October 31 of 2010 became the day when Oleg Fëdorovich Akimushkin passed away...

Along with this man a part of an epoch passed away too — the epoch of development of Iranian studies in the Leningrad department / St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (today known as the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts) in the post-war years. Oleg Fëdorovich stepped onto the premises of this institute at the end of 1953 and lived all of his life of a scholar within these walls. This life of his was rich and diverse; in it science organically combined with discharging of administrative obligations. For over 30 years Oleg Fëdorovich was the head of the Middle East Department of St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, having formed a solid viable creative team. And Oleg Fëdorovich was a prominent scholar, too. The circle of his scientific interests was quite broad: the history of Sufism and the history of Iran and Central Asia, oriental textual criticism and the history of manuscript booklore in Iran and Central Asia. In all of the aforementioned fields Oleg Fëdorovich oriented himself with ease and no constrains, founding his excellent knowledge on accurate study of original sources. However, the research talent of Oleg Fëdorovich in all his brilliance was manifested in the field of the history of Persian manuscript booklore and codicology. In this realm he was a high-quality expert and all researchers who embark on this course, whether in Russia or abroad, take into consideration his opinion.

As a researcher, Oleg Fëdorovich Akimushkin authored about 250 scientific works (including those written in English, French and Persian languages), including 19 monographs, either individual or co-authored with others. Among these monographs the publication of the critical text with commentaries of a part of the “Chronicles” of Shâh-Mamhûd b. mîrzâ Fâzîl Churâs (The Written Monuments of the Orient series XLV (Moscow, 1976)), which presents great interest in informational respects, needs to be noted in the first place. This work was written within the frameworks of preparation for Ph. D. thesis, in the course of defending of which in 1970 opinions were shared that the degree contender needed to be conferred with Doctor of Philology. However, the existing tradition did not allow for that to happen. A substantial — not to say decisive — contribution of Oleg Fëdorovich was his work in the area of preparation of the well-known-to-specialists catalogue “Persian and Tajik Manuscripts of the Institute of Peoples of Asia of the Academy of Science of the USSR” (parts I and II (Moscow, 1964)). His monograph, which served as a follow-up to the series of “The Description of Persian and Tajik Manuscript of the Institute of Oriental Studies” (issue 10: Poetic collections, albums (Moscow, 1993)) was highly appraised. This, without any exaggeration, model description testifies to enormous amount of work done by the author, who in great detail inventoried 58 poetic collections from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies. A collection of articles of different years (with the total
number of 29), published for the 75th anniversary of O. F. Akimushkin “Medieval Iran. Culture, History, Philology” (St. Petersburg, 2004) became a scientific bestseller.

O. F. Akimushkin authored 40 articles for the “Encyclopaedia of Islam” (Moscow, 1991) and 9 articles in the encyclopaedia “Islam on the Territory of Former Russian Empire” (vols. 1—3 (Moscow, 1998—2001)). His pen wrote a great number of forewords for publications on the topic of Persian literature and Šūfism. In addition, he served as an editor-in-chief of over 20 monographs. Shortly before his decease Oleg Fëdorovich finished his translation of “The Treatise of Calligraphers” of Qūṭṭī Aḥmad with commentaries into Russian; its scholarly significance can scarcely be overstated. A large portion of the commentaries to the translation was done when the author was gravely ill, but still continued to work hard, demonstrating an enviable strength of mind, which was hardened during the time of blockaded Leningrad, when, being just a teenager, he could not sit out in bomb shelters, but rather ran on rooftops and put out high-explosive shells.

Oleg Fëdorovich was not only an excellent researcher; he was also an inimitable teacher. A brilliant orator, he possessed abilities to draw attention of his audience from the very first minutes of his lectures and kept it till the very end of it. Since 1966 he taught at the Oriental Department of St. Petersburg University, whose alumnus he also was. In 1980 he became the first lecturer who delivered a series of lectures on the topic of Muslim mysticism. And that is apart from his lectures on Persian language and literature, historiography and source study, as well as the history of manuscript booklore of Iran and Central Asia. As a scientific advisor he prepared over ten candidates of science. And he counselled an even larger number of postgraduate students.

With the person of Oleg Fëdorovich the science of our country lost a prominent connoisseur of the history and culture of Iran and Central Asia, with which he had first-knowledge of. A number of scientific field trips to Iran made the last name “Akimushkin” known in scientific circles of this country and compelled them to take researches of Soviet scholars in the field of Muslim codicology seriously. And this is no incident. His scholarly charm, his ability to penetrate to the very heart of the problem and see that, which others could not see, is hidden in the combination of traits of a rigorous researcher and a medieval adīḥ, i. e. an erudite person, knowledgeable in many fields of science.

The memories of Oleg Fëdorovich Akimushkin will live on among those, who was fortunate enough to associate with him, study under him and also among those, who are familiar with him on account of his numerous scientific works, which still have a long life ahead of them.

Boris Norik