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# PRESENTING THE COLLECTIONS

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## RARE MANCHU MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE ST. PETERSBURG BRANCH OF THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES, RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES\*

### To the history of the collection

The Manchu collection of the Institute of Oriental studies, St. Petersburg, is the largest outside China. The printed catalogues of this collection number up to 600 entries of manuscripts and block prints [1]. The first Manchu documents were brought to St. Petersburg in the beginning of the 18th century, but the actual study of Manchu was started much earlier with the establishment of commercial, and later, diplomatic relations between Russia and the Qing dynasty China in the middle of the 17th century. At that time all official Qing documents were written in Chinese, Mongolian and Manchu, and Manchu was used during diplomatic negotiations.

The members of the Russian Ecclesiastic mission in Peking were the first to collect and bring to Russia the Manchu manuscripts and block prints. They were the pioneers of Manchu studies to compile the first Manchu-Russian dictionaries, grammars and readers, as well as to make a linguistic and literary research [2]. Many of these materials remained unpublished and are kept in the Archives of Orientalists.

Different Manchu grammars, dictionaries, historical and philosophical texts both in manuscripts and block prints were brought to St. Petersburg Asiatic Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and later to the Asiatic Museum of the Imperial Academy of Sciences. Many of them are well represented in the world libraries owing to the collections of sinologists and Jesuits from different countries. Nevertheless, the Manuscript Department and the Archives of Orientalists contain a unique Manchu material. This fact allows to put the Institute collection on the first place among the other depositories both in number and repertoire of the Manchu manuscripts. Many of them were acquired from the outstanding man-churists N. N. Krotkov and A. V. Grebenshchikov, who worked on the Institute collection at the beginning of this century. The Institute archives could be very handy to reconstruct their scientific activity.

Nikolai Nikolaevich Krotkov (1869—1919) graduated the Manchu-Chinese department of the Oriental faculty, St. Petersburg University. In 1894 he started his diplomatic career at the Russian consulate in Kuldzha as the head of the consulate school of translators and interpreters. Later he was a secretary at Russian consulates in Jilin, Qiqihar and Kuldzha, and then a Russian consul in Urumci, which he left for Russia in 1912 [3]. In spite of his diplomatic activity, N. N. Krotkov continued his studies of the Orient. Thanks to him the St. Petersburg Asiatic Museum got one of the largest collection of Central-Asiatic documents like Uighur, Indian, Mongolian and Manchu manuscripts and block prints. He sent the first manuscripts in 1898 [4], his Turfan and Central-Asian materials are mentioned in the letters of S. Th. Oldenburg and V. V. Radlov [5]. In 1910 N. N. Krotkov became a correspondent of the Anthropological and Ethnographic Museum and was given an honorary title of a correspondent member of the Russian committee for the studies of Middle and East Asia [6]. Of his personal interest were Manchu studies. Therefore he had collected a lot of precious Manchu texts which were later added to the Institute collection [7]. On his return to Petrograd in 1918 N. N. Krotkov compiled a catalogue of Manchu books kept in the Asiatic Museum listing 323 entries of manuscripts and block prints [8]. This list of Manchu books did not include the manuscripts from his private collection. They were listed later by M. P. Volkova and K. S. Iakhontov [9]. The Manchu texts of N. N. Krotkov are a unique registration of the spoken Sibe dialect of Manchu as he heard it at the merge of the centuries. They mostly include epic songs and shamanic texts. To collect them he asked for the help of his Sibe friends in Kuldzha, Suiding, Huiyuancheng and Chuguchak. Some of their names could be reconstructed from the letters in his personal file in the Archives of Orientalists.

The other private collection of Manchu materials belonged to the famous Russian manchurist A. V. Gre-

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