
PRESENTING THE COLLECTIONS

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ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS OF KARL FABERGÉ. I: THE QUR'ĀN

Any specialist who works closely with a collection as rich as the collection of Eastern manuscripts at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies faces a constant danger. Virtually every visit to the manuscript repository produces a find. One fetches a manuscript from the shelf, opens an unprepossessing folder or box, and it begins: when one pauses to recall the reason for the visit, several hours have passed and the thrill of the hunt carries one farther and farther. Leaping from one theme to another, drawn on by astonishing material, the researcher runs the risk of never writing anything significant.

The author of this paper has confronted this on numerous occasions. While preparing a book on the Qur'ān, for many years I set aside the finds which naturally accompany all work with manuscripts. Still awaiting its time is a letter from the Muscat Sultan to Admiral Bazoche, governor of the Ile de Bourbon and hero of one of Balzac's novel. I found it in a small metal box while going through documents that made their way into the above-mentioned repository from the collection of the famous Russian collector N. P. Likhachev. My desk also holds photocopies of two small fragments of an Arabic manuscript, presumably a work on *fiqh* copied no later than the eleventh century. They were found in 1915 among the Chinese manuscripts gathered by S. F. Oldenburg's expedition to Dunhuang (today in the Gansu province, Northwest Chinese Peoples Republic) on the ancient Silk Road. And there remains the mystery of a gilt noble herald painstakingly drawn on a blank page in a Qur'ānic manuscript and later just as painstakingly pasted over (our restorers worked for several days in order to discover it). I also recall the enigma that surrounds the history of an old Italian-Arabic dictionary [1], of the manuscript with a rich collection of tracings of figures from Persian and Turkish engravings (around 300) bound in old leather, with headings and captions in Italian.

While preparing a database on Qur'ānic manuscripts from the collection at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, I couldn't help noticing a lovely small-format manuscript obviously copied in Persia. I read the catalogue description with surprise: "From the Fabergé collection". Soon the manuscript was thoroughly described, but the question remained: why had Eastern manuscripts interested "the Jeweller of his Emperor's Majesty and the Jeweller of the Emperor's Hermitage"? I spoke with my

senior colleagues, primarily the head curator of the collection of manuscripts and documents at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Prof. Margarita Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, and Prof. Oleg Akimushkin. The latter has conducted a long-term study of the history of the collection's formation and written a special article on the topic [2]. He generously provided me indispensable help in writing this paper. I very carefully studied the existing catalogues, spent time in the archive. It soon emerged that the miniature Qur'ān was not the only Eastern manuscript to enter the collection thanks to K. Fabergé. The extensive inventory of 1920 reported the transfer of 10 manuscripts and 27 folios with miniatures.

Nine of the ten manuscripts were identified with comparative ease, while one of the two tiny Qur'āns and the folios with miniatures remained a mystery. I recall clearly the sunny spring day when Prof. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya showed me a folder with beautiful Indian miniatures and calligraphy samples kept in the artistic collection. We counted the folios and determined that they numbered 37 according to the pagination (38, in fact, as in one case a bifolio was paginated as a single folio). Only a careful comparison of all extant information showed that these were the same folios mentioned in the inventory. Our collection simply does not contain any other miniatures that could belong to this collection. I then realised that I must one day write about the Eastern manuscripts of the Tsar's jeweller. Some time passed, and the problematic second manuscript of the Qur'ān was also explained. According to the 1920 inventory, it should also have been a miniature. The selection was not large, and when I peeled back a pasted-on call number of the Asiatic Museum on one of the manuscripts, I discovered a note made by a bibliographer in 1920. The note had escaped the notice of those who drew up the catalogue of Arabic manuscripts, and the copy had remained unidentified. Nearly a year passed. The book on the Qur'ān went to print, and with great pleasure I undertook my new project.

The present article is the first in a series that describes the Eastern manuscripts of Karl Fabergé from the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies collection.

The famed Fabergé firm was founded by a native of Livland (territory of present north Latvia and south Estonia), the French Protestant jeweller Gustav-Peter, who in 1842 opened a store in St. Petersburg. He was succeeded