

FOREWORD

The present publication of the Lotus Sutra in Sanskrit is without exaggeration an outcome of over a hundred years of dedicated work and efforts of generations of collectors, researchers, curators, and restorers. The manuscript of the Lotus Sutra introduced to readers of this publication has been stored at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOM RAS). The manuscript is recognized as one of the “diamonds” of the world’s largest and most valuable Russian collection of Eastern books and manuscripts. The collection of the manuscripts stored at IOM RAS includes over 115,000 items in 65 living and extinct Oriental languages.

IOM RAS was founded as the Asiatic Museum. On November 23 (11), 1818, the president of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg at the time, Sergei Semenovich Uvarov (1786-1855), approached the Board of the Academy with a letter in which he emphasized the “necessity of opening a specialized section for Eastern medals, manuscripts, and books” within the Kunstkamera of the Academy.¹ The request matched the overall goals of scientific research at the time, which was primarily focused on the research of antiquities and monuments of the past.

Christian Martin Frähn (1782-1851), an outstanding numismatist and historian in the field of Oriental studies, became the first director of the Asiatic Museum. According to I. Y. Krachkovskij (1883-1951) and V. V. Barthold (1869-1930), both Russian Oriental scholars and historians, due to Frähn’s tremendous efforts, the Asiatic Museum reached a level of development that other European centers of Oriental studies needed at least 200 years to achieve in the relatively short period of just two decades. One of the justifications for establishing the Asiatic Museum was the purchase of over 700 unique Muslim manuscripts of Arabic graphics made in 1819 and 1825 from Jean-Baptiste-Louis-Jacques Rousseau (1780-1831), the French consul in Aleppo and relative of the great philosopher. The research work on the new collection immediately enhanced the development of the Arabist studies in St. Petersburg. From that point on, all of the Asiatic Museum’s significant purchases had a direct influence on the growth of specialized fields of Oriental studies in Russia. The purchases from the collection of P. L. Schilling von Canstadt (1786-1837) made in 1836 and 1838 by the Asiatic Museum contributed to the expansion of Tibetan, Mongolian and Buddhist studies. The collecting activities of M. I. Brosse (1802-1880) in the middle of the 19th century caused significant breakthroughs in certain research fields such as Georgian and Armenian studies, which then led to the establishment of one of the most recognized centers of Caucasus studies and the Georgian fund.

The Asiatic Museum was considered by the Russian government and the Academy of Sciences to be a major center responsible for coordinating all the sources needed for research and study of Oriental cultures and customs. Already in the middle of the 19th century, the Museum was the only governmental institution for the storage and research of Oriental manuscripts that guaranteed their safety and coordinated their usage for practical and scientific purposes. The manuscripts were accessible not only to researchers and practitioners of Oriental studies in St. Petersburg, but also, according to the regulations at the time, could be delivered for research purposes to the Russian provinces and even abroad. The Asiatic Museum from its very first day of existence served not only a research and storage function, but also as an educational institution by making its collections available to the public. Access without any special arrangement was provided to anyone interested in the rare exhibits of the Museum, and Oriental scholars could use the manuscripts for research purposes.

One of the remarkable stages in the enlargement of the Museum collection was definitely related to the expeditions to Central Asia at the turn of the century around 1900. The materials collected during those expeditions contributed to the emergence of unique research fields such as Dunhuangology, Uyghurology, Tangutology, and Turkic runic epigraphy. The Russian Geographical Society, founded in 1845, became the organizer of the first multidimensional expeditions to the Ussuri region, Mongolia, and China. The explorers N. M. Przhevalsky (1839-1888), M. V. Pevtsov (1843-1902), G. N. Potanin (1835-1920), and V. I. Roborovsky (1856-1910), who took part in the expeditions focused on the discoveries of antiques, initiated archaeological excavations, and purchased ancient manuscripts and other items of everyday life from locals.

Russian diplomats contributed greatly to the foundation of Oriental manuscript funds in their country. In 1844, the Russian government imposed a purchasing duty on the consuls in Asia for manuscripts written in Oriental languages. The government's order was strictly maintained until 1914, the beginning of the First World War. In 1863, an extensive collection was presented to the Asiatic Museum by the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A significant number of handwritten items and books in various languages was donated to the Museum at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries by Russian diplomats who served in the Far East and Central Asia.

Nikolay Fedorovich Petrovsky (1837-1908), diplomat and Orientalist, played a formidable role in the research of the antiquities of Central and Middle Asia. At the beginning of his career he had joined the army, and between years 1859 to 1861, after graduating from the Cadets Corps in Moscow, he served as an instructor in a similar institution known as the Alexander Cadets Corps for orphans. In 1870, N. F. Petrovsky

was assigned as a representative of the Ministry of Finance in the General Governorship of Turkistan and was transferred to Tashkent in order to collect information regarding the general situation of trade and industry.

Already in Tashkent, N. F. Petrovsky began to research the history of the region and was actively engaged in local academic life. He participated in the opening of both the Turkestan Branch of the Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography Lovers Society, a Central Asian scientific association, and the Turkistan Club of Archaeology Lovers. In 1872, he set off for Bukhara, India, and Afganistan. Between October and December 1878, he visited Tiflis, Batum, Poti, and Kars in order to gather information on the Russian trade situation in the Transcaucasian region, Persia, and the territories reconquered from Turkey.² Petrovsky was promoted to the position of the consul in Kashgar on June 1, 1882. In August 1903, he accomplished his service and settled in Tashkent where he died on November 19, 1908.

N. F. Petrovsky not only supported the extension of Russian involvement in Eastern Turkestan but also advanced the field of scientific archaeological research. According to his biographers, Petrovsky “was considered a first-class expert on Eastern Turkestan. The extensive knowledge he gained from his outstanding library of French, German, English, and Turkish languages helped him to broaden access to the studies through various languages published about the region in general and the Central Asian region in particular.”³

The long-term cooperation between Petrovsky and the Oriental Branch of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society (EBRAS) started with his attendance at a meeting organized by the society on March 15, 1890, where he demonstrated a few coins he had brought from Central Asia.⁴ On November 28, 1891, in response to a suggestion made by Sergey Fedorovich Oldenburg (1863-1934), EBRAS approached Petrovsky with a request to provide information on the existence of archaeological sites in Kucha and other areas of Kashgaria. Petrovsky sent a detailed reply together with a manuscript he had purchased two years earlier. The manuscript was the famous “Kashgar Manuscript” featured in the current publication. It was introduced to the scientific society by S. F. Oldenburg in 1892.⁵

Also known as the Kashgar Manuscript, it was the first manuscript that started the Serindian (Central Asian) fund of the Asiatic Museum that at present maintains over 7,000 items in Uyghur, Tocharian, Saka, Sogdian, and other unique languages, and remains one of the most valuable collections worldwide. Between the years 1892 and 1893, Petrovsky forwarded to S. F. Oldenburg over 100 folios and fragments of manuscripts that he purchased from the inhabitants of Kucha, Korla, and Aksu. In 1905

he donated the entire Eastern Turkestan collection of the manuscripts to the Russian Committee for Middle and East Asia Exploration that was founded in 1903. Later, the other Russian consuls in Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang), N. N. Krotkov, A. A. Dyakov, and S. A. Kolokolov, followed Petrovsky and started to send the manuscripts they purchased to the Committee on a regular basis. The research activities conducted by Russian scholars in Central Asia matched the general tendencies of the mainstream school of Oriental studies worldwide as the region appeared to be at the top of research agendas at the time and received most of the attention toward the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. As a result, a few extinct and forgotten languages (Khotanese-Saka and Tocharian A and B) were discovered, and certain new research trends were developed in the field of Oriental studies due to the findings of not only Russian, but also German, British, and Japanese diplomats, explorers, and researchers.

The objectives of the Museum that received a large portion of the manuscripts imported to Russia included taking inventory, cataloguing, researching them, and utilizing them for other scientific purposes. Part of the exclusive texts from Central Asia were published already at the beginning of the first decade of the 20th century due to the combined efforts of V. V. Radloff (1837-1918), K. G. Salemann (1849-1916), S. F. Oldenburg, F. A. Rosenberg (1867-1934), A. I. Ivanov (1878-1937), S. E. Malov (1880-1957), and N. A. Nevsky (1892-1937), among others.

The Museum was reorganized in 1930 and started functioning as the Institute of Oriental Studies (IOS) of the USSR Academy of Sciences. From that point, along with research of the written heritage of the East, the staff members of the new Institute were expected to conduct the research on current issues of Asian history, and to compile new dictionaries and grammar guides of Oriental languages in general, and the languages of the Soviet Asian republics as a priority. In 1950, the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union and the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences decided to transfer the Institute to Moscow. The Department of Oriental Manuscripts remained in Leningrad. In 1956, it was reorganized into the Leningrad Branch of IOS, and in 1991, into the St. Petersburg Branch of the IOS of RAS. In 2007, the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies was reorganized again into the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of RAS.

In the 1950s, Vladimir Svyatoslavovich Vorobyov-Desyatovsky (1927-1956) continued the inventory and the research work on the Serindian fund by compiling a preliminary catalog of the palaeographical description of all the fragments. He initiated the process of describing (based on the collection in St. Petersburg) the various issues in Central Asian philology comprehensively. Unfortunately, he managed to complete only

a few of his projects before his untimely death.⁶

Thereafter, M. I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya continued the work on fragments in Indian languages from the collection of the IOS RAS. In the first place, in the years 1990 and 2004, due to her tenacious efforts and contributions of G. M. Bongard-Levin (1931-2009) and E. N. Tyomkin, the pages of the Petrovsky's Kashgar Manuscript from the St. Petersburg's collection came out in the 2nd and 3rd volumes of the publication "The Monuments of Indian Scripts from Central Asia" («Памятники индийской письменности из Центральной Азии») as a facsimile, transliterated with scientific explanations.⁷

The current publication, put together by leading experts in the field of Central Asian textology for the first time, offers the reader a color facsimile of the Lotus Sutra text in Sanskrit found in Xinjiang at the end of the 19th century. The manuscript from the collection of our Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of RAS was supplemented by fragments from other world collections. With these portions added, this current publication can truly be called the most complete and invaluable research source on the history of Buddhism in the vast regions of Central Asia and the Far East.

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Notes

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3. Nikolay Fedorovich Petrovsky // Historiography of Social Science in Uzbekistan. Biobibliographical Essays. Ed. by B. V. Lunin. Tashkent: Fan Publishers, Uzbek SSR, 1974, p. 278.
4. The Notes of the Oriental Branch of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society. StP, 1891. Vol. V. Pt. I. P. II-III; Bukhert, V. G.And his Russian Portrait. P. 31.
5. Oldenburg, S. F. N. F. Petrovsky's Kashgar Manuscript // Proceedings of the Oriental Branch of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society. V. VII (1892). 1893. P. 81-82.
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