



BOĶĀRĀ-YE ŠARĪF

BOĶĀRĀ-YE ŠARĪF “Boĳārā the noble,” the first Central Asian newspaper published in Persian. It first appeared on 4 Rabīʿ II 1330/11 March (Julian) 24 March 1912, and the last issue, the 153rd, was dated 24 Moĳarram 1331/2 January (J.) 15 January 1913. It was published 13 km from the city of Bukhara, in Novaya Bukhara (Kagan), a small town founded by Russians, where the Russian “political agent” was established. For approximately the first four months *Boĳārā-ye šarīf* appeared six times a week, then three times, and toward the end only twice. Each issue consisted of four pages in large format. The newspaper was printed by L. M. Levin, probably the best local firm for printing in the Arabic alphabet.

According to the contemporary Russian Muslim press, six Bukharans, six Russians, and three Persians formed the group that founded *Boĳārā-ye šarīf* (Samoïlovich, 1912a, p. 278). Only two of these men can be identified, however: the millionaire Mīrzā Moĳyīʿl-Dīn Maņšūrov and the first local doctor to practice European medicine, Mīrzā Serāj-al-Dīn (q.v.), both active in the Javān-boĳārīyān, Young Bukharans (q.v.), a group of Islamic modernists (*jadīds*, ʿAynī, 1926a, p. 94; Umnyakov, p. 90, n. 2; Mīraĳmadov and Šamad, p. 111). The launching of the newspaper was approved by the Russian political agent, A. S. Somov, who was persuaded that it would reflect the spirit of the post-1905 Russian constitution and especially that it would propagate Russian culture and promote the expansion of cotton cultivation, in which the Russian administration in Central Asia was very interested. Novaya Bukhara was chosen as the headquarters mainly in order to evade an anticipated



prohibition by the Bukharan amirate. Somov did, however, persuade the authorities not to put obstacles in the way of its circulation in the amirate, and the amir's chief cabinet minister, the comparatively liberal Naşr-Allāh, issued a special decree permitting it.

Some other newspapers published by the *jadīds* publicly interpreted this decree as a command to subscribe to *BoĶārā-ye šarīf*. The Russian political agency showed its support by appointing its interpreter Ḥaydar Ḳvāja Mīrbadalov as nominal editor in chief. In fact, he appears to have served only as a kind of liaison with the political agency, exercising some power of censorship. The actual editor was Mīrzā Jalāl Yūsofzāda (1278-1350/1862-1931), a Shi'ite from Transcaucasian Azerbaijan, an experienced journalist, and the author of several educational books and works of belles-lettres in both Persian and Tūrki, a kind of artificial Turkic literary language favored by *jadīds*. In fact, though it was never officially proclaimed so, *BoĶārā-ye šarīf* was the organ of the Young Bukharans. Even its name was an obvious allusion to the Šerkat-e BoĶārā-ye šarīf, a progressive educational society apparently already established in 1909 or early 1910 (Umnyakov, p. 85 n. 1).

There are no exact data on the number of copies printed or the number of subscribers. Subscription income certainly did not cover the expenses of publication, for the newspaper suffered financial difficulties. A sister publication in Tūrki (intermingled with Čagātāy and Özbek), called *Tūrān*, was launched on 11 Ša'bān 1330/14 July (J.) 27 July 1912, also under the supervision of Mīrbadalov; the Istanbul-educated Bukharan Ġiāt-al-Dīn MaĶdūm Ḥosnī was managing editor.

In August, 1912 (J.; the exact date is unknown), the political agency attempted to close down *BoĶārā-ye šarīf*. Although the agency was being pressed to do so by the amirate, which was in turn under pressure from the strong *qadīmī* (traditionalist) group among the Sunnite religious leadership in Bukhara, the Russians themselves were apparently not pleased by the paper's content. The printer, a Russian subject, was asked to break his contract with the publishers, on the pretext that they were unable to pay him. In response the Young Bukharans met and established a joint-stock company capitalized at 10,000 rubles, divided into 100 shares at 100 rubles each. Ninety shares were sold on the spot, and the sum of 9,000 rubles thus collected was sufficient to ensure that the newspaper would continue to be printed (Samoilovich, 1912a, p. 472 n. 2). Its first maneuver having failed, the political agency then recalled Mīrbadalov in order to dissociate itself publicly from the newspaper. Ḥosayn



Ebrāhīmov of Samarkand took his place. At about the time that the 150th issue appeared (again the exact date is unknown), the political agency finally ordered the offices closed, using as excuse the amir's opposition (‘Aynī, 1923, p. 101; Umnyakov, p. 91). *Tūrān* was also terminated, after its forty-ninth issue, which appeared 23 Moḥarram 1331/1 January (J.) 14 January 1913.

During its short lifetime, the editors of *Boḳārā-ye šarīf* succeeded in attracting to its pages the leaders of the Bukharan modernist intelligentsia, including such outstanding writers as Feṭrat and ‘Aynī. Many contributors, however, feared retaliation from the amir and especially from the *qadīmī* leaders and disguised their identities with pseudonyms or initials; it is thus not possible now to determine who they were. It can be assumed that the newspaper was read by almost all the modernists and sympathetic intellectuals in the amirate, as well as by most of those in Central Asia who were able to read Persian.

In the second issue Yūsufzāda formulated the newspaper's principal aims: using “simple Pārsī,” to bring “various problems and varied information” to the attention of “the population of Bukhara the noble . . . [which] wants to be informed about the world situation” and to urge “the people to seek eagerly for knowledge and for improvement of the educational situation.” Most of the news about the world situation (with special emphasis on Muslim countries and on the Russian empire, especially its Muslim central Asian portion) was translated or adapted from Russian- and Turkic-language sources. Translations of Russian literature appeared from time to time as well, including several stories by Leo Tolstoy. As for the second aim, improvement in education was an important component in the ideology of the *jadīds*, especially the Young Bukharan wing. Some other ideological tenets were also reflected in the pages of *Boḳārā-ye šarīf*, which actively encouraged development of local business and devoted much attention to topics connected with trade. The editors also expressed a strong pan-Islamic bias, promoting a kind of Islamic ecumenism (apparent in the appointment of a Shi‘ite as managing editor). Furthermore, paradoxically for a Persian-language newspaper, it showed clear pan-Turkic tendencies as well. These tendencies were closely related to the vague ethnic identifications of bilingual Tajik- and Özbek-speakers on the Central Asian flatland, from whom most of the writers were drawn. Finally, the “simple Pārsī” in which the newspaper was to be written actually included a broad range of language, from simplified classical Persian through simplified contemporary Iranian Persian to varying amalgams of classical Persian with elements from the Samarkandi-Bukharan



group of Tajik dialects. In addition, the contributors freely borrowed terms from Russian and Tūrki.

BoĶārā-ye šarīf actually had more in common with the foreign Turkic-language than with the Persian-language press. As already mentioned, much of its material was translated or adapted from such publications. The Tūrki newspaper *Tarjomān* (established in 1300/1883) at Bakhchisaray in the Crimea, which was published by Esmā'īl Gasprinskiĭ (Gaspralı, 1267--1332/1851-1914), founder of the *jadīd* movement and initiator of Tūrki as the movement's lingua franca; *Waqt*, a journal in Tūrki heavily interlarded with Volga Tatar, which was founded at Orenburg in 1324/1900; and the Turkish-language *Sırat-i müstakim* (established in 1326/1324 Rumī/1908, renamed *Sabilürreşad* in Şafar, 1330/Şubat, 1329 R./February, 1912) were the main sources. In turn the Turkic-language press in both the Russian and the Ottoman empires relied heavily on *BoĶārā-ye šarīf* for news of events in the amirate, though foreign editors also expressed criticism of the newspaper. For example, the main organ for expressing the pan-Turkish ideology of that time was the fortnightly *Türk yurdu* of Istanbul, established in 1327 R./1911; its editor, Yusuf Akçura (Akçuraoğlu, Aqçurin, 1293-1354/1876-1935), who was of Volga Tatar origin, sharply criticized the editors of *BoĶārā-ye šarīf* for publishing in Persian and accused them of “looking down on the mother tongue” of what he claimed was the “entirely Turkish” population of Bukhara (Samoïlovich, 1912c, p. 642). As for the contemporary Persian-language press, *BoĶārā-ye šarīf* had some affinity with some newspapers outside Iran, for example, *Habl al-matīn* in Calcutta and *Serāj al-aĶbār* in Kabul. The editors were especially receptive to the pan-Asiatic views expressed in the Kabul paper.

Sets of *BoĶārā-ye šarīf*, varying in completeness, can be found in some Central Asian libraries and private collections.

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