
M. E. Rezvan

QUR'ĀNIC FRAGMENTS FROM THE A. A. POLOVTSOV COLLECTION AT THE ST. PETERSBURG BRANCH OF THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

“It has always seemed to me
that the publication of texts
and documents forms the basis
for the study of history...”

A. A. Polovtsov [1]

The present work aims to describe Qur'ānic fragments from the A. A. Polovtsov collection at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental studies. They are held in the so-called Artistic Collection under call number X 158. This call number brings together several folders with disparate fragments of Arab and Persian manuscripts sorted by format, samples of calligraphy etc.; they were acquired by the Asiatic Museum in 1919 from the collection of A. A. Polovtsov. These fragments have never received detailed study, although they are of indisputable scholarly interest.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Polovtsov [2] (see *fig. 1*) was born on May 31, 1832. After finishing the Legal College in 1851 he began service in the Senate. His position and subsequent career were greatly influenced by his marriage in 1861 to Nadezhda Mikhailovna Iiuneva, the ward of court banker Baron A. L. Stiglitz. He received a dowry of a million rubles and after Baron Stiglitz' death inherited a fortune of 16—17 million rubles. At the beginning of 1883, Polovtsov was appointed State Secretary, receiving at the same time the title of His Majesty secretary of state. He spent nearly ten years at this post. He was also a member of the Finance Committee and sat on various important state commissions. His posts and membership in the State Senate made A. A. Polovtsov one of the most influential figures in the Empire.

Polovtsov was a versatile person whose position in the state hierarchy allowed him, for example, to instigate in 1866 the creation of a Russian Historical Society and involve the Emperor in its activities. Between 1866 and 1909, when the Society was in fact headed by Polovtsov, 128 volumes of “Collections of the Russian Historical Society” with various documents on Russian history were published. A great deal of work was done to publish diplomatic documents on Russian history from London, Vienna, Paris, and other foreign archives. A. A. Polovtsov's great accomplishment was the publication of an encyclopaedia of outstanding Russians, the “Russian Biographical Dictionary”, which he undertook with his own

funds. In addition to statesmanship, scholarship, and organisational work, Polovtsov was implicated in industry and finance, although his efforts in this sphere appear to have been less successful.

Polovtsov spent vast sums to support the School of Technical Drawing founded by Baron Stiglitz, as well as to acquire various collections for the School's Museum. As chairman of the School's Central Council, Polovtsov was deeply involved not only in the financial, but also the scholarly and organisational aspects of the School's operations. In the later years of his life, the Stiglitz Museum collection became one of the richest in Europe, especially in the area of decorative-applied art. The collection was regularly augmented, and purchases were made both in Russia (sometimes entire collections at a time) and abroad (mainly in France).

A. A. Polovtsov died at his estate, not far from the city of Luga on 24 September 1909. The volumes of the “Collections of the Russian Historical Society” can be regarded as his true legacy; they have retained their significance up through the present, as has the collection of the Stiglitz Museum. Polovtsov's name can without doubt join the list of such famed Russian sponsors of the arts and collectors as S. M. Tretyakov, S. T. Morozov, and N. P. Likhachev.

After the October Revolution, a decision was taken to disperse the collection of the Stiglitz Museum (the bulk of it went to the Hermitage). It was at that time (1919) that 31 Eastern manuscripts and numerous manuscript fragments were transferred to the Asiatic Museum. There they became part of one of the world's largest collection of Eastern manuscripts and documents, to which Polovtsov had added two Arabic manuscripts in 1895: a fifteenth-century Qur'ān (today call number D 31) and an apocryphal poem attributed either to Abū Bakr or 'Alī (today call number C 1861). The first retains an *exlibris* from Polovtsov's library (*fig. 2*). 13 Arabic manuscripts, including 4 Qur'āns, were given to the Asiatic Museum by Polovtsov together with the well-known