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Islam in Russia. Problems of Methodology

Abstract

The present article entitled “Islam in Russia” constitutes the beginning of research in this field in Poland, especially from historical, sociological and political perspective. In the face of virtually lack of more substantial or any scientific materials in Polish concerning this topic, except for sporadic texts in the press, the aim of the article is to assign scientific priorities for this field, as well as goals, methods and needs. One of the main aims is also systematizing and periodizing the relations between the Muslim civilization and Russia. Moreover, this article is an introduction to more advanced research done by the author, concerning the problems of Islamic culture in Russia, its history, structure, acculturation and assimilation with Russian and European culture. It summarizes the current state of research.

The issues of contact, the meeting point of Russia and the Islamic civilization as well as the existence of religious, cultural, social, historical and political Muslim community in Russia, its organizational, social and political structures, the centres of religious and socio-political thought, the press, publishing houses and electronic media have been so far little or not at all discussed. There has been no important work attempting to present a generalised approach. In fact, in the historiosophical sense there is no such work, not counting the works of Vladimir Solovyov or Alexandr Blok’s poem *The Twelve*. We must certainly emphasise the effort of the research conducted by Lev Gumilov and Vasily V. Barthold¹. We also have to mention the translating effort of

¹ Known also as Wsiewołod Barthold, V.V. Barthold’ d, *Istoriya izucheniya Vostoka v Evrope i v Rossii*, St. Petersburg 1911.

Ignatii Kraczkovski, the author of the translation of Qur'an into Russian, published in 1946.

As far as Poland is concerned we must remember about *The History of Russia from the Earliest to the Newest Times* by Feliks Koneczny, where the author made a partial attempt to describe mutual attitude of Russia and the Islamic civilization. The relations between the Muslim civilization and Russia were discussed fragmentarily in the works of Tadeusz Kowalski and Tadeusz Lewicki, especially in a series initiated by them, *Arabic Sources for the History of the Slav Lands*. These relations were mentioned also in the work of Ananiasz Zajaczkowski *Diplomacy of the Golden Horde* and in the extensive research work of the historian Ludwik Bazyłow, the author of, among others, *History of Russia* and *History of Mongolia*. Making reference to research achievements of Stanisław Kałużński is also necessary. However, they have never existed in the research space of historians or orientalists as a separate topic of research or the subject of a scientific monograph. The early medieval relations have been studied, for example in the works of Ahmed Nazmi or the aforementioned Tadeusz Kowalski, for their philological and historical value, whereas the very essence of these relations has been left aside. Some references concerning the existence of Islam in Russia can be found in the works of Marek Dziekan².

In Russia as well as in the Soviet Union the relations between the world of Islam, understood above all as the relations of Rus' and later of Russia with the Tatars and Ottoman Porta in the very nature of things were discussed, however they were not free from either Great-Russian or communist ideology which demanded to prove ruthless superiority of Russia in accordance with the Stalinist current of national communism. It is worth mentioning a well-known work by Boris Grekov and Alexander Jakubowski *The Golden Horde and Its Fall*, as well as earlier references in the multi-volume work of Sergey Solov'yov or Vasilii Smirnov's *Krymskoe khanstvo pod verkhovenstvom Ottomanskoi Porty do nachala 18 veka do prisoyedineniya yego k Rosii* (1889). As for the Russian works we should make a note of the emigration works of George Vernadsky, such as *Political and Diplomatic History of Russia* (Boston 1936) or *The Mongols and Russia* (New Haven 1953) and *Kievan Russia* (1948)³. Vernadsky, coming from a very interesting ideological movement of the Russian emigration – Eurasianism, was the forerunner of the American Sovietology whose representatives, quite naturally, though fragmentarily, dealt with some aspects of the civilization of Islam in Russia. Valery Vosgrin's book *Istoricheskiye sud'by krymskikh Tatar* must also be acknowledged (Moscow 1992). When discussing the Russian researchers who dealt with the topic of the meeting point of the Russian and Muslim civilizations and the Islam in Russia, it is impossible to omit the main, so to speak, researcher, the aforementioned Lev Gumilov. His works, such as *The Civilization of the Great Steppes* and *The History of Old Turks*

² E.g. M. Dziekan, *Cywilizacja islamu w Azji i Afryce*, Warszawa 2007; Id., *Dzieje kultury arabskiej*, Warszawa 2008.

³ *Slavonic Yearbook*. American Series, vol.1, 1941, pp. 360–362.

constitute classics of the research in this thematic area today. Also the contemporary Polish researchers studying Eurasianism in their works have brought up issues of the relations between Russia and Islam⁴.

It is worth mentioning some of the German works describing Russian-Muslim relations, albeit fragmentarily. I am speaking here about Berthold Spuler's work⁵. The subject of Russian Islam has been brought up by sovietologists and historians such as Alexander Benningsen and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay⁶. We should also mention Azade – Ayse Rorlich's work *The Volga Tatars. A profile in National Resilience* (Stanford 1986) and Alan Fisher's *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford 1978).

This outline obviously does not aspire to be monographic or comprehensive, nevertheless it can be a modest contribution to possible further speculations on this topic. The problem can be considered in various aspects, such as historical, cultural or geopolitical. Relations of Russia and the civilization of Islam can be treated with accordance to philological aspects, as the matter of studying sources, in aspects of the research on literature, history and philosophy of civilization, economic history, history of international relations, history of ideas, but also in historical, historiosophical and geopolitical aspects. The author of this text is interested above all in the latter aspects as well as in the area of research covering the present of the Russian Federation in the context of themes listed at the beginning. What can be added is the military aspect or rather international safety, especially in Europe, as an important element of the research on Islam in Russia.

Contacts of Russia or formerly Rus' with the civilization of Islam date back to as early as the 10th century. The subject of contacts between the Rus' people and Arabs was described by the historian Al-Masudi, who died in 956, in such works as *Kitab at-Tanbih wa-al Ishraf* or *Muruj adh-dhahab wa-ma'adin al-jawahir*⁷. There were also

⁴ R. Paradowski, *The Idea of Russia-Eurasia and the scientific nationalism of Leon Gumilyov. An attempt of reconstruction and the ideology of eurasianism*, (in Polish) Warsaw 1996; Id., *Eurasian empire of Russia. Study of the idea*, (in Polish) Toruń 2001; R. Bäcker, *Interwar eurasianism. From the intellectual counter-enculturation to totalitarianism?* Łódź 2000; Z. Abbatial, "The Russians in quest of a separate identity. Conception of eurasianism", (in:) *Russia – Poland – the Balkans in 18–20th cent.*, (in Polish) ed. A. Giza, Szczecin 1998, pp. 301–315; *Between Europe and Asia. The idea of Russia-Eurasia*, (in Polish) ed. S. Grzybowski, Toruń 1998; S. Mazurek, "Russian Eurasianism – Historiosophy and Ideology", *Studies in the East European Thought*, (in Polish) vol. 54, no 1–2, 2002, pp. 105–123; M. Filipowicz, "Mongols and Russia. From the history of the historiographic dispute", (in:) *Christianitas et cultura Europae. A jubilee book of Professor Jerzy Kłoczowski*, (in Polish) ed. H. Gapski, part 1, Lublin 1988, pp. 618–624.

⁵ B. Spuler, *Die goldene Horde – die Mongolen in Russland 1223–1502*, Leipzig 1943.

⁶ *Islam in the Soviet Union*, New York 1967; *La presse et le mouvement national chez les musulmans de Russie avant 1920*, Paris 1964; „Le khanate de Crimée du XVI siècle de la tradition mongole à la suzeraineté ottomane d'après un document inédit des archives ottomanes“, *CMRS* 13 (1972), pp. 321–337; *Les mouvements nationaux chez les musulmans de Russie. Le „sultangaliévisme“ au Tatarstan*, Paris 1960; *Les musulmans oubliés. L'Islam en Union Soviétique*, Paris 1981; „Musulmans et missions orthodoxes en Russie orientale avant 1917. Essai de bibliographie critique“, *CMRS* 1 (1972), pp. 98–106.

⁷ A. Nazmi, *Commercial Relations between the Arabs and Slavs*, Dialog, Warsaw 1998, pp. 89–101ff.; see also: G.M. Davletshin, *Volzskaya Bulgariya: dukhovnaya kul'tura*, Kazan 1990.

contacts between the Rus people and the Muslim civilization of the Volga Bulgarians whose state dates back to the 10th century. It influenced not only mutual trade and cultural relations but also mingling of these ethnic groups, i.e. the Rus, Slavs, Bulgarians and Turks. Contacts of Rus' with Islam and its civilization were considerable enough to be reflected in a legend about a religious debate between representatives of Islam, Christianity and Judaism organised by prince Vladimir the Great considering acceptance of one of these religions. Theoretically accepting Islam by Rus' was possible, in any case the intensity of contacts made such a choice potentially probable. Rus' however chose Christianity, Orthodox faith, and this choice determined mutual, Muslim-Russian relationships.

These relations were in a way established twice. For the first time in the period which we mentioned, i.e. from the 10th to 13th cent., and these were contacts with the state of the Volga Bulgarians and the caliphate of Abbasids; for the second time from the 14th century onwards, i.e. from the time of conversion of the whole Golden Horde to Islam under Uzbeg Khan's reign in the years 1312–1341. It is possible to characterize the first period as the time of quite peaceful exchange and coexistence, however the second was definitely the period of fighting, expansion, and later – of colonization. We can also divide the latter period into various stages. First was the stage of the definite military and political dominance of Islam, i.e. from transforming the Mongolian Jochi's ulus into a Turkish-speaking, Muslim state of the Golden Horde. The second is the period of Russian expansion in Muslim territories from the 16th to 20th century, including them within the borders of the Russian state. It is also a period of rebellions and uprisings of the Muslim population. There has been little research done on the political leftist thought developed amongst the Muslim communities of Russia at the turn of the 20th century, on the role of religious and cultural centres in the process of preserving the Islamic tradition under the rule of the Bolshevik governments, the Stalinist regime and contemporary political parties, as well as on the social movements or relations between the government centres and the Muslim communities of Russia.

Another topic for research is the territorial scope of Muslim settlements in the chronological aspect in Russia including the present, as well as the specific character of particular territorial communities. In the framework of the topic of the research what might and should be a separate entity is the specific character of Islam in Siberia, its culture, literature, political history of the community of Siberian Muslims, examination of the impact of religious, social and political centres, of relations between the Muslims of Siberia and the rest of Russian followers of Islam or the muslim world *ummah*. In political research, which is the domain of the author of this outline, the system of political parties is of crucial importance, starting from its beginning after the year 905, as well as the participation of Muslims in the Russian parliamentary system in the years 1905–1917 and after 1991. Also, in accordance with the initial declaration within the range of research options there remains the role of the media starting from the formation of the modern Muslim press in Russia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century up to the contemporary media, including not only the press but also electronic

media. Another area of research will be the social structure of Russian Muslims both in the chronological sense and at present, as well as the role of the economy in social development, connecting the influence of religious ideas with history of social economics in reference to a precursory research carried out by Max Weber on the economic history of religion. It is therefore possible and necessary to study Islam in Russia from the angle of the French history methods by writing an equivalent to the great work of Fernand Braudel⁸. Military issues are the next aspect of the research. These include history of battles and wars of Russia with Muslim countries, Turkey and Persia⁹, as well as of Rus' and Russia with the Tartar states, with the Golden Horde and later with the khanate of Kazan, the Astrakhan, Siberian and Crimean khanates and the military history of uprisings of the Tartar population subjected to Russia until the second half of the 18th century as well as the examples of forming Muslim army units in the Russian Imperial army or within the Red Army. It is also important to consider the scope of the cultural, religious, economic and political autonomy of Russian Muslims, along with the scope of their assimilation and enculturation as well as the issues of participation of the Muslims in the Russian power elite in the past and in our times. In this context it seems essential to become acquainted with the interreligious forms of relations both between the Orthodox church and Islam as well as a sample reference to Western European relations, including the ones between the Roman Catholic Church and Islam. It would be also interesting to examine the differences between the structures of Muslim societies in Western Europe and in Russia. The subject matter of the Muslims in contemporary Europe and the existing and possible interreligious dialogue is receiving more and more attention also in the publications of Polish researchers¹⁰. A separate research problem seems to be distinguishing the subject matter of Islam studies from the Russian studies whose centres and publications are starting to gain ever higher research position in Poland. Also the first works of Polish researchers concerning the topic of Islam in Central Asia from the point of view of social sciences, especially political science and international relations, are being published¹¹. It is also worth mentioning research works of the team led by Prof. Tadeusz Bodio¹² concerned with the Muslim states and societies of Central Asia.

⁸ F. Braudel, *Mediterranean Sea and Mediterranean World in the Epoch of Phillip II* (in Polish), vol. I–II, Warsaw 2004.

⁹ W. Morawski, S. Szawłowska, *Russian-Turkish Wars in 17–20th century* (in Polish), Warszawa 2006.

¹⁰ *Islam and citizenship in Europe*, eds. K. Gorak-Sosnowska, K. Drifter, P. Kubicki, Warsaw 2006; *Muslims in Europe* (in Polish), ed. A. Parzymies, Warsaw 2005; R. Armour, *Islam, Christianity and the West. Turbulent times of the interrelation* (in Polish), Cracow 2004; F. Cardini, *Europe and Islam. History of the misunderstanding* (in Polish), Cracow 2006; E. Sakowicz, *Dialogue of the Church with Islam. According to conciliar and post-conciliar documents (1963–1999)* (in Polish), Warsaw 2000; Id., *Islam in documents of the Church and the teaching of John Paul II (1965–1996)* (in Polish), Warsaw 1997.

¹¹ S. Wrestler, "Combatant Islam" in *Central Asia. The problem of the social genesis of the phenomenon* (in Polish), Wrocław 2006.

¹² *Traditionformation, Integration and Security Problems in the States of Central Asia* (in Polish), edited by T. Bodio, A. Wierzbicki & P. Załęski. "Systematic Transformation of the States of Central Asia", (in:) *Studia Polityczne*, vol. 12, Warsaw 2008, Instytut Nauk Politycznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

Concluding, the aim of the author of this outline is to point out the necessity and the issues of research on Islam in Russia in the area of social sciences, especially political sciences, and suggesting the composition of a monograph on this topic according to given criteria, an enterprise which is being carried out by the author systematically.