of Khurasan who personally met Ivanow somewhere allegedly before 1920.

“Ivanow came to us, but we did not disclose the existence of this book (*Dīwān-i Qā'imīyyāt*) to him, because no one owns the complete collection.” (*Dīwān-i Qā'imīyyāt*: 7-8)

Though this reference hints to a meeting of Ivanow with Ismailis in Khurasan, its exact date remains unknown. As it is known, Ivanow had frequently visited Iranian Ismailis even in his later years and had regularly returned to Iran from India for different purposes before his final settlement in Tehran in 1959. Badakhchani personally suggested to the author of this paper in a personal meeting in his office at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in 2014 that the above-mentioned meeting of Ivanow and Barzgar took place before 1920 (*Dīwān-i Qā'imīyyāt* 7 – 8). Yet, in our view, the evidence for this meeting before 1920 is still missing.⁹

⁷ For instance, Ivanow did meet the Ismailis of the area of Dīzbād in July 1918, as it was demonstrated in his *Ismailitica* in 1922. 55. n. 17. (Ivanow 1922b)

⁸ Ivanow does mention this work among his findings in his *Ismailitica*, therefore we may presume that it remained hidden to his eyes as it was confirmed by Mr. Barzgar. See Ivanow 1922b. Here Ivanow complains about the secretive characters of some Ismailis when asking them about their beliefs and writings. Ivanow made critical notes about the poor written heritage of these rural Ismaili communities and in general their lack of education.

⁹ Although the title suggests that this collection of poems was entirely composed by Hasan Mahmūd Kātīb, the authorship of this work has been heavily debated in

Nevertheless, this brief quotation is very important since it proves that Ivanow was still remembered by a rural Ismaili community decades after his visit. Throughout his life Ivanow was an ardent collector of Ismaili manuscripts. His main goal was to collect Ismaili manuscripts in order to save the spiritual heritage of this minority group.¹⁰

Summary

Ivanow's early encounters with Iranian minority groups appear to be decisive for his later career. Ostracised social groups, fringe members of a society and declining conditions of the pre-modern Iranian society at the threshold of modernity all contributed to his own interest in documenting the literary, religious and linguistic conditions of these relatively small communities of Khurasan. Besides these facts, we might assume that his own linguistic skills and earlier education in the field of Ismaili literature of Central Asia could have played their own role in his keen interest in studying these minority groups. It is beyond doubt that all of these early influences had a serious impact on his later researches which eventually made him a pioneer of Ismaili studies in Iran and worldwide.

Ivanow was a man of the “ancien regime” who disliked the radical changes of modernity which led to the elimination of numerous premodern customs, manners and traditions. His lines about the “ugly new buildings” designed in the Pahlavi era in Tehran clearly reveal his strong pre-1921 nostalgic feelings towards Iranian culture and policy. (*Memoirs*: 108 – 111). The pessimistic opening remarks of his *Memoirs* clearly reflect his own traditionalist world-view as well:

“The circumstances of my life have unfolded in such a way that I have spent fifty years, virtually continuously, as a researcher in the field of Iranian studies (Persian dialects) and Ismaili studies. This period coincided with one of the most tragic eras in the history of mankind, one of radical change and enormous shifts in lifestyles, world-views and of social and political changes in the life of nations, including the peoples of East.” (*Memoirs*: xv.)

the secondary literature. It appears that the *Dīwān-i Qā'imīyyāt* was rather an anthology of works penned by different Ismaili poets of Northern Iran before 1256.

¹⁰ As it was suggested, Ivanow failed to gain access to the entire manuscript of the *Dīwān-i Qā'imīyyāt*, this very important manuscript about the pre-1256 period of the Iranian Ismailis, yet minor parts of it were published by him in 1938. See Ivanow 1938.

Whether Ivanow's own seclusive and lonely character played a certain role in his researches and preferences towards these largely isolated and vulnerable minority groups of northern Persia remains a mystery. But it is probable that a personality who dedicated his entire adult life to science while living in seclusion and spending long decades in exile perhaps felt some shared sympathy with these peripheral minority groups.

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IS THERE FEMALE THEOLOGY IN ISLAM? CASE STUDY OF FĀṬIMA BINT ^cABBĀS AL-BAGHDĀDĪYA

ADMIRA DELIĆ

Introduction

Today many people tend to think that religious tradition, dogmatics and interpretations of holy scriptures have always been solely in the hands of men and that religious ideas and rhetoric were used and misused to advocate male supremacy and dominance over women. Such claims are valid to a certain extent and dismissing the existence of such attempts would be inaccurate. The currents described as female or feminist theology are thus often seen as something inherently modern and anti-traditional. Conventional views of premodern societies depict them as harshly patriarchal with no space left for reasoning about the position of a woman believer as a subjective centre of the religious universe.

However, this paper will present a completely different story of a female theologian actively articulating her beliefs and their forms in everyday practical life. We are also going to introduce the legacy of female Islamic scholarship in Islam, from the earliest period of the companions of the Prophet up to the period mostly seen by the outside observer as a decline of the liberties and possibilities once guaranteed by the Islamic religious reforms.

The historical changes of the role of women in the Islamic society were predominantly viewed as a process of gradual deterioration, both by Westerners and by the so-called “modern Muslim feminists”. Nevertheless, the real picture is not so simplistic and one-dimensional. In fact, we are not discussing a single process but rather a complex set of processes with altering intensity and depth and occurring in varying time perspectives. Some changes required a longer period of time while others a shorter one to occur. Furthermore, the effect of those changes clearly varies depending on the ethnic and cultural background, degree of urbanization, political, social, and geographical circumstances etc.

All factors mentioned above also concern current challenges facing the attempts of certain modern Western-based scholars as well as so-called “Muslim” or “Islamic feminists” trying to interpret their struggle as a process that had never been conducted before. It also attempts to prove their reinterpretation as alien to the legacy of female Muslim religious specialists speaking, teaching and writing about their belief and religion. Traditional approaches of Islamic discourses throughout the centuries have not viewed the relations among male and female individuals as those of contradiction nor articulated a need of liberating one from the limitative influence of the other. There was no notion of men standing above women, rather, both sexes were viewed as creating a single structure superior to the individual interests of its components:

“The unit of humanity is not a man or a woman. It is a man and a woman in that union that makes them a family (just like the smallest part of water is not oxygen or hydrogen but both united).” (Hathout 1995: 110)

The discussion about women and traditions clearly reveals two different antagonistic subdiscourses: “female theology” and “feminist theology”. We can define “female theology” as a product of scholarly effort of a female individual within a certain religious tradition, in the present case Islam. It is the contribution of female religious specialists, e.g. female theologians, to the religious tradition. This contribution is applied further and becomes an inseparable part of the corpus of religious texts. If such female theology empirically exists, it should be found as a part of the given tradition itself, not producing any major controversies, and generally accepted as indisputable. This could make the examples of such female theology very interesting and vital for the improvement and enrichment of the traditional role of women within the religious community.

The first approach is based on articulating the key concepts of Islam by the women and exercising the liberties given to women within the Sharia to be a native female voice in Islamic theological debates.

The second one is not a traditional but rather a very modern product of recent streams and reactions to feminist impulses rooted in the Western tradition. As such, this feminist theology can be considered to be a threat to the tradition and something that the more conservative part of the Islamic societies tend to reject. For instance, in 2005 American-based activist Amina Wadud led a prayer as an imam at New York City. This act was refused by large segments of the Muslim population and recognized as a deviation from what is traditionally legislated in Islamic liturgy or jurisprudence of worship (*fiqh al-ʿibāda*). For the feminist theology such an approach means that the feminist component is essential and thus one

may conclude that the feminist theology is derived from feminism itself.

Feminism has been defined as a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements with a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve personal, socio-economic and political rights for women (Hawkesworth 2006: 25 – 27). It could be considered to be the liberation of women from the traditional, religious or cultural “chains”, or the elimination of the traditional gender role. Feminism and its theories spread worldwide and thus have entered the Islamic society as well. Badran dates its first wider occurrence in Islamic debates in the 1990's and differentiates between “secular feminism” (the female critique of religion without any textual hermeneutics and any importance to our subject) and “Islamic feminism”. She defines the latter as “a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm”. (Badran 2002) Legenhausen views Islam and feminism as not completely antagonistic, but with generally conflicting values and principles:

“Both condemn the oppression of women, but the feminist view that patriarchy is equivalent to the oppression of women is not compatible with Islam. The feminist idea that traditional gender roles are to be eliminated is opposed by the Islamic idea that the primary role of woman (after that of servant of God) is that of wife and mother.” (Legenhausen 1999)

Methodology

Since the 1980's, simple philology and classical historiography have proven to be insufficient for fulfilling the needs and interests of researchers studying both Islamic and World History. New approaches to historical studies have emerged. Among them, the so-called Annales school of historiography and the concept of microhistory have gained wider acceptance in the academic discourse.

The first methodological principle we have derived from the Annales school is reflected in viewing every historical event within a wider concept of History in its entirety as well as being the consequence of previous events and the cause of future events.

The second one is the varying duration of different historical processes. This simply means that different historical changes occur at a different speed. Some of them occur within several years, some of them within several decades, centuries, or even millennia. Therefore, their proper observation and evaluation requires the adoption of a proper time scale. This relatively new approach provides us with an innovative and creative view on the history of mankind applicable in all science disciplines which share a common ground with the science of historiography. As F. Braudel describes:

“From the recent experiments and efforts of history, an increasingly clear idea has emerged – whether consciously or not, whether expected or not – of the multiplicity of time, and of the exceptional value of the long time span. It is this last idea which even more than history itself – history of a hundred aspects – should engage the attention and interest of our neighbours, the social sciences.” (Braudel 1982: 27)

Microhistory as a new approach turns the perspective from significant political events such as wars, battles, or edicts of rulers, towards ordinary individuals living in a certain time period in a specific place under unique circumstances. Such an approach based on microhistory has its analogy in the study of recent phenomena – the anthropological approach where the individual also stands in the centre of the focus. In the academic study of Islam applying anthropological methods together with historiography leads to a clear shift from studying texts and scriptures to observing the religiosity of real living Muslims in their varying historical, social and individual contexts. This new anthropological change has given rise to a specific field of research called the Anthropology of Islam with all the related discussions of pros and contras.

Our supposed task is to combine both of these modern approaches in order to respond to the main research issue: the search for a genuine and authentic female theology of Islam. The aforementioned approaches have created a positive method in reaching our aim and addressing our main research question. However, as most research methods, this one also includes a set of limitations and borders. The first one is the concept of Orientalism first defined by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. It represents the Western perception of the Orient as the Other, substantially different and antagonistic towards the West (or Occident). The realities observed in the East are further explained in the light of this prism and the explanation is generally given higher credibility than the actual observed reality. The issue of women in Islam and its symbols like the veil, the forbiddance of free-mixing etc. is one of numerous topics which fell victim to Orientalist perceptions. The West views itself as egalitarian and liberal while perceiving the Islamic world as misogynist, patriarchal, and rigid. Due to this perception the Western colonial powers perceived their mission as one to liberate women from the shackle of Islam – the white man from the West was going to save the brown woman of the East from the oppression of her brown man. In accordance with this notion, the attempts to improve the status of women which were recognized Western enough, were then classified to be satisfactorily liberating and feminist, although they were not genuine and prone to be widely rejected with no practical impact on the conditions of women affected with real problems