CONTENTS

TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH 3

N. Tumanovich. An Indian Collection of Persian Folk Tales 3
A. Sadykhova. A Manuscript of "Tales of Some Lovers of the Past" in the Collection of the Oriental Faculty of the St. Petersburg University 9
Sh. Iakerson. An Unknown List of Hebrew Books 17

TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION 26

E. Rezvan. The Qur'ān and Its World: V. Language, the Unconscious and the "Real World" 26

PRESENTING THE COLLECTIONS 40

V. Kushev. The Formation and Study of the Afghan Manuscript Collection in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies 40

ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS AND NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES 50

J. Gippert. Digitization of Tocharian Manuscripts from the Berlin Turfan Collection 50

PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT 58

A. Mikhaylova. An Illustrated Arabic Manuscript of a Translation of a Seventeenth-Century Greek Chronograph 58

BOOK REVIEWS . 64

Front cover:

The portrait of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (r. 324—337), the founder of the Byzantine Empire. Miniature from a Christian-Arabic manuscript entitled *al-Durr al-manẓūm fī tārīkh mulūk al-Rūm* (C 358) in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, fol. 11b, 11.8 × 9.5 cm.

Back cover:

Plate 1. Portrait of two Roman Emperors — Stauracius (r. 811) and Michael I (r. 811—813). Miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 101b, 11.9 × 7.5 cm.
Plate 2. Portrait of the Roman Emperor Leo VI the Wise (r. 886—912). Miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 120a, 11.2 × 10.0 cm.

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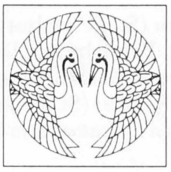
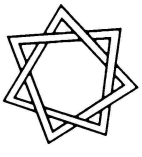


Manuscripta Orientalia

International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research

Vol. 4 No. 1 March 1998



THESA
St. Petersburg-Helsinki

TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

N. N. Tumanovich

AN INDIAN COLLECTION OF PERSIAN FOLK TALES

Manucsript B 256 in the holdings of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies is today known to the scholarly world only through three reference publications. The first is *Mélanges Asiatiques*, vol. X, p. 290, which contains a register of the Asiatic Museum's acquisitions appended to the 1880 annual report by its chief keeper, K. Salemann. Entry number 8 in the register is *Majmū'a-i ḥikāyāt*, and indicates the size of the manuscript and the sender of the package in which it arrived. The second, more detailed, mention is contained in the short alphabetical catalogue of Persian and Tadjik manuscripts in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies under No. 3921 [1]. The manuscript contains a collection of Persian folk tales, fifty-six works in all. O. F. Akimushkin, the author of the entry, enumerated the headings of all the tales in the manuscript and indicated a series of correspondences with tales noted in the most authoritative European and Asian catalogues. The third mention comes in the description of the collection of folklore manuscripts, where each of the tales is treated as a separate work and supplied with annotations and a bibliography [2]. In my work on the last of the enumerated publications, I was able to make a series of important observations about manuscript B 256, which go beyond the narrow limits of formal description.

Most important is that B 256 is in many ways unique in the collection of Persian folk tales, which are in the holdings of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. Moreover, it is a rare copy in terms of its formal characteristics, structure and the role it played in the Persian-language manuscript tradition in Iran during the rule of the Great Moghūls. It could be of interest to modern Orientalists — specialists in literature, folklore, sociology, etc. It is surprising that during the hundred years it spent in the collection of the Asiatic Museum, and after that in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, this manuscript did not attract the special attention of Russian scholars. The task of the present article is to fill this gap in the most concise fashion possible. It is no doubt that the manuscript's notable features make it one of the most valuable literary monuments of the Great Moghūl period.

Unlike the overwhelming majority of manuscripts brought from Central Asia to form the basis of the collection of Persian folk tales, preserved in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, B 256 came down to us by a different route. It was copied in India and then made its way to England, from where it was sent to Petersburg through the offices of the famous London bookseller Bernard Quaritch.

The palaeographic data clearly show B 256's Indian origin. It is of small format (11.2 × 22.0 cm.; text dimensions are 6.5 × 14.0 cm.) and great volume (810 folios). The Oriental paper is damaged by book-worms. The text is written in Indian ink; the headings and initial phrase of the tales are written in cinnabar. The text is written in *nasta'līq*.

Manuscript B 256 was restored in England. The frayed and torn edges of the folios were glued back together and trimmed by more than 5 mm. The thick volume was divided in two volumes. Each of the two relatively equal parts was stitched into a booklet and bound in the fashion then common in Europe — pasteboard with glued-on glossy, spotted paper in black-grey hues and black leather backings with impressed gold letters which read "Persian tales" and indicate the volume number.

Unfortunately, B 256 does not contain the name of the copyist or the date of the copy. On the bases of palaeographic data one may conclude that it was produced in the eighteenth century. At the beginning of this century, two outstanding Orientalists, H. Ethé and E. Blochet, dated manuscripts, which share a number of characteristics with B 256, to the eighteenth century. Already in 1903, Ethé gave a detailed description of a collection of folk tales in the India Office Library (under No. 797), noting the limit dates in the manuscript — 1616—1639 [3]. Now we can state that manuscript No. 797 in the India Office belongs to the group of possible protographs for our B 256.

After studying the "Tale of Arshad, Rashīd and Ashraf", which is contained in manuscript No. 2069 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Blochet came to the conclusion that both that version of the "Tale of Arshad, Rashīd and Ashraf" and the rest of the tales in this manuscript were written down at the end of the seventeenth century [4]. We find the same version of this "Tale" in manuscript B 256 as well, which makes us conclude that either B 256 is contemporary to Paris manuscript No. 2069 or was copied later.

At first glance, B 256 is notable by the diversity of genres it represents. On further examination, this view turns out to be not quite correct. Formally, B 256 contains 5 anec-

dotes, each one to one or one and a half folios long, and 11 short tales of two to five folios each. The anecdotes are similar to those known from Muḥammad Awfī's early eighteenth-century collection. However, the notable feature of B 256 is its more than 30 entertaining tales, each 10 to 20 folios long. In this category we should also include four more substantial narratives which take up 40 to 50 folios in the manuscript. The compiler terms these *ḥikāyāt* as well — "tales". It follows from this that they were seen as such by his contemporaries, readers or listeners. The longest of them, the *Bakhtiyār-nāma*, takes up 66 folios. In its form, a single thematic framework breaks down into nine tales, each of which averages six to seven folios; this arrangement allows it to blend in with the architectonics of the manuscript.

The works collected in B 256 were widely popular in the Near and Middle East. Versions of some of them are even encountered in Europe and Russia. The richness of bibliographic data, appended to each of the 55 works represented in my description of manuscripts mentioned above, gives notion of the broad area of circulation of the thematic material which is contained in B 256. Analogies were found for all but one — the thirtieth story, a half-folio long — which describes a typical street scene in an Indian city with the participation of conjurers.

Matching selections of tales from B 256 are found in other manuscripts scattered over the world. For example, in Tashkent manuscript No. 3534 of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences, folios 185—367 and 73—157 double in the same order the first nine, twenty-second and twenty-fourth tales in B 256. It is a small but significant detail, the headings for three of the tales in both the Tashkent and Petersburg copies are given at the end of the text. These correspondences cannot be accidental, rather they testify to a certain connection between the copies. Another detail of some significance: the tale of the son of an Aleppo jeweller, in which the son falls in love in Yazd with the daughter of a Jewish wine-seller, ends in B 256 with the compiler's remark that this story was told to him not completely. In Tashkent manuscript No. 3534, the story ends with reflections on the customs of Gebrs (Zoroastrians) whose women allow men to court them and drink wine with them, but should the guest think ill thoughts, he is threatened with death.

Three purely speculative conclusions come to mind in connection with all said above. First, that our MS B 256 and Tashkent MS No. 3534 have a single stem. Second, that in India the theme mentioned was known in both written and oral form. Third, that through circulating and abundant oral retelling of the subject, both Iranian and Central Asian tradition retained curious and important to local dwellers details about the customs of other faiths in the well-known city of Yazd (to this day followers of Zoroastrianism live in the vicinity of the city). As for the close of the story, it was forgotten, since the ethno-confessional milieu in India was quite different and the story's ending held no interest there.

Our MS is also related to manuscript No. 477 from the Bodleian library in Oxford: ten works it contains are also present in B 256. The eleventh work from No. 477 corresponds to the fifty-sixth in our manuscript, the eighth — to the eleventh, the ninth through tenth — to the twenty-third to twenty-fourth, and a block of four tales, from the second to the seventh, is doubled by the fourty-first to fourty-sixth tales in the Petersburg copy [5].

There is also Calcutta copy No. 301 of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. It begins with the same tale about Shaykh Ṣana'ān as our B 256, which alone could serve as proof of their relationship [6]. Furthermore, the first 15 tales in both manuscripts are in near correspondence. The divergences, which are but minor, are only two. The first is that the tale of the Kashmir princess and the son of the Qinnūjan king is present in B 256 but absent in the Calcutta manuscript. The second is that the tale of the bald gardener, which is present in both manuscripts, but in the Calcutta manuscript No. 301 it is found among the first fifteen tales, while in B 256 it is in a different place.

Especially telling is the correspondence of four anecdotes, which in B 256 are numbered 12 to 15. In the catalogue of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, its author W. Ivanow cautiously suggested the short tales in Calcutta copy No. 301 (fols. 164—165) to be similar to those in Indian Office manuscript No. 797 (fols. 195b—196a). If a group of analogous anecdotes in B 256 [7] are drown on to make additional juxtapositions, Ivanow's assumption seems even more reasonable.

The London manuscript No. 797, from the library of the India Office, comprises 44 works [8], 34 of which we find in B 256. Given the current condition of this India Office copy, it is not possible to judge with certainty whether the tales it contains were originally copied out as a unit or whether they came together by degrees. Today, the MS seems to be a sort of convolute — a composite manuscript, "collected from various sources". Three copyists participated in the copy, and the dates of their work are given: 1616, 1619, 1636—1647, and 1645. The folios order is broken "in the most arbitrary fashion." Such defects are frequently explained by unprofessional restoration — in this particular case the manuscript was apparently restored twice. Over thirty years the manuscript might have deteriorated quite seriously from constant use. A significant part of the manuscript, completed in the hand of the second copyist, may testify either to the copyist's reconstruction of the text, which had been lost by some reason by that time, or to the changed conditions under which this particular portion of the text was copied. It should be noted that India Office manuscript No. 797 begins with the "Tale of the carefree man", as Tashkent No. 3534 does. MS No. 797 also carries on for the first few dozen folios the thread of this last composition in a fashion evocative of a dotted line, which indicates the existence of intermediate copies between them.

If we accept India Office manuscript No. 797 in its present form, as a single whole, its similarity to B 256 seems to be indisputable: chains consisting of 15, four, three and three instances of two tales are present in both cases, although the place were these tales are located in the manuscripts may be different. The 15 works with which B 256 begins take up in India Office No. 797 numbers 11—25. The block of tales from 48 to 51 in B 256 is doubled in India Office No. 797 by the block from 30 to 33, and so on. Only one conclusion comes to mind, namely that India Office No. 797 or some other manuscripts originating from the same stem were among the basic protographs for Petersburg B 256, along with Tashkent MS No. 3534 (or its copies) and Calcutta MS No. 301 and its possible copies.

The comparison of the text of B 256 with the materials on which its compiler based his work enables us to make conclusions about an area of the Persian language spread and, consequently, Persian culture throughout the Middle

East from Ferghana to Bengal. Though being very important, this observation is but collateral for our exposition. Of much more interest could be the figure of the compiler of the text, which should remain at the focal point of discussions about our manuscript. If juxtapositions made can stress the mechanical side of the compiler's work, its other aspects, such as searching, analysis, editing, formating, i.e. the very essence of the creative process and individual method of the compiler's work, remains deeply concealed. To elucidate these facets of the compiler's work, more intent glance at the conditions in which the compiler of B 256 worked and, first and foremost, conditions in the book market in the area is needed.

It is well known that entertaining tales are the most common form for Persian-language folklore. Since ancient times, illiterate story-tellers performed, each with his own repertoire. With the spread of literacy, collections of the most popular stories were written down. By the seventeenth century, a strong tradition of compiling brief collections had formed. These were conventional in form, average in level, and geared toward a popular readership. The tradition stood up through the twentieth century. On the basis of our collection, which represents, for the most part, late copies, one can judge the sort of collections which circulated at an earlier period. They each contain approximately 12—20 folklore works, each of which averages 10—25 folios, resulting in a manuscript of 250—350 folios. The writing is far from professional at all times; at times it is even crude and careless. Whether on his own or in accordance with the taste of a customer of middling means, any barely literate copyist at the bazaar court produce such a copy in rapid order. Such manuscripts have been found in the homes of craftsmen as well as those of professional story-tellers, shop-owners, traders, etc. With the establishment in power of the Great Moghuls, a large number of collections of Persian folk tales were brought from Central Asia and Iran to India along with whatever goods the migrants carried with them.

We know of an attempt, and most likely not the only one, to "fictionalize" a group of folk tales by adapting the style to the tastes of devotees of belles-lettres. In a brief preamble to a collection of 19 folk tales he drew up at the turn of the nineteenth century, a certain Muḥammad Kāẓim b. Mīrak Ḥusayn Muẓaffarī Sājwāndī, writing under the pen-name of Ḥubbī, explained the task he had set for himself as follows: to retell in a refined style the amazing stories which he had chanced to hear from a professional, and evidently illiterate, story-teller in select company. These were, for the most part, stories typical of the Arab cycle of "1001 Nights", which had been passed form listener to listener in Persian adaptations for many centuries. Sājwāndī aimed for chamber performances of the stories among priveleged society, as is evident from the careful use in the manuscript of "beautiful *nasta'līq*" [9].

As an experienced, older literary figure — he was 70 years old — Sājwāndī had an accurate sense of the ideal parameters for a manuscript volume, knew that ease of use heightened the attractiveness of any good, and had an excellent idea of how to convey the entertaining tales in order to make them most accessible to listeners or readers. These considerations determined the form of the collection and the size of each work in it. The "Tale of Mihr and Mah", which did fit into this framework, was abbreviated by half. Such fundamental literary and editorial alterations of the source material transformed Sājwāndī into a co-author as he created his collection. This is probably why he felt it necessary to note his own name.

Manuscript C 1640 in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies indicates that Sājwāndī's experiment won him future adherents in all corners of the Persian-language cultural world. It consists of 15 stories and was prepared in Bukhara in the nineteenth century. On folio 10b of the copy, the compiler, a certain Karī, implores Allah to have mercy upon him ("this poor wretch") but says nothing about the aims of his work. The form and format of the manuscript clearly show that Karī belonged to a different social milieu than Sājwāndī. He was not an educated literary figure, but had mastered the folkloric themes most popular in the bazaars. It is possible that he was a professional story-teller or was preparing to become one. For this, either he or his mentor had, as they say, "a golden tongue" and made wide use in speech and writing of introductory remarks or catchphrases like "he told the truth and gave up the ghost" (fol. 191b) or "free to kill, free to reward" (fol. 200a) [10]. Part of collection C 1640 is a copy of an existing text and part was copied down from oral sources. In both cases the orthography is of poor quality.

C 1640 is of interest for the present study as an example of recorded folk speech and a reflection of the centuries-old practice of simultaneously using both oral and written material in compiling collections of stories.

Although it is no doubt that the compiler of B 256 relied on his predecessors' experience, the task he set for himself was utterly different. While an ordinary collection of entertaining tales for popular use was intended for light reading, manuscript B 256 was held together by the serious idea of a full collection of the most popular, typologically similar Persian folk tales. Hoping to realise such a plan, the compiler of B 256 must have stood higher on the social scale than the copyist of an ordinary, published collection. He had to move freely both among works of folklore and those of Persian classical literature, possess a literary style, taste, and other creative abilities.

The seeming proximity of the compiler of B 256 to Sājwāndī is deceptive, although both were educated, geared their work toward a select audience rather than the crowd at the bazaar, and gleaned the basic themes for their compilations from the selections in "1001 Nights". They differed in their motivation. Sājwāndī reworked tales he had heard on his own initiative, intending to give an effective demonstration of his literary gifts. Our compiler realised the wishes of a customer, striving to preserve in their natural form for future generations "the most popular" folkloric themes of his time in the regions he knew. The textological work of juxtaposing oral and written variants of well-known tales — noted above in connection with tales 21 and 24 of B 256 — bears witness to the thoughtful, conscientious and careful attitude of our compiler to his source material.

The compiler of B 256 was not troubled by the length of the works which he included in his compilation. Forthermore, he made use of variations in form to enhance the diversity of his work. Interweaving short and extended tales and skillfully selecting them by content, he so arranged them in one volume that more than 1,500 pages of text read easily, in a single sitting even. Despite the well-known conservatism of Asiatic society, entertaining folk tales are essentially dynamic, which fundamentally distinguishes them from works authored by specific writers. As a rule, time and

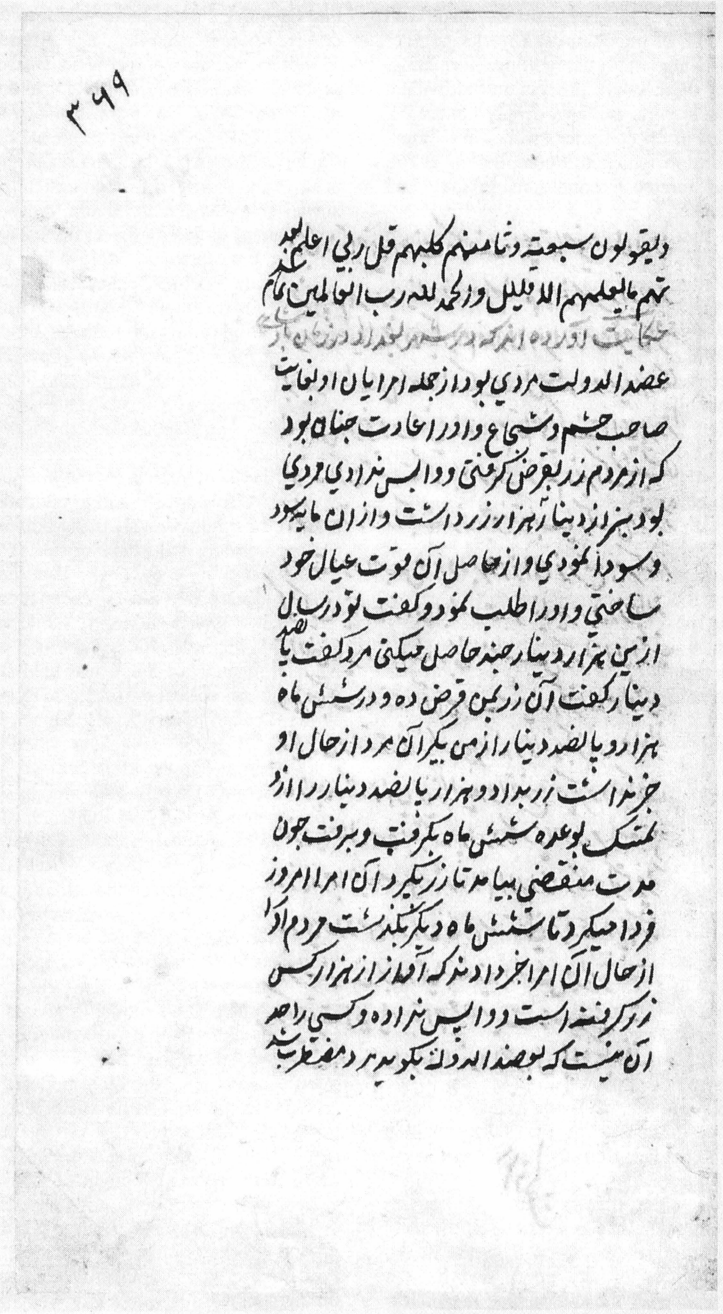
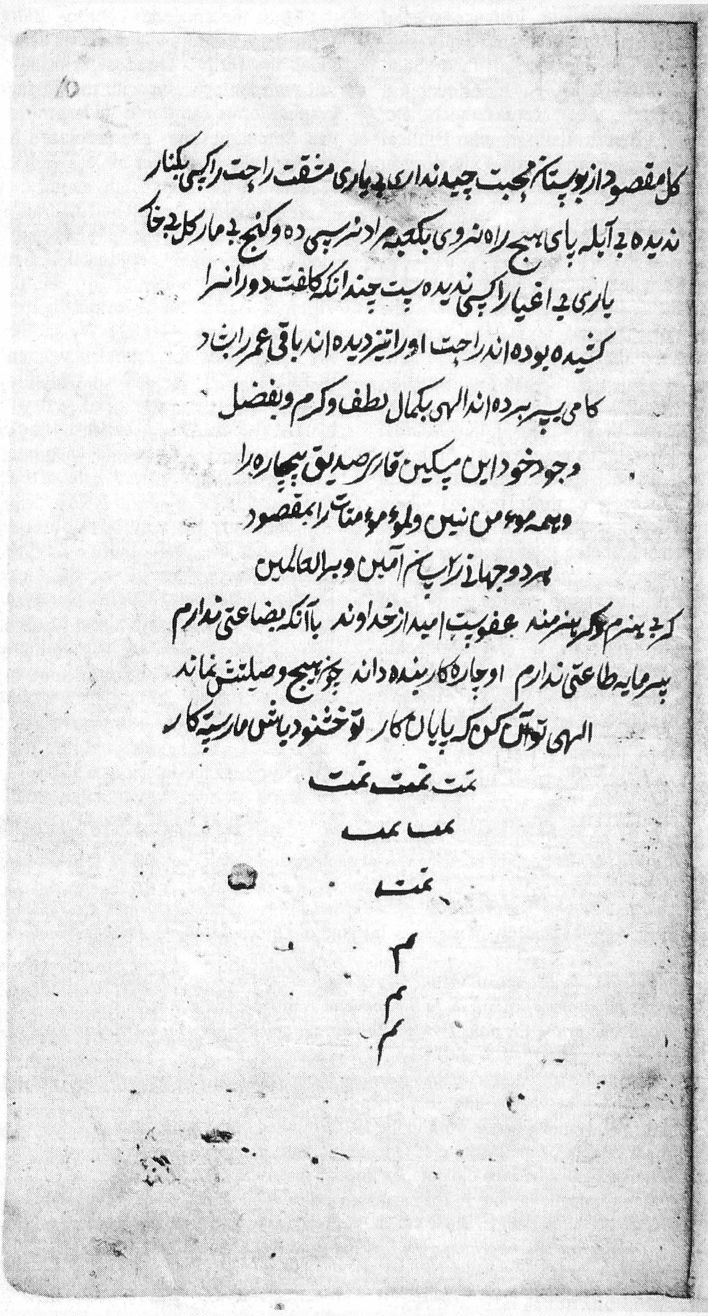


Fig. 1



10

کل مقصود از بوستان محبت چند نداری بیاری منفعت راحت را کسی بکنار
ندیده چه آبله پای هیچ راه نروی بکعبه مراد نرسیده و گنج چه مار کل چه خاک
یاری چه اغیار را کسی ندیده بیت چندانکه کلفت دوران را
کشیده بوده اند راحت او را نیز دیده اند باقی عمر را بشاد
کامی بسر برده اند الهی بکمال لطف و کرم و بفضل
وجود خود این مسکین تار صدیق بیچاره را
و همه مومنین و المؤمنات را بمقصود
هر دو جهان رسان آمین و رب العالمین
گرچه هنرم نیست بکر هنرمند عفو بست امید از خداوند با آنکه بضاعتی ندارم
سرمایه طاعتی ندارم او چاره کار بنده داند چون هیچ وسیلتی نماند
الهی تو آن کن که پایان کار تو خشنود باشی ما رستگار
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Fig. 2

place leave their mark on each piece of folklore. Our compiler succeeded in marking new features in traditional themes and brought them to the reader's attention.

The time and place or origin for the folkloric material used in B 256 require in each concrete instance special investigation. Such a research is far from uniformly successful, although many scholars have tried their hand at it, among them V. A. Zhukovsky, S. F. Oldenburg, I. Iu. Krachkovsky, E. E. Bertels, A. A. Romaskevich, etc. The deepest roots are usually found in stories with Biblical or Qur'ānic characters, in legendary materials. One story in B 256 goes back to the "Metamorphoses" of Apuleius (second century A.D.).

Tales of the sort under review here are normally compared with the Arab cycle "1001 Nights", which has become a certain type of standard for this genre. However, the tales of "1001 Nights" may hardly be considered as the "starting-point" for the stories found in B 256. Scholars have advanced authoritative claims that "1001 Nights", for its part, stems from the Sassanian *Hazār afsāna*. Some of the themes — in the *Bakhtiyār-nāma*, for example — are considered by scholars to go back to an Indian source. "1001 Nights" represents an established type of Arab entertaining tales which belongs to a specific time, the ninth century. Parallel to these themes, in those regions where Persian was known similar themes were transmitted orally; moreover, many of them clearly match themes in the *Hazār afsāna*.

In accordance with established tradition, the majority of works in B 256 are close to "1001 Nights". In the course of five centuries (from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century), however, each of these themes endured significant changes and acquired variants. For example, the effective scene between a cunning beauty and an unjust judge which ends with the judge naked at a crowded bazaar was transformed into an independent tale about a beauty who takes vengeance on a perfidious judge (tales 32 and 46 in B 256).

Until the sixteenth century, India and China were described in folklore materials as lands "where the heavens touch the earth". These descriptions, very indistinct, were full with fantasy. But with the passage of time, Indian geographic terms came into wider, more detailed and concrete use. Sometimes they even replaced Iranian terms in stories, as the latter were seen as less well known to listeners and readers of the eighteenth century. The above-mentioned "Tale of Arshad, Rashīd and Ashraf" attracts attention by its late origin. It mentions "Franks" — Europeans — and the "land of Purtugal", evidentally Goa. Blochet even took "Maryam, the daughter of Ṣān'ur Shāh, the king of Purtugal" for a real historical figure, namely Queen Maria of Portugal (1667—1683). We should add that Maryam was the usual name for Frankish women who were characters in folk tales. It appears that in this instance Blochet has exaggerated the extent of story-tellers' knowledge of historical Europe. As concerns the plot of this tale, it is close to a series of motifs encountered in "1001 Nights" and, on the whole, the "Tale of Farrukhshāh, Farrukhrūz and Farrukhnāz" — 33 in B 256.

These are the very brief observations, which could be made after the preliminary studying of manuscript B 256 from the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. Surely, the contents of the MS need a more detailed analysis of specialists in Near Eastern literature and folklore. The vast literary material the manuscript contains provides a fine basis for further work. Our aim was merely to attract attention to this manuscript collection of Persian folk tales.

Notes

1. *Persidskie i tadzhikskie rukopisi Instituta narodov Azii AN SSSR: Kratkiĭ alfavitnyĭ katalog* (Perisan and Tajik Manuscripts of the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of the Peoples of Asia: a Brief Alphabetical Catalogue), ed. N. D. Miklukho-Maklaĭ, Pt. I (Moscow, 1964), pp. 527—9.

2. N. N. Tumanovich, *Opisanie persidskikh i tadzhikskikh rukopiseĭ Instituta vostokovedeniia AN SSSR* (A Description of the Persian and Tajik Manuscripts of the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of Oriental Studies). Fasc. 6: Folklore: entertaining stories and tales (Moscow, 1981).

3. H. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office* (Oxford, 1903), i, p. 524.

4. E. Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1934), iv.

5. E. Sachau, H. Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Pt. 1: The Persian Manuscripts (Oxford, 1903).

6. W. Ivanow, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1924).

7. It is necessary to note that W. Ivanow, whose work in the 1910s resulted in the appearance of a collection of Persian folk tales in the holdings of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, unluckily, had no opportunity to analyse the manuscripts brought by him from Bukhara. It may be that he even did not look through manuscript B 256.

8. See the reference to Ethé's catalogue in note 3. The catalogue indicates 52 works, since the numbering begins with the introductory tales of the *Bakhtiyār-nāma*. In our numbering of the works in B 256, the tales in the *Bakhtiyār-nāma* are counted as a single work.

9. Ch. Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1881), ii, pp. 759—60.

10. Tumanovich, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. *Majmū'a-i ḥikāyāt*, manuscript B 256 from the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, fol. 369a, 11.2 × 22.0 cm. (of Indian provenance, eighteenth century).

Fig. 2. *Ḥikāyāt*, manuscript C 1640 from the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, fol. 10a, 13.5 × 25.4 cm. (Bukhara, nineteenth century).