
PRESENTING THE COLLECTION

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THE JAPANESE BOOK AND OTHER ARTICLES FROM GRAND-DUCAL PALACES, KEPT IN THE MAE RAS

Among exhibits kept in the collection No. 6132 given to the MAE in 1951 from the library of the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences in the city of Leningrad [1] there is a lithographic publication in the Japanese language (coll. No. 6132–8) (*plates 1–2, fig. 1*). Unfolding accordion book titled *Dainihon bussan zue* (“Illustrated Catalogue of Products Published in the Great Japan”) dated 1877, contains a series of works of a famous Japanese woodblock artist Utagava Hirose III (1842 or 1843 — March 28, 1894) [2] and certainly is of special interest. This publication aroused our interest as a part of a group of interesting collections, the history of which we will attempt to share. The archives of the State

Hermitage Museum contain documents [3], according to which Ethnographic department of the Academy of Sciences was given several illustrated Japanese books from the palace of Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna. The analysis of the inventories of the MAE indicated that no collection admitted to the MAE from the museum fund had these books. One of those books was found only on account of the following label “Инв.Худ.Ком. No. 290” (*fig. 2*). In all likelihood the articles from the museum fund received by the Academy of Sciences were then handed to the assets of the museum for safekeeping, and the books were admitted to the library from which they came to the museum only in 1951.

The Revolution of 1917 and the change in governmental authorities put the matter of life and ownership of vast numbers of art pieces, antiquity and various other “exotic rarities”, kept in numerous private collections in Petrograd and its suburbs. The solving of those issues was charged to an organization, which repeatedly changed its name, but in what follows we will refer to it as art committee or museum fund.

As far back as June of 1917 the Arts and History Committee was formed under the Winter palace; in August of 1918 it was renamed into the Art Committee for the Protection of Monuments of Art and Antiquity of Narkompros (the People's Commissariat for Education) of RSFSR; in November of 1918 it was yet again given a new name — the Department of Protection, Assessment and Registration of Monuments of Art and Antiquity; and since November of 1921 — it is called the State Museum Fund of Petrograd (later Leningrad) Department of Glavnauka (the Chief Administration for Science and Scholarship) of Narkompross of RSFSR [4]. The organization existed until 1929 and its main task was chiefly to expropriate artworks and antiques from private palaces, mansions and apartments of Petrograd and subsequently to redistribute those articles to

museums, newly established Soviet administrative settings, local history museums and even village halls. The 20s of the 20th century alone saw the admission of 15 collections from the museum fund; they had to do with the department of East and South-East Asia (their exhibits will be partially examined in the given essay), and there also are articles that are kept in the MAE that have to do with the departments of India and Central Asia, which will not be examined in the given work.

Our attention to the activity of the museum fund was attracted first by one “Mongolian” collection, admitted to the MAE in 1920, and particularly one article — a bronze image of Amitāyus, which can be attributed to the Sino-Tibetan art and dated to the rule of Xuande (1426—1435) [5]. The aim of subsequent research was to identify the name of its collector. Taking into account that the exhibit was admitted to our museum in 1920 at the height of the Civil War and evidently was expropriated from a private collection, it seemed impossible to sort things out and identify the person of the pre-revolutionary owner. However, some things were ascertained.

Central State Archive of Literature and Art of St. Petersburg (hereinafter referred to as CSALA) and