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*Editorial Board*

Dear readers,

The foundation of our journal coincided with serious changes in the whole complex of the humanities. The rejection of "large narratives" (Marxism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, etc.) led to predominance of description over interpretation and to the shift of attention to "boundary" themes and issues. Naturally, the contents of *Manuscripta* reflected this shift of interests of the scholarly society. Artificially created boundaries between related branches of scholarship were eliminated. This, in turn, have led to the fact that for the last three years our journal has developed in close cooperation with Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the State Hermitage. According to our readers' feedback, the materials that we publish have become more interesting and versatile. We have significantly widened the geographical range of the published studies. Series of articles that the journal continues to publish regularly excite stable interest.

A researcher engaged in complex analysis of oriental manuscripts sooner or later comes to realizing the following fact: full-fledged research can only be carried out in the context of a wide range of cultural and scientific achievements of the corresponding epoch. The peculiar features of patterned carpet weaving, the specificities in decoration of bronze or ceramic vessels can help greatly when dating or localizing oriental bindings. The same applies to the analysis of clothes, patterns of fabrics, styles of head-dresses of characters of oriental miniatures. Obviously, the study of many elements of an oriental manuscript can also be an important source when studying museum collections of different kinds. That is why there are so many museum specialists among the authors and readers of our journal, and the editorial board of *Manuscripta* has from the very first issues regularly published articles dedicated to materials which are not directly linked with the analysis of oriental manuscripts, but interesting from the point of view of comparative study of manuscripts and museum objects. This refers to the article published in the present issue, which continues Dmitry Ivanov's research dedicated to the Buddhist collections of the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera.

One of the articles published in the current issue is connected with new exhibition project started by St. Petersburg Kunstkamera together with several scholarly, artistic and museum institutions of Uzbekistan. Name of the project sounds strange for those who now nothing about the lengthy cultural interaction in between Russia and Central Asia: "Oriental Dreams: Russian Avant-Garde and Silks of Bukhara".

It is historically conditioned that MAE BAS possesses one of the wealthiest collection of Central Asian textiles connected with the history of political and diplomatic relations between Central Asia and Russia. Considering its volume and importance it is one of the most significant collections not only in Russia but in the whole Europe. The collection includes textile samples, festive and everyday clothes and jewellery. Most important part of the collection comprises ceremonial gifts to Russian tsars from Bukhara amirs and Khiva khans. The famous collection of velvet and silk ikats alone counts over 500 samples. These collections provide priceless material for comparative studying of Central Asia traditional costumes and they are now open for researches from all countries.

Our museum also possesses valuable collection of historical photos and ethnographic pictures associated with Central Asia and its culture studying history. We also obtain extensive collections of artefacts that can tell marvelous stories to an inquisitive researcher. The best items from our collections are shown at the present exhibition.

It may be considered the result of a lengthy cultural interaction that a collection of Russian avant-garde painting which is second only to the collection at the Russian Museum is now preserved in the collections of...
TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

MINGANA FOLIOS: WHEN AND WHY

In the previous issue of *Manuscripta Orientalia* we were pleased to publish Dr. Alba Fedeli’s article, entitled “Mingana and the manuscript of Mrs. Agnes Smith Lewis, one century later” [1]. It was devoted to the re-examination and re-evaluation of the data obtained nearly a hundred years ago as a result of a thorough study of a palimpsest, whose scriptio inferior, containing part of the Qur’anic text, was written with three principal kinds of script [2]. List of the various readings, omissions and interpolations found in comparison with the established textus receptus seems to be still very important for the study of the early history of the Qur’anic text.

The Arabic Christian texts (selections from the Fathers, St. Athanasius, St. Chrysostom, etc.) date from the end of 9th—beginning of the 10th century. While thinking about the palimpsest in question one can easily ask: how could it happen that on the territory controlled by the Muslim authorities, somebody could destroy the holy text of the Muslim scripture with the goal of re-using the parchment and writing texts of Christian origin on it?

What is a palimpsest?

This was a period of growing disappointment in the state and in “official Islam”. The uprisings of the ninth—tenth centuries challenged the power of the caliphate: “the truth has appeared to the world, the muhaddis has risen, the power of the ‘Abbasids, the jurists, the readers of the Qur’an and the preachers of the tradition is coming to an end…”

The empire seethed. In 930, the Qarmatians spirited away the black stone of the Ka‘ba, in 939 the “concealment” (ghayb) of the Shi‘ite imam began, the message of the Ismā‘īlīs (dhwā) attracted thousands of followers, Ismā‘īlī exegesis interpreted the hidden (beit) meaning of the Qur’an, and the dawn of the New Persian literary language, into which the Qur’an was translated, began. Finally, in 945 the Shi‘ite Buwayhid seized Baghdaad. The power of the caliphate was abruptly diminished.

The study of extant Qur’anic manuscripts shows that the tenth century was marked by fundamental changes in the history of the Qur’anic text. In addition to the appearance of Ibn Mājah’s work, it was then that new forms of Qur’anic script began to spread; they were distinguished by greater decorative embellishment in comparison to their predecessors. Primary among them were “Eastern kufi” (the oldest dated copy is from AD 972) and cursive naskhi (the oldest dated copy is from AD 1001) [3].

In the ninth century, the centre of scholarly activity shifted from al-‘ Başra and al-Kifā to Baghdaad, capital of the caliphate. The business of translation thrived there, famous philosophers, exegetes and lawyers worked there, a grammatical school which brought together elements of previous systems arose there, the eminent grammarians al-Mubarrad (d. 900) and his pupil al-Sarrāj (d. 928) created there their famous works. And there, the beginning of the tenth century was marked by several attempts to achieve a new level of unification in the Qur’anic text. Three works entitled Kitāb al-Maṣḥūf were dedicated to the problem of al-qur’ān. Their authors were Ibn al-Dowīd (d. 928) [4], Ibn Anbīrī (d. 938/9) and Ibn Aṣghā ḵal-Sāfahānī (d. 970/1). The main role, however, would fall to Ibn Mājah (859—935), a pupil of Ibn al-Dowīd. A noted authority on the Qur’anic sciences, who as the people believed, read the Qur’an even in his grave, worked in Baghdaad and enjoyed the successive protection of two extremely influential grand wazīrs, Ibn Muqla (famous reformer of the Arabic calligraphy) and Ibn ‘Isā, whose power and influence can be likened to the power of a regent to the caliph. Ibn Mājah’s work bore the title al-Qur’ān al-sūbūn (“The Seven Readings”), pretended to near official status and established a system of permissible Qur’anic “readings”. The system proposed in the work relied on the consonantal basis of the “Uṣūlī version” and limited the number of systems of variant vowellings of the text to seven; these belonged, correspondingly, to seven authorities of the eighth century. All of them were ac-
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