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EDITIONS OF THE TASHKENT ‘UTHMĀN MUṢḤAF: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The “Tashkent ‘Uthmān Muṣḥaf” is an ancient Qur’anic manuscript displayed as the principal exhibit in the Qur’an Hall of the Center of Islamic Civilization, established in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Since the muṣḥaf had been preserved in Samarkand for several centuries and became widely known after it was transferred from Samarkand to St. Petersburg in 1869, it was also commonly referred to as the “Samarkand Qur’an” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

While the muṣḥaf was kept in Samarkand, it remained largely unknown to the wider public. However, following its transfer to St. Petersburg, articles about the manuscript began to appear, and efforts were undertaken to produce reproductions of it. Some editions were prepared by prominent scholars and researchers, while others involved individuals who lacked sufficient scholarly expertise. For example, in 1895, a single folio from Sūrat al-A‘rāf was reproduced in 2,000 copies and sold in Muslim countries. It is evident that this undertaking was commercially motivated.

The Tatar publisher Ilyas Mirza ibn Ahmadshah Qirimi, having heard of the fame of the Muṣḥaf, had intended from 1883 onward to travel from Ufa to St. Petersburg. When he finally fulfilled this intention in 1889, he developed an interest in publishing selected portions of the sacred manuscript preserved in the Imperial Library. In 1905, he published a 25-page facsimile edition of Sūrat Yā-Sīn from the Muṣḥaf. He also wrote a preface to the edition, which he entitled



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“Noshirdan akhtor” (“Memories from the Publisher”). Today, one copy of this edition is preserved in the library of Bukhara State University,¹ while another is held in the Eshon Bobokhon Collection at the Center of Islamic Civilization.²

Z. Z. Gilazev states that this edition of Sūrat Yā-Sīn was printed in 13,500 copies. Although it is difficult to verify such a high print run, there is currently no sufficient scholarly basis for rejecting this figure either. The relatively wide circulation of the edition may be inferred from the fact that surviving copies are found today in numerous libraries and private collections. The Bakhchisaray Historical, Cultural and Archaeological Museum-Reserve (BIKAMZ), for example, currently holds two identical copies of this edition (catalogue numbers: KP 5037, inv. 87, and KP 7089, inv. 243).³

The first complete facsimile edition of the Muṣḥaf was published in 1905 by D. M. Rudnev’s cartographic establishment under the supervision of S. I. Pisarev and F. I. Uspensky, members of the Institute of Archaeology. Fifty copies were produced in a format closely resembling the original, measuring 53 × 68 cm and printed on paper intended to imitate the colour of parchment. However, in their attempt to make the manuscript more legible, the publishers introduced a number of errors because they lacked the necessary specialist expertise.⁴ Twenty-five copies were offered for sale at a price of 500 rubles each, while the remaining twenty-five were presented as gifts to rulers and other officials in various countries and regions.

¹ Bukhara State University Library Collection, inventory no. BDU-T №1.

² Eshon Bobokhon Collection, Center of Islamic Civilization of Uzbekistan, inventory no. SPb №22.

³ Ilya V. Zaytsev, “Arabian Antiquities,” in *Arabskie drevnosti: Sbornik statei v chest' 70-letiya Aleksandra Vsevolodovicha Sedova* [Arabian Antiquities: A Collection of Articles in Honor of the 70th Anniversary of Alexander Vsevolodovich Sedov] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 2020), p. 299.

⁴ Tayyar Altukulaç, *Mesâhif-i Kadime* (Istanbul: İslâm Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi, 2015), p. 188; A. G. Abdullaev, D. O. Rahimjonov, and Sh. Yu. Ziyodov, *Toshkentdagi Usmon mushafi* [The 'Uthmān Muṣḥaf in Tashkent] (Tashkent: Movarounnahr, 2015), p. 68. During his examination of the copy preserved in the library of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, the researcher directly studied the errors contained in the edition.



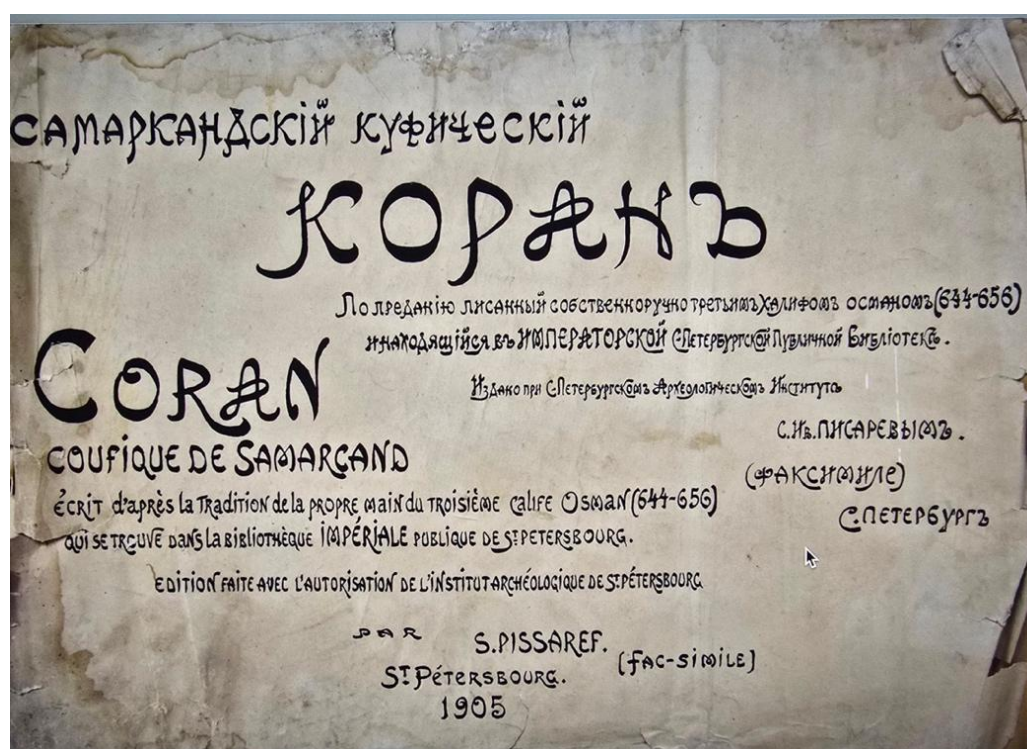
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These copies are now preserved in collections around the world as rare historical sources. Four copies, for example, are held in St. Petersburg and another four in Uzbekistan. The Leningrad-based researcher Irina Osmonova has conducted research into the worldwide distribution of this facsimile edition and the present locations of its surviving copies. The findings of her research have been incorporated into the scholarly projects currently being carried out at the Center of Islamic Civilization in Tashkent.



Title Page of Pisarev's Facsimile Edition

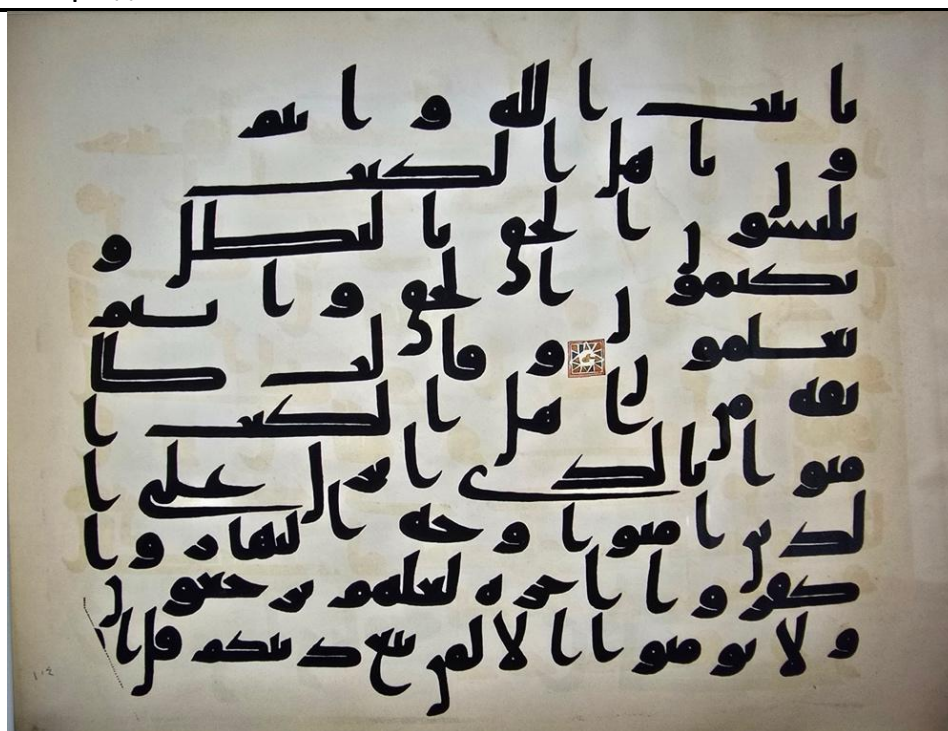


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Pisarev's Facsimile Edition. Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, Verses 70-73.

In 1918, the Soviet government produced several copies of the Muṣḥaf based on Pisarev's facsimile edition, measuring 72 × 52 cm, and presented them as gifts to a number of Muslim countries. One copy of this edition is preserved in the Central Library in Tehran under the shelfmark “د.س.س 4403”⁵

During the Soviet period, the Muṣḥaf also attracted the attention of political leaders. As the Soviet government sought to strengthen diplomatic relations with the Muslim world, copies of the Tashkent 'Uthmān Muṣḥaf came to be regarded as prestigious state gifts presented to delegations from Muslim countries. For this purpose, photographic reproductions of the Muṣḥaf were produced periodically

⁵ *Muṣḥaf Tāshqand al-ma'rūf bi-Muṣḥaf al-Khalīfa 'Uthmān (raḍiya Allāhu 'anhu)* [The Tashkent Muṣḥaf, Known as the Muṣḥaf of Caliph 'Uthmān]. Introduction by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī, 1428 AH.



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in limited numbers. Such reproductions of the Tashkent ‘Uthmān Muṣḥaf were presented to King Hassan II of Morocco, President Muhammad Ayub Khan of Pakistan in 1965, and President Zakir Husain of India in 1968.

Another photographic reproduction of this kind was produced in 1974 and is currently preserved in the Gifts Collection of the Süleymaniye Library.⁶ In 1985, Shamsiddin Babakhan, Mufti and Chairman of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, presented this copy to a visiting Turkish delegation headed by Tayyar Altıkulaç, President of Türkiye’s Presidency of Religious Affairs. The Muṣḥaf measures 45 × 56.5 cm, is bound, and is housed in a specially made case. No information about this copy is provided either on the library’s website or in its electronic catalogue. After further inquiries, however, it was eventually possible to examine the copy at the Süleymaniye Library.

In 1978, another reproduction of the Tashkent Muṣḥaf was produced on special paper and placed on display in the library of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, where it was viewed by visitors and guests.

In 1981, Muhammad Hamidullah published a limited-edition facsimile in Philadelphia, United States, based on Pisarev’s edition, under the title *The Holy Qur’an – ‘Uthmān Muṣḥaf: A Facsimile of the Samarkand Codex*, accompanied by a brief introduction. The publisher also included a table of contents listing the sūrahs preserved in the Muṣḥaf. In the same year, on the occasion of the beginning of the fifteenth century AH, Aisha Begum republished the same edition through the Hyderabad Press in Philadelphia.⁷

⁶ Süleymaniye Library, *Basma Bağışlar*, 20,000; Tayyar Altıkulaç, *Mesâhif-i Kadime* (İstanbul: İslâm Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi, 2015), p. 179.

⁷ Muṣḥaf Tāshqand al-ma’rūf bi-Muṣḥaf al-Khalīfa ‘Uthmān (raḍiya Allāhu ‘anhu), The Open School, Chicago, 1428 AH (2007), pp. 7–8.



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In 2007, Muhammad Husayn Jalali published an A5-format edition of the Muṣḥaf based on Pisarev's facsimile under the title *The Tashkent Muṣḥaf, Known as the Muṣḥaf of Caliph 'Uthmān (ra)*. In this edition, two manuscript pages are reproduced one above the other on the left-hand page, while the corresponding Qur'anic verses in modern orthography are presented on the right-hand page.⁸

The Corpus Coranicum project, which began its work at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities in 2007, is concerned with the study and documentation of the Qur'anic textual tradition and includes digital reproductions of a number of the earliest surviving Qur'anic manuscripts. Among them, the complete facsimile prepared by S. Pisarev is available on the project's website under the designation "Samarkand Muṣḥaf."⁹ The images are of high quality and have been carefully digitized. The manuscript comprises 353 folios, with each folio identified as either r (recto, the front side) or v (verso, the reverse side).

The most recent edition of the Tashkent Muṣḥaf was published in Türkiye. In 2024, Dr. Tayyar Altıkulaç published an edition based on a photographic reproduction of the Tashkent Muṣḥaf made in Tashkent in 1974.¹⁰ The edition contains 353 folios, corresponding to the number represented in Pisarev's facsimile. However, it does not reproduce the alterations introduced by Pisarev. Beneath the image of each page, Altıkulaç provides a transcription of the manuscript text in contemporary Arabic script and, in the footnotes, presents a comparative analysis of the text according to the principles of rasm al-muṣḥaf. The volume also contains an introduction discussing the Muṣḥaf and the edition, presented in Arabic from one direction of the volume and in Turkish from the

⁸ Muṣḥaf Ṭāshqand al-ma'rūf bi-Muṣḥaf al-Khalīfa 'Uthmān (raḍīya Allāhu 'anhu), The Open School, Chicago, 1428 AH (2007).

⁹ Corpus Coranicum, Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, accessed December 12, 2024. corpuscoranicum.de

¹⁰ Al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf al-Mansūb ilā 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (Nuskhat Ṭāshqand) [The Noble Muṣḥaf Attributed to 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān: The Tashkent Copy] (Istanbul: Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, 2024).



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other. It should be emphasized that this publication represents one of the most substantial scholarly works on the Tashkent Muṣḥaf produced to date.

In conclusion, the complete facsimile of the Tashkent ‘Uthmān Muṣḥaf was published only once, in Russia in 1905. The editions subsequently produced in the United States and Germany were based on this facsimile. In addition, complete photographic reproductions of the manuscript were also produced. In particular, several photographic copies were made in Tashkent between the 1960s and 1980s. The 2024 Turkish publication, prepared on the basis of a photographic reproduction, may be regarded as an edition accompanied by textual analysis. Individual sūrahs and folios of the Muṣḥaf have also been published on several occasions over the years and have attracted considerable interest.

Although the Tashkent ‘Uthmān Muṣḥaf is among the best-known and most frequently reproduced early Qur’anic manuscripts still extant, a comprehensive facsimile edition meeting contemporary scholarly and technical standards has yet to be produced. The preparation of a high-quality facsimile directly from the original manuscript using modern imaging technologies therefore remains an important task for scholars and relevant institutions in Uzbekistan. In this regard, the Center of Islamic Civilization, established on the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, is well positioned to undertake such a project.

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