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ISLAMIC NUMISMATICS  
IN RUSSIAN TURKESTAN  
(IMPERIAL PERIOD, C. 1867-1917)

*Abstract*

*The following brief survey deals with the numismatic activity in Russian Turkestan (later called Middle Asia) within the early colonial period from the annexation in the late 1860s and till the 'October revolution' of 1917, reviewing a succession of related events and pointing at some most noticeable personalities in the field, both Russian and indigenous. Particular attention is paid to the public state of affairs, which triggered the rise of amateur collecting of antiquities in the region, aimed at search, study and market trade of medieval artefacts, including (perhaps basically) Islamic coins, and later forming the solid base for the development of advanced scholarly numismatics of medieval and pre-modern Central Asia in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia.*

*Keywords*

*Russian Turkestan, Islamic Numismatics, Personalities*

As it should be clear from the title of the ensuing cursory sketch, it will deal with the numismatic activity of certified historians and dilettante collectors, both Russian and indigenous, in the area that we use to call Middle Asia (otherwise Russian Turkestan) since the accession to the Russian Empire in the late 1860s and till the ‘October revolution’ of 1917. The main emphasis hereinafter will be focused on the prominent personalities in the field, as well as the official measures aimed at the development of numismatics as a scholarly discipline in the region. Particular attention is paid to the public state of affairs, which triggered the rise of amateur collecting of antiquities in the region, aimed at search, study, and also market trade of ancient (pre-Islamic) and medieval (basically Islamic) coins, along with other cultural artefacts of the past. No less important is a clear manifestation of the ever-growing trend to closer cooperation between professional numismatists and private collectors, which had a strong impact, later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the further development of native liberal arts and finally enabled the Islamic numismatics to play an important role in the system of national historical source study.

Principal events related to the Russian annexation of Middle Asia took place between 1839 and 1876, representing the manyfold combination of military activity, diplomatic efforts and civil colonization, and finally resulting in the establishment of the Turkestan General Governorship (1867) and a number of adjacent regions subjugated to the Russian Empire.

By then, Islamic numismatics (European in general and Russian in particular) had not only emerged as a cultural phenomenon but also transformed into a branch of scholarly research, virtually created by the prominent Professor Christian Martin Fraehn (1782–1851), actual founder and long-term director of the Asiatic Museum in St. Petersburg. His colleagues and disciples, such as Bernhard (Boris) A. Dorn, Vladimir V. Veliaminov-Zernov, Pavel S. Saveliev, Woldemar (Vladimir) G. Tiesenhausen, Vassily V. Grigoriev and many others, also contributed a lot to the growing perception of oriental numismatics as a first-rank historical source. So it’s possible to say that prior to the advent of Russians to Turkestan, a solid background for the mentioned activity was right at hand on the one part, and since the annexed area supplied a first-rank source for Islamic coin findings, no surprise that they became a basic stuff for the first generation of coin collectors, emerging there almost in line with the conquest proper. A well-known example of that was General A.V. Komarov who used to force his subordinate soldiers for picking up coins on the ancient sites of Turkmenia: «One day 100 Cossacks had collected about 1500 coins in old Merv during two hours ...». Komarov’s enormous collection, consisting entirely of local findings, later became a valuable base for the study of Islamic numismatics of the region.

## RUSSIAN SERVICEMEN'S ACTIVITY

A number of servicemen in the Russian administration at Samarkand, Tashkent, Fergana (Skobelev at that time), as well as other towns of Semirechye and elsewhere, were active in the field of coin collecting during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as clerks B.N. Petrov-Borzna and M.N. Rostislavov, Generals A.K. Abramov and A.S. Galkin, Captain L.S. Barshchevsky, Sergeant Fadeyev and others. Many of them reportedly had their own numismatic collections, containing lots of Islamic specimens and passing among the contemporaries for rich and important. In particular, Petrov-Borzna possessed 2500 items; Barshchevsky's first collection, sold in 1893, included up to 10.000 pieces, many of which were Islamic. At the later period, private collections of Boris N. Kastal'sky and Ivan T. Poslavsky, along with the organizing activity of professional orientalists, particularly Nikolay I. Veselovsky in St. Petersburg and Evgeny F. Kal' (Kahl) in Tashkent, also contributed a lot to the material base of the numismatic history of Turkestan. On the other hand, some officers successfully combined the military and administrative service with scholarly research, like e.g. Captain I.I. Trofimov, who initially was not a specialist in history or other sciences, but acquired that skill in registering and studying the Islamic coin findings. The most significant works by Trofimov comprised a «Chronological Table of Muslim Dynasties», a Catalog of oriental coins of the Tashkent museum, and a comprehensive illustrated description of his own extensive coin collection, the latter unfortunately being left unpublished.

Along with private activity, a number of official institutions were established in Turkestan in those years. The most important in that number was the above-mentioned Turkestan People's Museum in Tashkent (1876), now the National Museum of the History of Uzbekistan. Of the 270 thousand items, preserved nowadays in that museum, more than 100 thousand belong to the numismatic section. Later on, similar museums were opened in Samarkand (1896), Fergana and Ashkhabad (1899).

In 1870 the Turkestan Public Library was opened in Tashkent. Starting with 1700 books only, it possessed by 1917 above 80 thousand volumes, mostly related to the nature, history and ethnology of the Turkestan region. In that period, a coin collection was also available in the library; later it was transferred to the Tashkent museum. Apropos, both those institutions, as well as the first Russian newspaper in Central Asia, «Turkestanskije Vedomosti», were established and maintained largely due to Nikolay A. Maev, a retired Major General, writer and journalist, devoted student of folk lore and culture in Middle Asia.

A number of scientific societies were organized in the Turkestan Kray by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the members of which were both Russian and native people taking great interest in the history of the region. The most prominent of those fellowships was the Turkestan Circle for the Amateurs of Archaeology, established in 1895

and exercising considerable impact on the development of historical, archeological and ethnological studies in the region until the October revolution.

In 1910, someone named Shumilov published a list of coin dealers, including 45 coin collectors from different towns of Central Asia. Given that the list did not contain even such well-known figures of the time as General I.T. Poslavsky, engineer B.N. Kastal'sky, archeologist and orientalist V.L. Vyatkin, artist and restorer M.V. Stolyarov (Svetlana Gorshenina, however, refers to many more names in similar lines), let alone a lot of other less prominent persons, we can state with confidence that the real number of persons, related to Islamic coin collecting in Russian Turkestan, was in fact much higher. This way or another, the mentioned list is a decisive proof of the well-developed numismatic activity in the region of the period under review.

## NATIVE FIGURANTS

Alongside the ever-growing number of professional and amateur numismatists of Russian (perhaps more exact to say 'non-local') origin, ever more native-born folk students, collectors and dealers emerged in Turkestan at the same time, of which even the far incomplete list of names looks demonstrative enough. In that row we may mention such persons as Abu Tahir Khoja, Mirza Abdulla Bukhari and Mirza Abdurrahman from Samarkand; Muhammad Wafa, Mirza Salimbek and already said Mirza Abdulla from Bukhara; Akram Palwan Askarov from Tashkent; Fayaz, Haji Yusuf and Mirza Haji Sabirov from Khujand (otherwise Khojend or Khojent); then certain Yunusov, Hafiz, Haji Zargar and many others.

One of the most illustrious figures of local origin was an entrepreneur from Samarkand, Mirza Abdulla Bukhari. Professor N.I. Veselovsky, who had visited Samarkand in 1883 and became fascinated by Mirza Bukhari's fabulous collection, acquired from him about 1200 antique artefacts, including 11 gold, 77 silver and 951 copper coins. Between 1883 and 1891 Mirza Bukhari sent to St. Petersburg a selection of 6300 coins, which, according to Boris V. Lunin, later took one of the principal places among the Central Asian collections of the Hermitage.

The enormous collection of ancient rarities, pieces of arts and archeology was compiled by another merchant and factory owner Akram Palwan Askarov, born in the qishlaq of Asht and staying in Tashkent. The Samarkand governor Nil S. Lykoshin considered him «an outstanding collector of antique rarities in Turkestan», who was «expert in Islamic literature on the equal level with any professional orientalist». After the demise of Askarov in 1891, more than 12.000 copper, 1428 silver and 17 gold coins from his collection were offered for sale to the Hermitage; the bulk of those gatherings was of Islamic origin and embraced the vast period from the Samanids to the latest issues of Bukhara, Khoqand, Kashgar & sim.

One more prominent collector was Mirza Haji Sabirov from Khojend, nicknamed *Haji Antika* for his passion towards the antique rarities and coins. He had crossed more than once through Middle Asia in search of antiquities and virtually bought them in every possible place. Professor Alexander A. Semenov wrote that *Haji Antika*, being asked where all those treasures had been from, used to answer *az zamîn baromadagî* – «found in the earth» or «originated from the earth». In 1909 he brought his collection to Tashkent in order to make an official exhibition; a document has been preserved with the respective permit for «the citizen of the town of Khojend, Khoja Mirza Haji Sabirkhojayev», signed by the district authority and dated from 1 July 1909.

According to Svetlana Gorshenina, by the mid-1900's the *antikachi* were ubiquitous in all the cities of Turkestan. In Tashkent, antiques were sold by Talib Khodja Abdulmalikov (who was reportedly a coin collector himself), his brother, holding an «Oriental shop» in Tashkent, and someone nicknamed *Sharipka*, who traded in old arms, manuscripts, embroidery, ceramics and coins, supplied by numerous 'agents' in towns and villages. A few similar dealers were active in Samarkand and Bukhara. In Khojend, antiques were sold by Mir Sabir and, in Karshi, by Mulla Najmuddin. Various coins were also the specialty of the markets in Kuliab, Kobadian and Termez. In aggregate, contemporary documental and narrative sources mention as many as several dozen names of native collectors and coin dealers in the region of that period.

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coin trade in Samarkand turned into the market of antiquities that was developed enough: it embraced the activity of professional coin-searchers (working both on the open market and for separate owners); professional dealers (organized into a vividly acting network); local producers of coin forgeries (imitations) and suppliers of the most wanted samples and copies.

## NO TOMORROW WITHOUT YESTERDAY...

Academician Mikhail E. Masson (1897-1986), whose scholarly activity had started in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially his standard course of lectures on numismatics given at the Middle Asian (later Tashkent) State University during many years, virtually served as a bridge between the two great epochs and laid the solid foundation for professional Central Asian numismatics of the Soviet period; it's enough to say that most of the prominent scholars flourishing in the field until recently, be it in Uzbekistan, Russia or abroad, were in one way or another his progeny.

Appositely saying, it was quite a bit of time ago that the official scholarly doctrine treated numismatics as a secondary source of incidental information and obstinately kept it for the «auxiliary historical discipline» (hence its fatal underestimation and

permanent underfunding throughout the Soviet period), while in fact – and especially within the ‘Islamic’ branch – it was consistently proving the opposite, providing more than once the positive information comparable in amount and quality with any other historical source. Professor Elena A. Davidovich (1922-2013), perhaps the most renowned disciple of M.E. Masson, wrote based on her long-term research experience: «It shall not be an exaggeration to say that the subject entitled ‘*History of Money Circulation in Medieval Middle Asia*’ was only put on the agenda along with the awareness of the opportunity to rely upon the coins as a basic, in many instances even unique source». Needless to say that none of the current advance could be observed nowadays in the branch of activity under review, had it not been steadily developing in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Davidovich’s expert opinion, numismatics must have the full right to be placed in the classification line alongside archeology and ethnography, thus getting attested as a full-length basic and substantive historical science. Another intrinsic feature, leading its origin also from the ‘colonial’ times, is the equitable, if not to say fraternal character of multilateral ties and collaboration between aboriginal and Russian professionals and amateurs in history, archeology and particularly numismatics.

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