
EDITORIAL BOARD

LIVES DEVOTED TO LEARNING

The editorial board of *Manuscripta Orientalia*, a journal created with the single aim of aiding the research and study of the Eastern manuscript tradition, dedicates this issue to two outstanding Russian orientalists — Prof. A. B. Khalidov and Prof. O. F. Akimushkin. Both of them are members of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. Both turn 70 years of age in 1999. Prof. Khalidov was born in Tataria, not far from Kazan, while Prof. Akimushkin — in Penza, both sites in the basin of the River Volga, the ancient water way to the countries of the East. From an early age, they took interest in the history of the Muslim East and its rich culture. The future scholars' paths crossed when they entered the Oriental faculty of Leningrad (St. Petersburg) University. But A. Khalidov's choice was Arabic studies, while O. Akimushkin's interest lay in the field of Iranian studies.

In the late 1940s, despite numerous ideological prohibitions and strict state control, the Oriental faculty remained to be a sort of island of culture deeply rooted in old, pre-Revolutionary Russia, which had flourished at the turn of the century. The representatives of this old Russian culture were I. Krachkovsky (1883—1951), who was among those university professors who viewed October revolution of 1917 as an event hostile to culture as a whole; I. Orbeli (1887—1961), N. D. Miklukho-Maklay (1915—1975), A. N. Kononov (1906—1986), A. N. Boldyrev (1909—1993), and others. All of them were born in pre-Revolutionary Russia and enjoyed the fruits of an excellent classical education. Besides, they all chose as their field the most elite discipline of their time — Oriental studies. They worked in 1930s and 1940s, when the communist authorities enforced a harshly repressive political system, and many outstanding scholars were labelled spies, "enemies of the people" or accused of cosmopolitanism. But luckily enough, Orientalistics was a special field of scholarly research even in these circumstances. Though Oriental studies were compelled to abide by the postulates of Marxism, scholarly discussion here was conducted with a greater freedom in comparison with adjoining disciplines of the humanities. Orientalists worked with rare and difficult for study languages. Luckily to those engaged in Oriental studies, their branch of science required extremely vast range of professional knowledge in keeping with world standards; they frequently studied the history, language, and culture of vanished peoples or civili-

sations. This was a saving grace, for even within the framework of a dominant communist ideology it permitted them to find their "asylum island" of ancient cultures, where they could somehow defend themselves against vulgar clichés and stereotypes imposed on their studies. It was also their fortune that they had to employ abundantly Western scholarly literature in their work, as well as to keep up with the results of the work of their colleagues in the West. This was the great advantage which permitted to smooth partly away a negative influence of obscurantism characteristic of many other branches of Soviet science in that period.

Also, both A. Khalidov and O. Akimushkin turned to have been lucky in their respective choices of Arabic and Iranian studies — they studied with great personalities who were not only significant figures in Oriental studies but in full sense men of the European cultural tradition. To the credit of the young scholars, they took the greatest possible advantage of these circumstances. Another important factor was that they did not succumb to the general temptation of political convenience. Unlike many of their contemporaries, they did not undertake the study of national-liberation movements in Eastern countries, despite the impetus of turbulent political events in the late 1940s and early 1950s and other circumstances of importance.

It was at this time that Leningrad (St. Petersburg) lost its status as the national centre of Oriental studies. By government decree, in 1951, the Institute of Oriental Studies was transferred to Moscow, where its primary focus became the study of the modern East. It seemed that irreparable damage had been done to classical Oriental studies in the country. A number of scholars moved from Leningrad to Moscow to work in the newly created institution. Only a small group of researchers remained then in Leningrad to take care of the enormous collection of Eastern manuscripts, which was not, thankfully, dispatched to Moscow. This group constituted the staff of the Department (Museum) of Eastern manuscripts, which was formally part of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. It was, in fact, this wonderfully rich collection of manuscripts, gathered in St. Petersburg over the course of over two centuries, which saved classical Oriental studies in the Soviet Union.

A. Khalidov entered the Group of Arabists at the Department of Eastern manuscripts in 1955, one year later than O. Akimushkin, who became a member of the De-