

Title: Pushkin and Muhammad: Prophetic Heart Excision
Author: Martin P. Bidney, SUNY Binghamton

In Pushkin's "Prorok" or "Prophet," perhaps his greatest lyric, the man chosen of God undergoes a heart excision recalling the one Muhammad underwent in the extremely popular hadith (extra-Qur'anic narrative) episode called "The Opening of the Breast." Harris Birkeland wrote a book about this Islamic tradition; Alfred Guillaume features it in his translation of Ibn Ishaq. Though the Russian poet's nine "Imitations of the Qur'an" are well known, I find the connection between his "Prophet" and the Muhammad episode made in only two places: Bidney's "Introduction" to his "East-West Poetry: A Western Poet Responds to Islamic Tradition in Sonnets, Hymns, and Songs" (Global Acad. Pub. 2010) and Bidney's "Introduction" to Pushkin, "Kak Erivanskie Kovry / Like a Fine Rung of Erivan / Wie Teppiche aus Eriwan" which he coedited with Katharina Mommsen and Marina Zalesski (Mommsen Foundation egw.unc.edu, vol. 2 of "Voices of the World in Song," 2010). Sebastian Donat has written a book entirely devoted to Russian works influenced by Goethe's "West-East Divan" (1819); Pushkin would very likely have learned of this work (whose influence on the "Crimean Sonnets" of Mickiewicz was also crucial, as the latter acknowledged) from his intimate friend Zhukovsky, who visited Weimar and corresponded with Goethe, who had used the "Opening of the Heart" in his own Mohammad-Fragment in a dialogue of the Prophet with his stepmother Halima. I will discuss Annemarie Schimmel's treatment of the Muhammad episode and read her rendering of the Baihaqi version, noting parallels with Pushkin. Then I will offer contextual comment on Pushkin the Islamist in "Prophet" as related to his "Imitations of the Qur'an" and to the "West-East" tradition initiated by Goethe.

mbidney@binghamton.edu