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PERSIAN FOLKLORE MATERIALS IN THE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION OF THE ST. PETERSBURG BRANCH OF THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

In the Manuscript fund of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies Persian folklore is represented by many genres. There are epic stories, long romantic narratives, entertaining stories, legends, lives of saints, anecdotes, proverbs, etc. The way the collection of Persian folk stories was formed in the funds of the Institute (formerly Asiatic Museum) was almost the same as the making of many other Oriental collections in Russia. Among the 152 volumes formerly belonging to J. Rousseau, which in 1819 laid the foundation of the Persian fund, there was already one manuscript anthology of *ḥikāyats* made, judging by its palaeography, by the order of its French owner (manuscript B 260).

In the first three quarters of the 19th century only single records of folklore were coming to the library: in 1845 two manuscripts came from the library of the Scholarly Committee of the Ministry of Finance (the total number of volumes transferred from there to the Asiatic Museum was 13); in 1852 one was received from Kazan after the death of Ch. D. Fraehn; in 1873 one was sent from Tashkent by the order of General K. P. Kaufmann (along with other 17 manuscripts); in 1880 — one manuscript was received from London from a book-seller B. Quaritch. Between 1890 and 1897 the collection was enlarged by 10 items which were coming from Central Asia — from local collectors A. L. Kun, J. J. Lutsch and D. M. Gramenitsky, also due to a special trip to Central Asia undertaken by the keeper of the Asiatic Museum K. G. Salemann (the total number of Persian manuscripts acquired at that time was 175). In the first decade of the 20th century the Museum acquired an interesting specimen sent by N. N. Muravyev from the Transcaucasian region and a copy brought from Kāshghar, from the Russian consul N. F. Petrovsky (the total number — 17 and 29 volumes correspondingly).

Of vital importance for the formation of the *ḥikāyat* collection was the mission of V. A. Ivanov to Central Asia, mainly to Bukhārā. Among more than 600 Persian-Tadzhik manuscripts bought by him in the 1910s there were 12 volumes containing folklore stories. V. Ivanov himself considered that this group of “folk, almost exclusively anonymous, often not quite grammatically correct compositions” were the most interesting among the manuscripts he acquired [1]. In fact, only from this moment we may speak about any collection of Persian folklore in funds, *i. e.*

of the range that makes it possible to realise the characteristic features of the genre, to compare the contents of distinct works and copies with similar works present in other libraries.

During the last few decades the collection was considerably expanded due to acquisitions from private owners, the activities of special archaeographic expeditions and transition of manuscripts from other institutions. At present the fund of the Institute has a compact but representative enough collection of Persian *ḥikāyats*. It includes one large anthology containing 56 stories, three — with 15—18 stories, one — with 10 stories, eight combined manuscripts contain 4—7 stories, eight more — 2—3 stories, and, finally, there are seventeen manuscripts with only one story. There are, as a whole, around 150 works in approximately 200 copies. The rich manuscript collections of Tashkent and Dushanbe are only partly listed in the catalogue, also fragmentary is the information on manuscripts preserved in Iranian collections. The analysis of acquisitions and donations to our collection shows that during the last hundred years there was no deliberate search for manuscripts containing Persian folk stories. The fund was formed at random, mainly due to acquisitions of whole libraries and manuscript collections from “amateur antiquarians”. Some of these collections contained one or two manuscripts of *ḥikāyats*, though often none were present. For example, in the chronological index of acquisitions made by the Asiatic Museum between 1852 and 1873 thirty new items added to the fund are enumerated, and there was not a single collection of *ḥikāyats* among them [2]. Obviously, at that time Russian orientalists were not paying much attention to them. It should be taken into account that for a long time the significance of the Persian folklore, especially of *ḥikāyats*, was not recognised by most both European and Iranian scholars — the last ones began to work on this subject only from the middle of the 20th century. According to the current theories, masterpieces of “fine” literature were descending to common people in adapted versions and circulated among them in oral form. Of all folklore genres preference was given to voluminous heroic epic stories and “novels”, the main task being the identification of the author and of the region whence from the plot had originated. There was a strict distinction between literary fiction and oral folk narratives,