
PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

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AN ALBUM OF ILLUSTRATIONS TO THE FAMOUS CHINESE NOVELS

Among the Chinese manuscripts of the so-called "Nova collection", preserved in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, there is an Album (call number H-13) containing sixty miniatures. The first forty-five of them depict the characters of the famous Chinese novel "Three Kingdoms" (三國演義) by Lo Guan-zhong (14th century A.D.). The last fifteen are illustrations to another famous novel — "A Dream in the Red Chamber" (紅樓夢) by Cao Xue-qin (1713—1764).

The Album represents a typical book produced in China. It contains sixty sheets of thick, dense, white paper, measuring 22.0 × 31.5 cm. The same type of paper is used for the front and back covers. The front and back covers are of patterned silk glued on paper. The sheets are folded in two and sewn so that the folds of the sheets face the outside, while the edges of the sheets are hidden in the back of the Album.

The Album bears no common title. There are the following records on the front cover:

- 1) *кит.* — an abbreviation written in black ink at the top right corner (a remainder of a former call number);
- 2) *Инд. 365* — the 1937 call number, written in violet ink by K. K. Flug.
- 3) *Инд. 1953, No. 339* — call number written in violet ink by M. P. Volkova.

There is also a stamp with the legend *Институт Вост. АН СССР* ("The Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences").

The current call number of the Album (H-13) is placed on the back of the binding.

At the bottom of the front cover it is possible to see the traces of a lost label measuring 11.0 × 7.5 cm. This size corresponds to that of the labels (*ex-libris*) which were used in the manuscript depository of the Asiatic Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry. It allows us to assume that the Album was transferred to the Asiatic Museum (and after that to the manuscript fund of the present St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies where it is preserved now) from the Asiatic Department in 1864, together with some other manuscripts, after the Department had been closed. If so, the first record mentioned above may be a remainder of the call number given to the Album in the library of the Asiatic Department. Unfortunately, both the full inventory of the books transferred from the Asiatic

Department and the 1937 inventory, made by K. K. Flug in the Asiatic Museum, are lost. The card catalogue of the "Nova collection", made by K. K. Flug, is luckily extant, but it contains only scanty information on the manuscripts.

The recto of the Album sheets comprise water-colours measuring 15.2 × 19.5 cm. The employment of pale, transparent paints is their general feature. The following paints are used: light blue, grey, yellowish, light green, apple-green, light brown, beige, pink, and purple. The contours of drawings are outlined in dark grey, almost black paint. Some details, such as the eyes, headgears, haircuts, grips of weaponry, the toes of footwear, etc. are painted in bright blue, red, green, brown, and black.

Water-colours illustrating each of the novels display distinctive features. Illustrations to the novel "A Dream in the Red Chamber" are distinguished by details of interiors and landscapes which are depicted more thoroughly. For example, the bamboo leaves and leaves of other plants are especially notable in this respect. This attention to detail is lacking in the illustrations to the novel "Three Kingdoms", where interiors and landscapes are only scarcely elaborated. The "Three Kingdoms" illustrations focus on garments and some other objects which are depicted in a clear-cut dark grey line. They contrast with other details of water-colours. As for the illustrations to "A Dream in the Red Chamber", they lack such contrasts and look more gentle and refined. Colour contrasts in the "Three Kingdoms" water-colours are much sharper.

The illustrations to the "Three Kingdoms" are provided with inscriptions on the upper margins, made by brush in a standard *kay* script. They are extensive and provide characteristics of heroes. The inscriptions betray the firm skilful hand of the scribe. At times Chinese characters are not written in traditional fashion (for example, 曹 instead of 曹; 諡 instead of 諡; 獻 instead of 獻 etc.).

One can see the same type of inscriptions in the illustrations to "A Dream in the Red Chamber", but they are executed in a smaller script which seems to be more elegant (possibly, the scribe was a woman). The inscriptions give only the names of the novel's characters and their Manchu equivalents. These inscriptions take up only a part of the upper margins' space. They are framed, while the inscriptions to the "Three Kingdoms" have no frame.

The above mentioned peculiarities allow us to conclude that there were two different painters, who had their individual vision of how to illustrate the genre scenes of the