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Some notes on the history of the Persian Manuscript Collection in the St. Petersburg State University

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The appearance of the Persian manuscript collection in the library of the St. Petersburg University is inseparably linked with the beginning of the teaching of Oriental languages in St. Petersburg. It started in the Pedagogical Institute in 1816, where Persian and Arabic were taught. Three years later the Institute received the status of a University [1].

In November 1818 the Oriental Chamber for preserving Oriental medals, manuscripts and books was opened at the Kunstkamera Museum under the supervision of Chr. D. Fren [2].

1819 can be named as the year of the foundation of the Library of Oriental Languages at the Department of the St. Petersburg University. At that time manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Tatar were transferred to the University from the Oriental Chamber of the Kunstkammer, which by that time had become the Asiatic museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences [3].

Afterwards the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg University was expanded due to the transformation of the Oriental Department into the Faculty of Oriental Languages on the order of the Emperor of October 22, 1854. The institution of the new Faculty in the capital of Russia, which St. Petersburg was at that time, meant that besides scholars resident in St. Petersburg the best Professors and teachers from the three orientalist centers of Russia — the Imperial Kazan University, the Lycée de Richelieu in Odessa and the 1st Gymnasium of Kazan were invited to work there. On the same order the teaching of Oriental Languages in these centers was abandoned [4]. For the same reason all the materials — books on Oriental studies, Oriental manuscripts and coins belonging to these institutions were to be moved to the St. Petersburg University with no recompense for them.

The dramatic history of the collection suffered great influence and calamities mainly not of the political events of the history of Russia in the end of the last and the beginning of this century, but very often as a result of the ambitious contradictions and even financial struggle of those scholars and specialists to whom we are to be obliged for the manuscript collection formed by.

The transformation of the Oriental Department into the Faculty of Oriental Languages was planned for the summer vacations of 1855. By the time of the opening of the Faculty, however, no manuscripts, books or coins arrived; moreover, the negotiations with the directors of the Kazan University and the Odessa Lycée were still going on with no positive results. The Emperor's order on the foundation of the Faculty of Oriental Languages in St. Petersburg met no enthusiasm both in Kazan and in Odessa. Right after the His Majesty's order these Institutions attempted to gain back their status, to be allowed to teach at least several Oriental languages.

For the Kazan University it was a matter of special importance. Just before the tsar's order The University acquired a large collection of Oriental manuscripts from Professor A. K. Kazembek (most of them Persian, as well as some Arabic and Turkish). The University expended on them «a great sum of 6000 rubles» [5]. According to the official sources the actual sum was even greater — 7145 rubles and 75 kopecks [6].

In vain the trustee of the Kazan University Molostvov, who estimated the whole collection in 18 thousand rubles in silver, tried to get back at least some part of the money recently spent on it [7].

The heated dispute between St. Petersburg and Kazan was stopped in 1861 by a special governmental decree, according to which two departments where Oriental Languages could be taught were preserved in the Kazan University.

In May of 1855 a special librarian was to be appointed by Musin-Pushkin, the trustee of the St. Petersburg University, responsible for moving the manuscripts from Kazan to St. Petersburg. Without any doubt, I. F. Gotwald, Professor of the Kazan University, was the person best qualified for this task. By that time he described most of the Arabic and some of the Persian manuscripts of the collection.

In August 1855, when 58 containers with manuscripts, coins and books arrived from Kazan, it turned up that there was no possibility to sort them out because no proper place had been reserved for it. Professor Gotwald returned to Kazan and another librarian — K. F. Buche from St. Petersburg — was appointed. When the later finally managed to check the lists of the manuscripts, he noticed that some of the manuscripts were missing. When Buche made an inquiry about the missing items, he received a very rude answer from librarian Gotwald and from Kholmogorov, a lecturer in Arabic, who informed him that the mentioned manuscripts had been left in the Kazan University because they needed them for their own use, since, according to the Emperor's will, the teaching of Oriental languages in University was resumed [8].

There was also a long delay with getting manuscripts and books from Odessa, though there the reason was different. The directorate of the Lycée de Richelieu did not insist on the restoration of its status and had nothing against the transmission of the library to St. Petersburg.

Neither did they ask for any compensation. Only due to bureaucratic delays manuscripts and books arrived at the capital only in 1856.

The official ceremony of the Opening of the Faculty took place on the 27th of August 1855 at 12 p. m. Professor A. V. Popov, a former Professor of the Mongolian department of the Imperial Kazan University, delivered a speech on the history of Oriental Studies in Russia and explained the reasons for establishing the new Faculty. Professor A. K. Kazembek, who a month before it was made the Dean, talked with great inspiration about the program and the aims of the Faculty, ending his speech with the words: «Will the Lord be with us and the grace of the monarch!» [9].

All who were interested in Oriental Literature and Culture were invited to this ceremony [10]. Unfortunately, count S. S. Uvarov, the author of the Asiatic Academy project of 1810 (he passed away a week after the ceremony) and O. I. Senkovskij, the author of the project of 1829 (who was mortally ill) were not among those present [11].

In September 1855, according to the Faculty program, lessons began. We can not definitely assert, that Professors and students could use the library funds, received from Kazan in a proper way. It was only by September 15, 1855 when librarian Buche began to unseal and sort out the packages instead of Gotwald, who suddenly left for Kazan. Besides that we should take into account, that delays in receiving manuscripts and books which lasted for about two years, as well as the absence of a properly equipped place, created additional difficulties. It is known, for instance, that the Münzkabinett (numismatic collection) got its permanent place, where «it could be used for the pedagogical purposes», in the rooms of the former Zoological cabinet only in October 1864. Before that the Oriental Numismatic Collection was stored in the safe of the University cash-box [12].

In such a dramatic way the foundation of the St. Petersburg University collection of Oriental manuscript was laid. Its main part was formed by the manuscripts coming from Kazan. Till the events of 1917 the manuscript collection was constantly enriched from different sources. Often manuscripts were left by the testaments of University Professors, they were bought by the students of the University during their trips to the East. Thus N. I. Veselovskij brought 22 manuscripts from Central Asia in 1889, 15 manuscripts came from V. A. Zhukovskij between 1891 and 1904 (collected during his journey to Persia in 1883—1886), 9 manuscripts were received from I. Yu. Krachkovskij, who brought them in Syria in 1911, and 10 — from A. A. Romaskevich (acquired in Persia in 1912—1915), 6 manuscripts were brought from Persia in 1906 by student V. L. Breche. 314 MSS in the University collection formerly belonged to A. K. Kazembek [13], about 60 came from Professors I. Dittel and I. N. Berezin, 10 manuscripts were bought from the heirs of Prof. Lerch, 54 — from the heirs of Shaykh Tantawi, 6 — from the heritage of V. V. Grigoryev, 10 — bought from student Plakhov, etc.

Manuscripts could also come as gifts: two copies were presented in 1833 and one in 1842 by the Khoqand Ambassador Gufranulla, 4 — by Professor I. V. Pomyalovskij (in 1876 and in 1879). There were also gifts from general-lieutenant Boguslavskij (1882), Prof. V. F. Girgass (1885), the Committee of the Third International Congress of Orientologists (1886), Prof. Veselovskij.

The fate of three manuscripts formerly belonging to Prof. A. O. Mukhlinskij, the Dean of the Faculty from 1859 till 1866, is of special interest: in 1868 they were returned to St. Petersburg, being bought for the Library in Leipzig by antiquarian K. F. Keler [14].

During the Russian-Turkish war the directorate of the Faculty was eager to get acquaintance with the Oriental manuscripts found on the territory of Turkey occupied by the Russian troops. There was an official answer to the request made by Dean V. V. Grigoryev in 1878. He was informed about the number of manuscripts and books (over 4300 titles), which had been discovered in Bulgaria, with an assertion these would be sent to the library as soon as possible. It is still unknown, however, which MSS came to the University Library from Turkey after the end of the war [15].

It is natural that the constantly increasing amount of Oriental manuscripts and books in the St. Petersburg University Library, formed on the basis of several collections required one general Catalogue. In 1858 on the suggestion of Prof. Popov it was decided to start working on it. This task was divided among nine Professors of the Faculty [16]. Before the publication of the catalogue the University Council demanded to estimate the forthcoming expenses. In answer given by the Faculty, which came only in March 1859, it was said that it was impossible to do this in advance. That was the end of Prof. Popov's initiative.

Nevertheless, this difficult enterprise was started: it was the Catalogue by Prof. Gotwald, the first description of the manuscripts of the Imperial Kazan University Library [17], dealing mainly with books in Arabic, although it contains also the description of some Persian manuscripts: Pandnama-yi 'Attar (no. 54b), Shahnama-yi Firdawsi (no. 72), Tarikh-i 'Alam-ara (no. 72), Anwar-i Suhayli (no. 81) and some others.

Not all items of the Collection were treated as valuable documents. Some of them were bought specially for teaching purposes, to be used by students. For example, in the autumn of 1860 librarian Buche wrote to the Rector of the University about the necessity of acquiring a copy of the Persian work «Anwar-i Suhayli» by Husayn Kashifi for 10 rubles, «because by reading this copy students will manage to learn how to read Oriental manuscripts» [18]. Two copies of this book in the University Library bear students' marks on their margins (nos. 846 and 646).

The index of the new entries of the Library was published by K. G. Zaleman in 1888. Zaleman was an assistant librarian since 1875, then the librarian and at the same time the lecturer of the Iranian Phi-

lology Department, still he managed to produce the inventory books of new acquisitions made after 1877 and a list of 945 Oriental (Arabic, Persian and Turkish) manuscripts, of which 380 were Persian [19]. As Academician S. F. Oldenburg wrote in 1914, «due to K. G. Zaleman and his pupils the Library of The Petrograd University holds an exclusive place among the largest libraries of the city in respect to the quality of its Catalogues» [20]. We can only regret now, that all his knowledge and experience in this field Acad. Zaleman could use fully only when he became the head of the Asiatic museum [21].

In 1860—1861 the very existence of the Faculty became questionable. From the very beginning the Oriental Faculty of St. Petersburg had a wider specification than those of the Kazan University and the courses by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where students were getting an excellent practical education. In summer 1860, Minister E. P. Kovalevskij visited the Imperial Kazan University. He expressed his disappointment, regarding the transition of the Faculty to St. Petersburg, which caused the Emperor's resolution: «Consider if it is possible to return the Faculty to Kazan» [22]. No official request was sent to the Faculty of St. Petersburg, however, and nothing was changed, since the professors had already become accustomed to the conditions of living and working in the capital [23].

Another blow was dealt to the Faculty at the end of 1861 when there were disturbances among its students. On the 20th of December 1861 on the tsar's order the Faculty was closed and all its staff discharged. The students were given the right to enter another Institute and to continue their education. But as the students of the Faculty of Oriental Languages had no other opportunity to continue their studies elsewhere, it was decided after some negotiations to resume the courses. Between February 1862 and the autumn 1863 the Faculty remained the only branch the University where lectures were attended.

As we see, the story of the foundation of the Oriental Library as well as that of the Faculty itself is rich in dramatic events: to some extent it reflects the history of the country in general. The creation of the Systematic Catalogue of the Faculty manuscripts was several times abandoned and resumed again. When, for example, in 1918 it was decided to organize in Petrograd the International Congress of historians, the orientologists of Petrograd were expected to compile a full list of Muslim historical manuscripts, preserved in the libraries of the city. Military and revolutionary upheavals made it impossible not only to organize the Congress or to accomplish this work, but even made it impossible to work on the manuscripts, because many of them were moved from Petrograd [24].

The revolution of 1917 made great changes in the development of Oriental studies in Petrograd. The social activity of the professors and lecturers of Orientological centers suddenly increased. In 1922 there were already more than 10 educational and research institutions in the

city, where Oriental languages, history and culture were studied. By the pre-war time, unfortunately, only 4 of them survived: the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of the Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Department (the former Faculty) of Oriental Languages of the Philological Faculty of the State Leningrad University, the State Hermitage Museum and The State Public Library named after Saltykov-Shchedrin; the rest were closed or moved to Moscow. The Faculty and the Institute of the Oriental Studies went through nine reformatations and renaming during those several years [25].

In February 1944 the Faculty of Oriental Languages was restored under the supervision of Acad. S. A. Kozin.

In spite of all objective obstacles, caused by numerous formal changes, the scholarly life in the University continued. In 1925 the index of the Oriental (Persian, Turkish and Arabic) manuscripts was published by A. A. Romaskevich. He included there 273 items, comparing them with the famous European catalogues of manuscripts in the British Museum [26], the Bodlean Library [27], the Library of the Cambridge University [28], Berlin Royal Library [29].

Almost a century and a half had passed after the creation of the collection before some part of its Persian manuscripts was described, cataloged and made into a data base. It was achieved by Professor A. T. Tagirjanov of the Dept. of Iranian Philology. His catalogue enumerates 169 manuscripts, copies of 81 works on history, geography, biographies of Sufies [30]. We can not omit to mention, that the book by Tagirdjanov presents not only the description of the original manuscripts represented in our collection. His Catalogue gives exhaustive information on almost every famous manuscript. To our general regret this Description was not continued in spite of the author's intentions to do it. In the introduction to the Catalogue Prof. Tagirdjanov mentions that the collection of the Persian manuscripts of the Oriental Dept. numbers 940 items dealing with different subjects: history of literature, art, theology, history, geography, grammar, lexicography, medicine, mathematics, astrology, politics, ethics, sufism and biographies of Sufies. Two years before the publication of Tagirdjanov's Catalogue in the University journal «Uchenye zapiski» there appeared an article by A. T. Abramov, where it was stated that «The Tadjik-Persian fund of the Oriental department of the University Library includes 580 manuscripts» [31].

In «The World Revue of Islamic manuscripts» [32] O. F. Akimushkin mentioned that the University collection numbers 900 Persian manuscripts. In 1967 A. T. Tagirdjanov published «A List of Tadjik, Persian and Turkish manuscripts in the Oriental Library of the University» [33], where 180 manuscripts were taken into account. The trouble is that, in comparison with the indexes by Zaleman and Romaskevich, Tagirdjanov could not provide information on the way the manuscripts came to the University collection. In his opinion many of these manuscripts had not been registered at all since the time of K. G. Zaleman.

9 manuscripts were given to the Library after the death of A. A. Romaskevich's widow. There was no documentation on the manuscripts nos. 1232—1272 and nos. 1282—1451, among them some very interesting and valuable items. For example, no. 1378 — a Turkish prose version of the second volume of «Shahname» by Firdawsi, its main text in Persian with the Turkish translation and comments, dating to rabi' 1 1030/December 1620—January 1625, contain 30 refined-style miniatures. It is possible, that some of these manuscripts came to the Faculty from the Leningrad Oriental Institute, which existed between 1928 and 1938. This, however can not be properly checked.

In the «Note of the Board of Orientologists of 1923» the following is said about new books acquired by the Oriental Department of the Petrograd University in the post-revolutionary time: «From the Museum of the Revolution and the Committee of Registration and Assessment of the Nationalized book sources a great amount of books and manuscripts was received, among them books in Oriental languages — Jewish, Arabic etc.» [34]. So among the unregistered manuscripts mentioned by Tagirdjanov, there were probably those confiscated from citizens without any documentation during the revolution of 1917.

Those investigators, who would like to continue the description of the Persian manuscripts of the St. Petersburg University collection will meet several problems, first of all — the very amount of the work to be done.

Notes

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