
EDITORIAL BOARD

Dear Reader,

You hold in your hands an anniversary issue of our journal — we are now ten years old. Our country experienced a turbulent decade, and we did as well. A journal such as ours — a fully independent scholarly publication — could only have appeared in the new Russia. The journal was created by people who learned how to earn money under new social and economic conditions, yet still felt a responsibility to scholarship and to the people who perform scholarly research. The humanities in the Soviet Union were, to a large extent, “a world of their own”. We emerged from that experience with the realization that the scholarly world should know no borders, and with the dream of creating just such a world. We, the researchers and orientalists who helped to create this journal, are grateful to the people who made it possible for our dream to come true. They are, first of all, the “two Borises” — Correspondent Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Boris Gidaspov and Prof. Boris Ionin. It was they who, together with Prof. Yuri Petrosyan, laid the cornerstone for the journal.

At that time, ten years ago, we began printing and distributing the journal in nearby Finland because we lacked the necessary conditions to publish it at home. I remember very well our amazement and joy when Prof. Ionin showed us the first issue of *Manuscripta*, which still smelled of fresh ink from the printer. We could hardly believe that we would have such a beautiful journal. In the early stages of its development, the journal needed a professional publisher familiar with the rules and laws of the international journal market. Mr. Kalevi Yaskilainen was just such a publisher, and he was a key figure in helping the journal to find readers in 30 countries.

The death of our Finnish publisher marked a turning point in the history of the journal. We had to do all the work for publication in Russia. Fortunately, the experience we had obtained in Finland proved sufficient. We did our best to ensure that foreign readers would not notice any changes. This was not an easy task. Circumstances in Russia were another obstacle — financial crises, an imperfect banking system, the default of 1998... The work was hard, but at the same time gratifying. Each issue brought joy, new friends, and greater confidence.

When we conceived the idea for an “international journal”, we saw it primarily as an opportunity to tell our non-Russian-speaking colleagues about the scholarly activities of St. Petersburg’s scholars of the East, as well as the riches of our manuscript and museum collections. Initially, the journal’s main authors were scholars who worked at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute for Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. At that time the journal played an important role in popularizing its collections and the works of its researchers. Projects that were initiated by the journal helped the Branch to survive its most difficult years. We soon established strong ties with scholarly centers in the former USSR. The scholars and caretakers of museum and library collections from many countries became our frequent contributors. Time passed and the journal became truly international.

We began to collaborate more with our colleagues from other oriental studies centres, museums and libraries. This, first of all, means our good old friends from the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera, the State Hermitage, the M. E. Saltykov-Schedrin Russian National Library, and the Oriental Faculty of St. Petersburg State University. We enhanced our ties with orientalists from Moscow, Makhachkala, Tashkent, Kazan, and Ufa. We continue to publish a Russian scholarly journal in the English language, although today the profile of *Manuscripta* is becoming more and more European. And here we can see parallels with the historical fate of Russia.

We have learned a great deal in the course of producing our journal. The Eastern manuscript that finds its way to the desk of the European scholar was removed many decades or centuries ago from the complex context that defined its existence. Created to meet the needs of people who lived in a specific place at a specific time, the manuscript contained important knowledge. It pleased the eye with its construction and the beauty of its calligraphy. It could act as a talisman. It provided descendants with information about their forbears. It preserved the remarks of earlier owners and readers... Although many elements of this context are often lost forever with the passage of time, the attentive researcher has tools that allow him to restore at least some of them. In doing so, one can grasp the true significance of a manuscript copy, which usually goes beyond the common identification of a manuscript with its text. Moreover, many of the elements mentioned here together form a certain code that must be deciphered to grasp the true meaning of a manuscript.

On the other hand, the significance of, for example, a talisman, an item of armour or a piece of jewellery with a Qur’anic inscription can be comprehended only in the context of the tradition that produced them. The texts that form the backbone of that tradition have been preserved for us primarily in manuscripts. This is why we must study collections in their totality, examining not only manuscripts, but also objects and artefacts from the world of the Orient. Moreover, one must have a sense of the collector’s personality in order to appreciate the fruits of his labours.

We are proud of our journal and we believe in it. Today I would like to thank once again the people who made the journal possible — its creators, editors (especially Dr. Irina Petrosyan, its deputy editor-in-chief for many years, who retired from the journal recently), translators and designers. Our greatest debt, however, is to the journal’s faithful writers and readers. Because it is they who will decide whether our journal will enter its third decade. In this lies our freedom, and our responsibility.

On behalf of the people who work to create this journal, I want to extend our heartfelt thanks to you, our readers and subscribers. Without your interest, our communication with you, and, at times, without your patience, our journal would long ago have ceased to exist. Thank you all!

Efim Rezvan
Editor-in Chief