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Book review

Daghestan and the world of Islam, edited by Moshe Gammer and David J. Wasserstein, Helsinki, Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2006, 126 pp. + map, €20 (paperback), ISBN 9514109457

Islam and Sufism in Daghestan, edited by Moshe Gammer, Helsinki, Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2009, 192 pp. + 28 illustrations/glossary/abbreviations/index of names and places, €20 (paperback), ISBN 9789514110238

Islamicized in the late seventh century, Daghestan has played an important, if widely unrecognized, role in the dissemination of Islamic learning throughout history. The volumes under review here, made up of articles largely by Daghestani and Russian scholars, document, with a depth never before encountered in English language scholarship, Daghestan's role in this complex historical nexus. The first volume is made up of articles on Daghestan in the pre-Islamic Near Eastern world (Ibrahimov), the Abu Muslim and myth making in the North Caucasus (Bobrovnikov), medieval Daghestan's political history (Shikhsaidov), the introduction of Sufism into modern Daghestan (Gammer and Abu-Manneh), Daghestani intelligentsia at the cusp of modernity (Chesnin) and in exile (Kemper), and closes with a contribution to Dargi linguistics on the basis of a customary-law codex by the recently deceased Helma van den Berg. While the first volume inaugurates a rapprochement between the study of Daghestan and Islamic studies globally conceived, the second volume takes the reader substantially further along that journey. The contributions of Shikhsaidov, Bobrovnikov and Kemper – the three scholars whose works appear in both volumes – preside powerfully over both volumes, but particularly over the second, which also includes contributions on medieval Islamic architecture in Darband (Hajiev), Daghestani *ᶜulama'* and Sufi Sheykhs (Musayev and Alkhasova, Mahomedova, Ibrahimova and Roschin), Islamic law (Kemper and Bobrovkinov), and Sufism and Islamic education in contemporary Daghestan (Shikhaliev and Navruzov respectively).

Perhaps the most provocative claim advanced in these volumes is that Daghestan's encounter with modernity was part of a process that had ramifications across the Islamic world. Several contributors, most notably Musayev, Alkhasova and Kemper (in the second volume), suggest that 'Daghestani scholars contributed to the post-seventeenth century Arabic Renaissance' (p. 43). This is demonstrated both by the fact that Daghestani scholars were in frequent contact with leading intellectuals in Egypt, Yemen and Syria, as well as, and less obviously, the debates concerning *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning) and *ra'y* (private interpretation) and customary law (*adat*) versus Islamic law that defined the intellectual landscape of early-modern Daghestan. There are fascinating connections between Kemper's discussion of the transformations in attitudes towards Islamic law in the early nineteenth century and Khaled El-Rouayheb's work on the development of *ijtihad* [nwsm1] (independent legal reasoning) among Islamic scholars in the early-modern Maghrib. Confining himself to a local discussion, Kemper goes so far as to indicate that the anti-colonial jihad movement, inaugurated by Ghazi Muhammad and later spearheaded by Imam Shamil, was rooted in contexts more local than Russian imperialism, namely in Ghazi Muhammad's attempt to replace *adat* by *shariᶜa*.

In both volumes, we learn of thinkers who did not fit the Islamic mould. For example Mikhail Roschin's essay on Ali Kayayev introduces us to a thinker and educational reformer whom

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Islamic traditionalists dismissed for his ties to Bolshevism and whom Bolsheviks suspected for his steadfast commitment to Islam. We learn in Bobrovnikov's contribution of Abu Muslim's legacy in Shi^{c}a traditions, of the contrasts between the Hanafi practices of the northwest Caucasus as contrasted with Daghestan and the northeast Caucasus, which follow the Shaf^{c}i rite. The diversity of Daghestani literary culture is revealed not only through this panorama of religious belief, but is also on display in the genre diversity of its textual output: the Daghestani Muslim elite worked in a range of discourses, from poetry to jurisprudence. Hasan al-Alqadari's literary ambitions, discussed in Chesnin's contribution, attests to this polyglot richness, as does the poetry produced in exile in provincial Russia by Daghestani sheikhs, studied and beautifully translated in Kemper's contribution to the first volume.

Gammer's volumes serve at least two purposes. First, they introduce the non-Russian reader to a transgenerational group of local Daghestani scholars engaged in important projects on the history of Islam in Daghestan. Secondly, they provide a forum for Shikhsaidov, Kemper and Bobrovnikov, among others, to elaborate, over the course of two volumes, their detailed engagements with Daghestani Islamic pasts. Shikhsaidov's contributions in each volume are classics in the tradition of Krachkovskian and (Vladimir) Minorskian philology. Due to their linguistic, historical and philological density, they will long outlast the majority of work produced on this region to this day. If brought into dialogue with scholarship on early-modern Islam in regions such as the Maghrib, Kemper's intriguing if still tentative hypotheses concerning the relations between Sufism, jihad and local and non-local forms of Islamic knowledge would be even more significant for a comparative readership.

Bobrovnikov's contributions, particularly to the second volume, stand out as landmarks in an already impressive oeuvre. Most compelling of all, and perhaps suitable as an overarching framework for both volumes, is his discussion of *shari^{c}a* in Daghestan during the period 1917–27. With a keen eye for the complicated mechanisms of colonial power, Bobrovnikov demonstrates how what he calls the 'colonial *adat*' of the pre-revolutionary era was replaced after the Bolshevik Revolution by a *shari^{c}a* aimed at securing 'national and social liberation' (p. 117). That *shari^{c}a* was perceived during that brief moment in modern Daghestanian history by Islamists and secularists alike as a potential agent of social liberation is a remarkable insight, and is fully borne out by the extant sources. It is to Bobrovnikov's credit that he is the first scholar to advance such an argument.

The confederation Bobrovnikov studies that collectively agitated for *shari^{c}a* courts as a replacement to both Russian colonial and local non-*shari^{c}a* administrations was made up of four remarkably diverse factions: Islamic leaders such as Najm al-Din Hutsi (Gotsinskii), Sufi sheykhs such as Mamma (Muhammad) ^{c}Ali Hajji- al-Aqushinki (Akushinskii), liberal political reformers such as Ali Kayayev, and Soviet leaders including Lenin and Stalin. These warring factions united over the necessity and usefulness of implementing *shari^{c}a* in ways utterly inconceivable today. (Much the same political trajectory may be plotted for Soviet and Islamic discourses concerning the *abrek* [sacred bandit]: a figure that Islamic and Soviet constituencies colluded in celebrating for a brief period following the revolution.)

Even if, as Kemper notes, 'Throughout history, there has hardly ever been a Muslim society that was completely governed by Islamic law' (p. 92), the very fact that, in the early decades of the Soviet experiment, four politically opposed factions could agree on the basic issue of how Muslim lives were to be governed deserves our attention today. It has been claimed that intellectuals matter to history less for what they achieve than for the possibilities they create, for the paths they blaze that can be followed by future posterities. Knowingly or not, Bobrovnikov has hit upon one such remarkable untrodden path in his research into early Soviet *shari^{c}a* courts. No one, not even most Islamists and certainly not most secularists, would think of *shari^{c}a* as a system capable of guaranteeing justice in Daghestan today. And yet the fact that this was a

near-universally shared sentiment in the years immediately following the first wave of colonialism indicates that in certain respects Islamists and secularists were more forward thinking in the early twentieth century than they are today.

In a review of the recent volume *Caucasian paradigms* published in the pages of this journal, Stephan Rapp noted the need for a synthetic history of the Caucasus (Rapp 2009). Yet we do not even possess synthetic histories of the regions making up the Caucasus: Daghestan, Chechnya, Georgia and Azerbaijan, much less of the region as a whole. Scholars of the Caucasus commonly divide themselves into North versus South Caucasus, allowing present political boundaries to delimit and determine regional identities. Such dichotomies do not serve the region well. In these two volumes, Daghestan – one of the most neglected regions in the Caucasian landscape – occupies not the periphery but the centre. As both Butrus Abu Manneh's and Gammer's contributions show, the Islamic movement in Daghestan substantially contributed to the spread of Sufism across the Ottoman territories, including Azerbaijan. Inasmuch as Daghestan was, to a greater extent than Chechnya, Circassia or even Azerbaijan, the stronghold of local Islamic identity for the pre-modern and much of the modern period, Caucasian history is irremediably rooted in Daghestani pasts.

Some of the chapters in both volumes are written from disciplinary-specific perspectives not likely to be shared by the majority of readers, and indeed nearly all presuppose a degree of specialist knowledge. Murtazali Hajiev writes as an archaeologist in volume two; Helma van den Berg writes in the first volume as a linguist. While both contributions are not without broader implications and add disciplinary-specific depth to each volume, it would have been helpful to have the implications of these specialized contributions elucidated in the texts themselves for the sake of an interdisciplinary readership. The contributors might have been encouraged to think more thoroughly outside the boundaries of their disciplines as effectively as they do within them.

The specialist nature of these contributions highlights a dimension that attends any investigation of the Caucasus: the sheer array of linguistic competencies and regional historical knowledges that must be brought to bear in order to make a scholarly contribution. Linguistic competence in Arabic, Turkic, Russian, the local vernaculars such as Avar and Lak, and arguably also Persian, are all necessary for the purpose of assessing the relevant sources. So too is knowledge of Ottoman, Safavid, Russian imperial and local Daghestani history necessary in order to adequately frame Daghestan in a global, or even Islamic, context.

Nor can the scholar of literature afford to ignore scholarship on law, or the scholar of law afford to ignore the literary output of one's subjects (as Kemper and Bobrovnikov understand well). History, poetry, Sufism and jurisprudence are all necessary competencies that the erstwhile scholar of Daghestan must master. The task is daunting, and few have succeeded. Those who have, such as Ignaty Krachkovsky, cited by many of the contributors, Vladimir Minorsky, whose name is strangely absent from these volumes, and Amri Shikhsaidov, who contributed to both volumes, have expanded the possibilities of historiography, and not only for the Caucasus. Moshe Gammer deserves the gratitude of present and future readers for bringing together a group of scholars to achieve what no one alone is capable of: he has edited a synthetic history of Daghestan in the world of Islam, and has made this understudied world region accessible to a broader community of scholars.

The first volume includes no index or glossary; thankfully, the second volume makes up for these deficiencies. Several terms used in the text of the articles without elucidation are missing from the glossary: *naskh*, *mihrab*, *waqf*, *Kufi*, *mukhtasar*, *surat*, *tasliya* and *shirk*. Additionally, the index would have been even more valuable had it included such basic names as Uzun Hajji and Najm al-Din al-Hutsi. These glitches are however trivial compared with the volume's achievement: to have single-handedly laid the foundation for the study of Islamic Daghestan

in a language other than Russian. If one can plausibly speak of 'firsts' in scholarship, Gammer's two volumes belong to this rare category.

Reference

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