
PRESENTING THE COLLECTIONS

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ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS OF KARL FABERGÉ. II: RĀGAMĀLĀ MINIATURES OF THE ALBUM (*MURAQQA'*) (PART ONE)

In a previous article in this series [1] I described in short manuscript X 3, undoubtedly the gem of Fabergé's collection of Eastern manuscripts. This is a so-called *muraqqa'* (Album), and its 38 folios (sg. *lawḥ*) present a series of miniatures and calligraphy samples that originated in various regions of the Middle East and India; some of the miniatures betray obvious Ethiopian influence. In general, the Album reflects the astonishing cultural symbiosis typical of India in the era of the Great Moghūls. The *muraqqa'* folios bear traces of the cultures, religions and traditions of the Greater Indo-Turko-Iranian world, the Middle East, and Central Asia, as well as China and Eastern Africa [2]. The album's large scale (39.7×23.0 cm) folios present portraits of prominent political figures and aristocrats, spiritual mentors and ordinary people. It also presents scenes from private life and illustrations to well-known literary works. Many of the Album folios show beautiful, elegantly dressed, delicately depicted female figures in various settings; it is clear why several of them were chosen by the curators of the Tokyo Fuji Museum of Art for an exhibition entitled *Muses, Madonnas and Maidens. 500 years of the Female Image in East and West* (Tokyo, Fukuoka, Kobe, 01.11.2001 — 03.03.2002).

A significant part of the miniatures are linked with special poetry collections — *rāgamālā* — that de-

scribe various musical tones in personified form. That is why we decided to devote our second article to the *rāgamālā* miniatures of *muraqqa'*, which the Tsar's jeweller Karl Fabergé bought for his private collection around century ago.

Before I begin I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Roselyne Hurel (Musée Carnavalet, Paris) and Oleg Akimushkin (St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences), whose friendly support during my study of *muraqqa'* and the preparation of the article was both decisive and encouraging. After the death of Tatiana Grek (1920—1985), Keeper of the Indian Collections of the State Hermitage, no specialist on Indian miniatures remained in St. Petersburg. Unfortunately, we must also state a lack of necessary literature in St. Petersburg libraries. I am sincerely grateful to my colleagues, primarily Rachel Milstein (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and Lesley Wilkins (Harvard Law School Library, USA) for providing information without which this work could not have been completed [3]. I hope that as a relative newcomer to the field I shall be forgiven any errors caused by my enthusiasm and lack of access to special literature.

I

The artistic phenomenon known as *rāgamālā* (Skt., “garland of melodies”; there is also another term — *rāgāsāgar* — “ocean of melodies”) is a unique but little known concept of illustrating musical modes in pictorial form; it was introduced by Indian writers and artists [4]. Literally *rāgamālā* means a garland of musical modes divided up into *rāgas* and *rāginīs* (“wives” of *rāgas*), sometimes *rāgaputras* (“sons” of *rāgas*), and *rāgaputrīs* (“daughters” of *rāgas*). The system is divided into fixed “families”, each headed by a *rāga*, and structured in a fixed sequence. Each line or verse of the composition is sung in different mode, so that the entire piece appears like a string of melodies on a particular common theme. In some cases different rhythms are used for different lines or verses. The essence of the concept of *rāga* [5] was the recognition that certain combinations of notes were endowed with particular

sentiments, *rāsa* (Skt.). The prevalent melodies were depicted in vivid verbal imagery by Indian musicologists of the late medieval period and were associated with a season, a mood, a time, and even with colours, parts of the human body and with animals [6]. All this provided the source of the *rāgamālā* illustrations. The characters in the paintings, also called *rāgas* (princes) and *rāginīs* (ladies), personify the spirits of the various melodies. As mentioned above, each *rāga* or *rāginī* is associated with a certain mood created by a combination of the *rāga*'s inner unity, the season, time of day (or night), and each has its accompanying verse of poetry about lovers in a state of separation or union. It was widely believed that to play or sing a *rāga* at the wrong time could course various misfortunes and failures.

A standard *rāgamālā* series comprises 36 paintings (6 *rāgas* with 5 *rāginīs* each) [7]. The uniqueness of *rāgamālā*