

CONTENTS

Yu. Petrosyan. Editor's note	3
<i>TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH</i>	5
O. Akimushkin. The Sources of "The Treatise on Calligraphers and Painters" by Qāzī Aḥmad Qumī	5
M. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya. An Unique Manuscript of the "Kāṣyapaparivarta-sūtra" in the Manuscript Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.	12
I. Petrosyan. On Three Turkish Manuscripts from the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies Collection. The Problem of Authorship	17
A. Alikberov & E. Rezvan. Ibn Abi Kḥazzām and his "Kitāb al-makhzūn": The Mamlūk Military Manual	21
E. Tyomkin. Unique Sanskrit Fragments of the "Sūtra of Golden Light" in the manuscript collection of St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences	29
<i>TO THE HISTORY OF ORIENTAL TEXTOLOGY.</i>	39
E. Kychanov. Wen-hai Bao-yun: the Book and its Fate	39
<i>PRESENTING THE COLLECTIONS.</i>	46
M. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya. Tibetan Manuscripts of the 8—11th centuries A. D. in the Manuscript Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies	46
Tsuguhito Takeuchi. Kh. Tib. (Kozlov 4): Contracts for the Borrowing of Barley	49
<i>ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS AND NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES</i>	53
Val. Polosin & E. Rezvan. Asiatic Museum Project: 1. Data-Base on Muslim Seals	53
<i>PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT</i>	56
A. Alikberov & E. Rezvan. 'Adjā'ib al-Makhlūqāt by Zakariyā' al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283): 16th-century Illuminated Manuscript from the St. Petersburg Academic Collection	56
<i>BOOK REVIEW.</i>	68

Color plates: 'Adjā'ib al-Makhlūqāt by Zakariyā' al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283), MS D 370 from the collection of St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences (see p. 56).

Front cover:

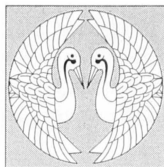
Fol. 34a. The Archangel 'Izra'īl, 160 × 124 mm.

Back cover:

Plate 1. Fol. 13b. The Planet Venus, 225 × 145 mm.

Plate 2. Fol. 35b. The Angels of the Second Heaven, 171 × 94 mm.

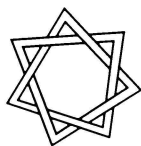
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Offering this first issue of the newly born quarterly journal "Manuscripta Orientalia" its founders, members of the research-staff of the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental studies, first of all keep in mind one of the most intriguing fields of Orientalistics, that is textology, the discipline dealing with the history of Oriental manuscripts.

The role of manuscripts in the development of human culture, as later the role of printed books, was immense. Manuscripts turned to be an extremely stimulating device of the ancients. For many centuries they served as the main depository of information, greatly contributing to the evolution of human culture by spreading knowledge and varied cultural experience.

One can number dozens of Oriental languages and systems of writing supported by a solid heritage of manuscript tradition. The principal religious systems of the world owe their success and possibility to propagate their teaching to the existence of manuscripts. From Oriental manuscripts we receive much information on the history and the vast cultural achievements of Eastern civilizations.

Oriental manuscripts present the most impressive result of the creative genius of Eastern peoples. They are of great value to the whole mankind, even to those who are not well acquainted with the treasury of Oriental thought and spiritual experience. Orientalists can be proud of their role as the interpreters of this fruitful branch of world's culture. They often acted as the bold discoverers of its most intriguing secrets. It is true that Oriental manuscripts are still full of mysteries unsolved.

Many thousands of these manuscripts are preserved in public and private collections all over the world. Often they are not available even to specialists, not speaking about ordinary readers interested in the literary tradition of the East. One of the primary aims of the editors of this journal — professional orientalists — is to make these manuscripts available to all who need them for their studies.

The editors are well aware of the fact that there are already many periodicals, both world-famous and obscure, dealing with the problem of Oriental manuscripts and manuscript collections. There are even several journals entirely dedicated to the study of Oriental manuscripts. The frames of most of these, however, are limited to some particular field, usually to some "national" manuscript heritage, which means that each of these periodicals deals only with manuscripts produced within corresponding geographical and temporal limits.

The editors of the present journal view their research program in a wider context. Its pages will be offered to all scholars who study all kinds of Oriental manuscripts, be

they Arabic, Turkish and Persian, Chinese, Hebrew, etc. Articles on Oriental textology, palaeography, codicology as well as on philology, history and culture will be published here, provided that these studies are basing upon some Oriental manuscript. The editors believe that it will be useful to collect such articles within the framework of one special periodical. It would present to scholars a much broader view of what has been done in this very special field of research, and of what should be done. We hope that these works, being collected in one journal, will contribute to the comparative study of the phenomenon of Oriental manuscript tradition.

When speaking about the aims of the journal, one can not omit to mention one more important point of the program. I mean the current problems of registration, cataloguing as well as conservation and restoration of ancient manuscripts. It must be mentioned that the pages of our journal are at the disposal of those who specialize in conservation of manuscripts, the priceless literary heritage of the Oriental peoples. Needless to say, all those acting already as potential patrons, rendering their material and technical assistance in the field of restoration and conservation of ancient documents, are welcome to contribute to the journal. When it concerns the safety and the future destiny of Oriental manuscripts, the editors regard it as one of their most important tasks to provide the necessary information on their keeping and restoration.

When founding this new journal of Oriental studies, scholars from the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of the Oriental Studies bear in mind the special position of the St. Petersburg school in Russian orientalistics. Its origin and its traditions go back to the eighteenth century. The Institute, an immediate successor of the pre-revolutionary Russian Asiatic Museum, inherited many thousands of Oriental manuscripts written in more than sixty different languages, including dead ones. It is now settled down in the beautiful building of the Novo-Michailovsky palace on the Neva embankment. Its manuscript treasury is comparable only to the world-famous manuscript collections of the British Museum and Bibliothèque National de Paris.

It is not just a mere coincidence that St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, gradually collected within its walls scholars specializing in the problems of Oriental culture. These scholars working in various fields of Oriental history, linguistics, literature and religion enjoy the privilege of using their own manuscript collection.

Since the foundation of the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies its members regarded the description of the manuscripts from this collection, textological studies as well as their translation and publishing as their primary task. By now they have acquired considerable experience in this work. Many books and articles on Oriental manuscripts have been published by them during last years. Unfortunately, since most of these publications are in Russian, they are not available in full measure to scholars from other countries.

Starting the publication of the "Manuscripta Orientalia" in English the editors mean, among their other aims, to introduce the results of the Russian scholars' research on Oriental manuscripts to a broader scholarly audience all over the world. Works by scholars from the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies will be given special attention. We also intend to reproduce in English, the language of our quarterly, the most important works on Oriental manuscripts previously published in Russian or in other languages, which may present problems to Western scholars.

One more important point must be mentioned when speaking about the general program of the journal. The rapid progress of computers and their introduction into all spheres of modern life and science is, naturally, affecting the development of Oriental scholarship. New information technologies applied to the study of Oriental manuscripts open new perspectives in this traditional branch of humanitarian studies. One can expect really impressive results from the use of computers, especially in the field of textology. Being very eager to support this new approach to Oriental studies, the editors would like to use the advantage presented by this new journal to spread more information on the new computer programs developed for the aims of textology and other disciplines connected with manuscripts. Articles written by specialists who apply recent information technologies to Oriental manuscripts are of particular interest to us.

We are happy to inform the readers of the journal, that its every issue is expected to contain a publication dedicated to some manuscript of special artistic or scientific value belonging to the collection of the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, with some of its pages or miniatures reproduced in colour. Publications on rare and valuable manuscripts from other collections are

also welcome. Such publications will ensure the distribution of information about most valuable manuscripts preserved in different museums and libraries.

Aiming to achieve the highest professional level in presenting information about Oriental manuscripts, the editors do not want to neglect the needs of those readers who, not being professional scholars, are interested in this subject and wish to be acquainted with the achievements of the Eastern civilization. Reproductions from the masterpieces in the manuscript art published in our quarterly will serve to this purpose.

There is no need to say that the editors will be happy to accept and publish articles submitted by those orientalists whose scholarly interests are focused on studying manuscripts. The only requirement is that the articles should be written in English. Respectfully inviting our colleagues to collaborate in the task of publishing their works dealing with a very special phenomenon, that is the Oriental manuscript, the founders of the "Manuscripta Orientalia" wish to express their highest estimation of the labors of those scholars, who chose the study of Oriental manuscripts their life-occupation. Any contribution made by them to our journal will be accepted as a great honour.

Finally, the editors feel it their pleasant duty to express their gratitude to the Correspondent Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Boris V. Gidasov and Professor Boris I. Ionin, the founders of the "Thesa" publishing house and the sponsors of our newly born journal, for their financial support of the present project. One can not but feel deep respect towards them for all their efforts and for their profound concern about the state of Oriental studies in the present-day Russia. It is especially significant, that the journal is supported by the national benefactors, who are fully aware of the role of Oriental Studies in the development of science within the wide context of the world culture.

We wish that the publications on Oriental manuscripts presented in this journal would contribute to mutual understanding between different cultures and facilitate the everlasting cultural dialogue. We undertake this work with the feeling of admiration for the art of those who created the manuscripts, as if passing to us through the ages, their worship of the word written and their deep respect of its magic energy.

Yuri A. Petrosyan, Editor-in-chief