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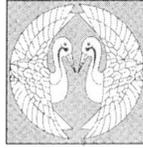
Front cover:

"The Sultan's repose in nature", miniature from 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's *Dīwān*, manuscript C 1697 in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, A. D. 1486/87, fol. 243 b, 7.7×7.7 cm.

Back cover:

"Portrait of some Moghol principal or influential grandee sitting in a chair (throne?) with a falcon on his right arm", miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 1b, 7.3×14.8 cm.

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MANUSCRIPTS CONSERVATION

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ON CHANGING THE MEANS OF THE BEREZOVSKY COLLECTION STORING*

The small Berezovsky collection (only 130 items) occupies a special place in the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. A rich variety of writing materials — paper, birch bark, silk, palm leaves, wood — and writing itself — upright and slanting Brāhmī, Chinese hieroglyphics — make the documents of this collection particularly interesting. It is therefore not surprising that the Berezovsky collection has always drawn attention of numerous Orientalists. The collection is also distinguished by the fact that all of the manuscripts are identified geographically and topographically. In 1906, M. M. Berezovsky carried out excavations in Kucha, a famous oasis with many temples and monasteries: Kyzyl Minuy, On Bash Minuy, Kyzyl Karga, Tadjit Minuy. Berezovsky scrupulously described his finds and accurately drew up maps and diagrams to show where they had been discovered. The Archive of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies contains his lists of finds and his sketches (fund 59, inv. 1, items 21, 26). All of the materials collected were carefully processed — manuscripts and fragments were placed in paper bags and envelopes with an indication of their quantity, where they had been discovered, and their material. At the same time, in 1906, many manuscript fragments were placed in acetate pulp film, so-called gelatin, and thick paper was pasted tightly over the edges. (Envelope where fragments SI B/19 are contained has a note about this in Berezovsky's own hand). They have been preserved in this form until the present day. At that time, this means of preservation was considered the best. Unfortunately, the acetate pulp film has undergone changes over time, losing its transparency, yellowing and darkening; it has become cracked, deformed, and bent (see *fig. 1*).

At the beginning of the 1980s, the Berezovsky collection was described by M. I. Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya, who provided inventory numbers, clarified and identified many manuscript fragments, noted the quantity of lines, letters, or signs, and indicated dimensions. All material described was put into thematic or linguistic groups and placed in paper bags. However, the physical condition of the manuscripts gave cause for alarm since the paper had grown weak at the edges, loess and clay within the gelatin film scraped at the writing. Of special cause for concern was the condition of the birch bark, an extremely brittle and breakable material;

it cracked and splintered somewhat even from the light contact necessary for work with the texts. As a result, in several envelopes and bags, paper and birch-bark fragments of various sizes had combined with crumbled loess and become unusable for research purposes. This is, for example, the case of fragments SI B/1 and SI B/6 (see *fig. 2*).

The entire Berezovsky collection is stored in five boxes (40.0×20.0×12.0 cm) and several paper bags. A decision was made to separate all of it, removed the fragments from gelatin, clean them when possible, and place them for conservation into melanex plastic. This means of storage is long-lasting, safe, and allows for work with the text such as study, comparison, photography, etc.

Box No. 1 contained 19 items. Envelope SI B/1 contains a note in Berezovsky's hand: "Kyzyl Minuy with one Chinese coin". Later, M. I. Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya noted in her description: "Envelope with scattered contents: small manuscript fragments mixed with loess..." The envelope was torn and beneath it, on the bottom of the box, lay numerous small pieces of birch bark. These were added to the scattered contents of the envelope and separated as follows:

- 1) paper and birch-bark were separated;
- 2) birch-bark fragments with several signs or lines were isolated;
- 3) birch-bark fragments with one entire sign were isolated;
- 4) birch-bark fragments with elements of signs were isolated.

In group No. 2, three fragments, similar in handwriting and the colour of the birch bark, with identical fracture lines were identified visually. When assembled, they formed fragment 5.5 cm long with two lines of text (SI B/1, fol. 3). This leads us to believe that a dedicated researcher will in the future be able to reconstruct the ancient text, with the aid of even the tiniest elements of signs (see *fig. 3*).

All materials from the envelope with "scattered contents" — 114 paper fragments and 63 birch-bark fragments — were placed in three sheets of melanex (40.0×40.0 cm).

On envelope SI B/6, with the hand of Berezovsky is written: "insignificant fragments of paper and birch bark".

* This paper was delivered at the Fourth International Conference "Preservation of Dunhuang and Central Asiatic Collections", held at St. Petersburg on 7—12 September, 1999.



Fig. 1

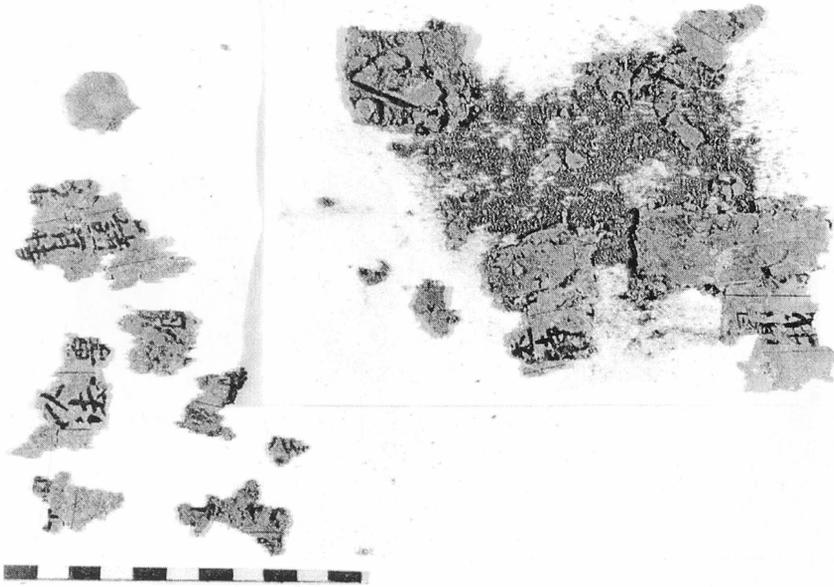


Fig. 2

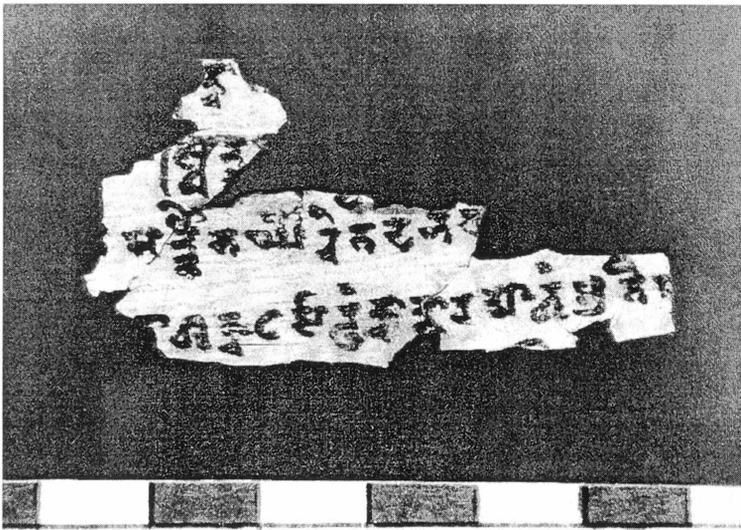


Fig. 3

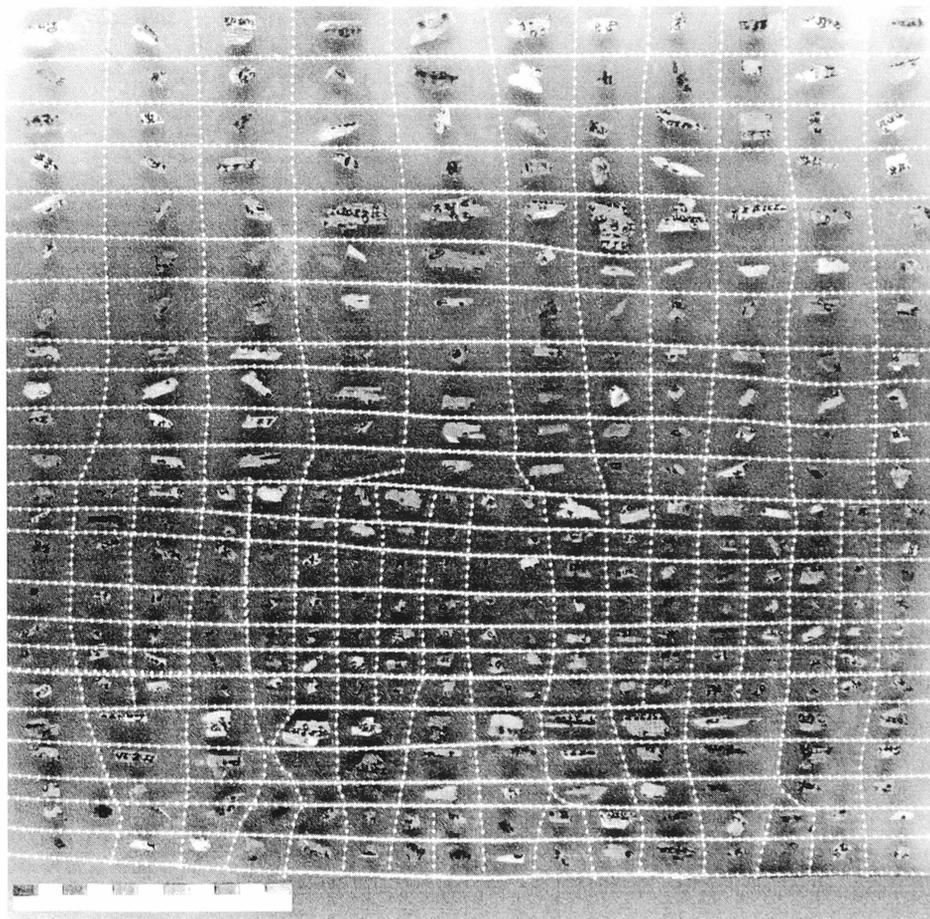
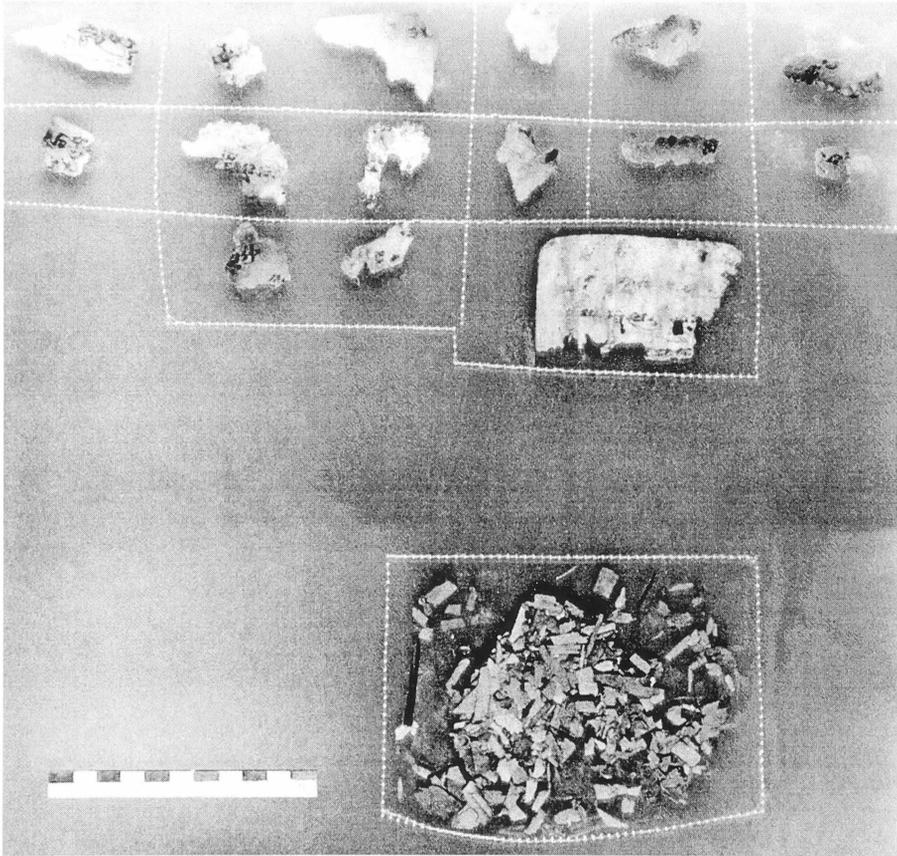


Fig. 4

*Fig. 5*

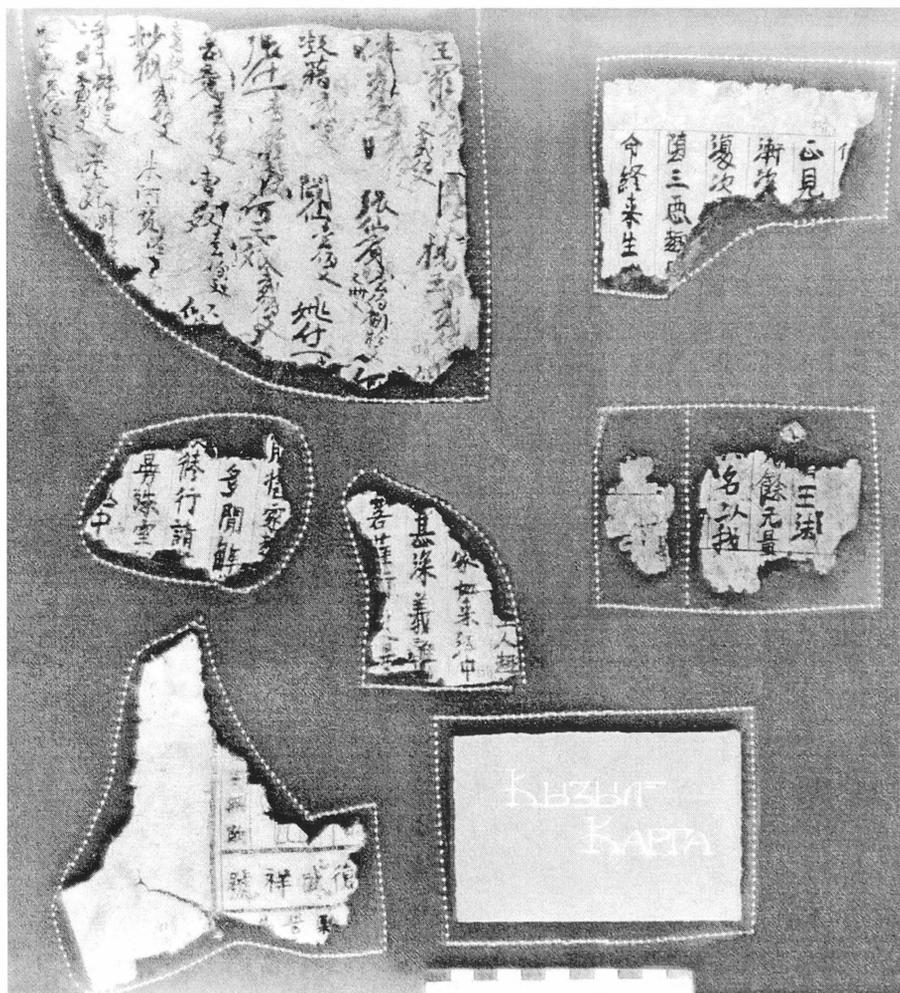


Fig. 6

Inside, we find the folded notebook pages, which enclose the fragments, the following inscription: "insignificant shreds of paper and birch bark". But very little had remained in the notebook pages; most of the contents had fallen to the bottom of the envelope. Collecting this group was difficult because of the loess which had stuck to the birch bark and paper and cemented them together. The task was to separate and clean the fragments. Free-settling dust was brushed and blown off the surface with signs. The cemented sections were usually removed with a scalpel and then cleaned using the scalpel as a scraper. But it was sometimes necessary to accept the loess on those sections where particles of India ink came off even at the touch of a soft brush or with blowing. Many birch-bark fragments were rolled up and broke into pieces when unrolled or straightened. In such cases, a special thin restoration paper with a dry adhesive layer was first applied to the fold (SI B/6, fol. 2). In this fashion, the cohesion of many fragments with a few signs or even lines was preserved.

The paper was also cleaned with a soft brush and air. Only where clay had soaked through the paper and its removal would have destroyed the signs or text were fragments left unrestored (SI B/5, SI B/9). Nine fragments of yellow silk were also found here; they were heavily marred with clay. After separating out birch-bark fragments with signs and elements of signs, a large group remained without signs. This could be a second layer of birch bark or gaps between signs or words and lines. A decision was made to store them in melanex together with the other fragments until they are needed (see *fig. 5*). At present, item SI B/6 consists of 587 birch-bark fragments, 22 paper fragments, and 9 silk fragments.

Berezovsky's note on envelope SI B/7 is as follows: "3 fragments of drawings". Three fragments with drawings on paper had been placed into acetate pulp film which was seriously bent and cracked. Upon removal, the paper was cleaned with a dry brush and straightened. Tear lines on the fragments turned out to be identical; when assembled, they formed part of a single drawing.

The bundle of papers from envelope SI B/8 was gummed together with clay and animal glue; the signs were almost impossible to see. Berezovsky's noted is: "Small fragments of various manuscripts (Brahmi, Chin.)". After cleaning and separation, the paper needed to be reinforced, which was done with the aid of a 1.5% water solution of methyl cellulose. In addition to fragments with Chinese hieroglyphs, the bundle also contained coloured paper without signs. All of this was installed in a single layer of melanex.

Materials of the other fourteen items — SI B/2—4, SI B/9—19 — were, for the most part, stored in acetate pulp film which had undergone serious changes over time. They were all removed from the film, and placed and fixed in melanex (see *fig. 6*).

As a result of this work with the materials from box No. 1 of the Berezovsky collection, the precise total of manuscript fragments was determined. The numbers are impressive: 422 fragments on paper, 650 fragments on birch bark, 11 fragments on silk, and three fragments on palm leaf. All of them were placed on some 34 plates of melanex, affixed, and packed in special paper.

Now it is hoped that the materials from box No. 1 of the Berezovsky collection will be quite safe from damage and become an object of researchers' attention.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Manuscript fragments from the Berezovsky collection in the acetate pulp film.

Fig. 2. Manuscript fragments in the process of cleaning and sorting out.

Fig. 3. Three birch-bark fragments assembled.

Fig. 4. Birch-bark fragments placed into melanex.

Fig. 5. Paper and birch-bark fragments, lacking writing, placed into melanex.

Fig. 6. General view of manuscript fragments placed into melanex.