
EDITORIAL BOARD

Dear readers,

It is historically conditioned that MAE RAS, the heir of the first Russian state museum — Peter the Great's famous *Kunstkamera* — possesses one of the wealthiest collection of Central Asian textiles connected with the history of political and diplomatic relations between Central Asia and Russia. Considering its size and importance, it is one of the most significant collections not only in Russia, but in the entire world. The collection includes textile samples, festive and everyday clothes and jewellery. The most important part of the collection comprises ceremonial gifts to Russian tsars from Bukhāra emīrs and Khīwa khāns. The famous collection of velvet and silk ikats alone numbers over 500 samples. These collections provide priceless material for a comparative study of Central Asia traditional costumes, and they are now open for research from all countries.

Great Tīmūr was passionate about new architectural monuments, beautiful manuscripts and luxurious fabrics whose ancient narrative designs Islam transformed into an ornament, which kept the recognisable form of old images and colour. By his orders the best craftsmen and architects were brought to Mā warā' al-Nahr from all corners of the lands he conquered. The patterns of the walls and portals of new buildings, of the luxurious carpets and of the manuscripts decorated with exquisite miniatures are so similar to the ornaments of the abr silks of Central Asia (see plate on front cover).

Often entire cities of the East specialised in making fabrics of certain sorts and colours. Velvet, silk, semi-silk cloths, finest flax and cotton textiles had whimsical patterns on them with plots dating back to remote ages. Fabrics are able to tell of great migrations of peoples, nations' contacts, philosophy, traditions and aesthetic ideals. They contain signs and symbols of millennial wisdom. Specialists of our Museum can tell the visitors wonderful stories about the “talking textiles”; the ornamentation, composition and colour spectrum of these cloths have preserved the depth of old wisdom and ardour of feelings to our times, an energy of beauty and refinement of cultural tradition which is, regretfully, almost incomprehensible for a European or American. It is especially important today when we face deliberate attempts to level the national diversity of our civilisation, replacing it with a common pseudo-cultural surrogate.

Our museum also possesses a valuable collection of historical photos and ethnographic pictures associated with Central Asia and its cultural history. We also obtain extensive collections of artefacts that can tell marvelous stories to an inquisitive researcher. The best items from our collections are shown at the exhibition “Oriental Dreams (Russian Avant-Guard and Silks of Bukhara)”, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (*Kunstkamera*) RAS (Saint-Petersburg, May 31—August 31, 2006).

In the current issue of our journal we are glad to continue publication of the material connected both with the subject of the exhibition and *Manuscripta* traditional sphere of interest.

The exhibition was organized by the *Kunstkamera* Museum in cooperation with our Uzbek colleagues and with the support of the Russian Asiatic Society. Starting with the current issue the Russian Asiatic Society, organization uniting scholars, journalists, politicians and businessmen eager to work on the consistent and progressive development of cultural, political and economic relations between Russia and the East, is taking active part in the preparation, publication and distribution of our journal. I am sure that our joint work will make *Manuscripta* more interesting and accessible not only in the central European and American libraries, but also in the scholarly centres situated in Central Asia, Near and Middle East.

Efim Rezvan,
Editor-in-Chief