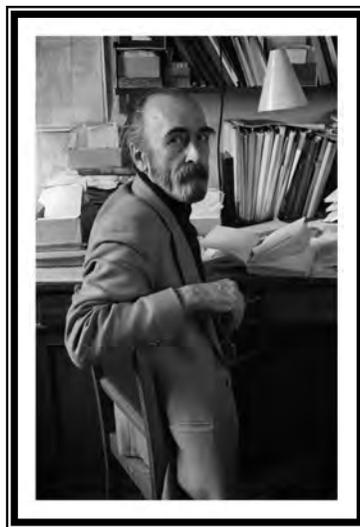# VALERIĬ VYACHESLAVOVICH POLOSIN
(1939—2014)

On November 14, 2014 we lost Valery V. Polosin, gifted Arabist, incredibly humble and decent man. He was senior researcher in the Department of manuscripts and documents of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, in the recent past — head of the Sector of the Middle East in the Institute. He was 75, but full of energy and plans. He had just prepared the article to *Manuscripta* current issue and we were discussing the details of the future publication with him.

Valery Polosin graduated from the Oriental faculty of Leningrad State University in 1961 as a historian of the Arab countries and worked for several years as a military interpreter, that is a quite usual career in those years. From 1967 to 1969 he was the Deputy Head of the Institute's library. Work in the library has identified scientific vocation of Valery Polosin: he became a first-class bibliographer and specialist in the Muslim manuscript tradition. Since 1984 Polosin worked in the Sector of the Middle East. His area of research was the book of the Arabs in the epoch of the rise of their culture. He is the author of the important work devoted to *Fihrist* ("The Catalogue") by Ibn al-Nadīm [1]. Together with his brother Vladimir and in cooperation with N. I. Serikov and G. Toele he completed the full scientific description of the Arabic Christian manuscripts stored at the Institute [2]. He made the description of the Druz manuscripts of the Institute and together with N. I. Serikoff and S. A. Frantsuzov prepared a scientific description of the famous illustrated "Arabic Psalter" [3]. Together with him we worked on the description of one of the oldest translations of the Bible into Arabic [4]. Later he developed largely pioneering topic "Arabic manuscripts: quantitative methods of research" and we were glad to publish the first results of the study in our journal [5]. His monograph "Non-Verbal Information in Arabic Manuscripts. Essays on Medieval Book Culture", was prepared to print in January 2013, but never published, much to our regret. At the same time I had a chance to write a review to the work. Now I would like to present it in full.

E. Rezvan

The Review on the Monograph by Val. V. Polosin
"Non-Verbal Information in Arabic Manuscripts. Essays on Medieval Book Culture"

In the Preface to the work presented for discussion, it is rightly noted that its research topic belongs to the category of pioneering ones. So it was understood by the Editorial Board of 𝓜anuscripta 𝓞rientalia, which published the first studies of the author in the area of the original Muslim medieval aesthetics embodied in the manuscript design. Now these articles are included in the bibliography of the key reference works on Arabic codicology [6]. In the proposed work, the boundaries of the research are greatly expanded by attracting new objects that are not similar to previously studied, but "related" to them when mathematical (metrological) analysis is used. The hypothesis of the matrix nature of Arabic manuscript aesthetics was studied in details on each artefact involved in the investigation. The reader with a simple office ruler, a pair of compasses and a calculator has the opportunity to check the validity of the study and any conclusions by carrying out control measurements according to the illustrations, go along with the work (or the originals of them to which the monograph has appropriate references).

The proportional matrices seem to be the most important achievement of the work. They guarantee the correctness of the study. Not everyone will probably pay attention to the fact that the number of proportional matrices, which are given by the author at the Conclusion exceeds the number actually presented in the work. This means that much of the manuscript material studied by the author is beyond the scope of the work and. In other words, the author pays his attention not to the separate, exclusive artefacts, but to the large circle of "ordinary" manuscripts. He does not state this specifically, but in reality he identifies and explores the "canon", the established practice and the "set of standards" that are common to a wide range of Muslim manuscripts.

He does not divide the time of artefacts creation to the ages or periods, emphasizing that the mathematisation in the design of the Arabic manuscript took place from the 3/10th century (the earliest example in the set of manuscripts of the studied by author) through the entire time of their production and did not depend on the place of creation (see, for example, samples of Persian and Turkish manuscripts in his work).

I would welcome the earliest possible publication of the work under consideration (with all the *unique set* of the illustrations selected by the author!) There are many reasons for the publication not to be delayed. The most important of them is the priority of the Russian scholarship in the discovery of the unknown book aesthetics and the "return" to the peoples, who now use Arabic script, their original book and manuscript canon, which was in use for a thousand years and then was completely forgotten in areas where it once dominated.

Historically, Muslim and European handwritten codices have the same origin (from Coptic and Greek ones). In this regard, the codicology of Muslim manuscripts was strongly influenced by the highly developed European codicology. Common features of the two types of codices were already studied in details. The work of Polosin describes one of the decisive differences between the Muslim codex and the European one — its mathematical and metrological certainty and consequent different aesthetics.

I want to emphasize again, monograph by Valery Polosin deserves prompt publication!

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Now we agreed with Prof. Mikhail Piotrovsky that we will do everything to see its printed copy as soon as possible.

N o t e s

1. Val. V. Polosin, *"Fihrist" Ibn an-Nadima kak istoriko-kul'turnyi pamiatnik X veka* (*"Fihrist" by Ibn al-Nadim as a Historical and Cultural Monument of the 10th Century*) (Moscow, 1989).

2. *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Christian Arabic Manuscripts Preserved in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, ed. by N. Serikoff (Leuven, 2010).

3. *Arabskaia psaltyr': prilojenie k faksimil'nomu izdaniiu rukopisi A187 (arabskaia peterburgskaia licevaia psaltyr') iz sobraniia Instituta vostokovedeniia RAN (Sankt-Peterburgskiĭ filial)* (*The Arabic Psalter: a Supplement to the Facsimile Edition of the Manuscript A187 (St. Petersburg Arabic Illuminated Psalter) from the Collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies (St. Petersburg Branch)*), prepared by Val. V. Polosin, N. I. Serikov, S. A. Francuzov under general. ed. by N. I. Serikoff (St. Petersburg — Voronej, 2005).

4. Polosin, E. A. Rezvan, "To the CD-ROM edition of the St. Petersburg Arabic Bible", 𝓜anuscripta 𝓞rientalia III/1 (1997), pp. 40—7; Polosin, "The Arabic Bible: turning again to an old controversy", *ibid.* VI/3 (2000), pp. 3—18.

5. See for example: Idem, "To the method of describing illuminated Arabic manuscripts", *ibid.* I/2 (1995), pp. 16—21; idem, "Frontispieces on scale canvas in Arabic manuscripts", *ibid.* II/1 (1996), pp. 5—19; idem, "Muslim bindings with al-Khalidiyani double borders", *ibid.* II/2 (1996), pp. 9—12; idem, "All is numbers? An unknown numerical component in the design of medieval Arabic manuscripts", *ibid.* V/1 (1999), pp. 7—11; idem, "Unknown numerical aesthetics in the design of Turkish manuscripts", *ibid.* VII/4 (2001) pp. 30—6; idem, " 'Unwan illuminations in Arabic manuscripts (part 1)", *ibid.* VIII/2 (2002), pp. 12—9.

6. See: F. Déroche, *Islamic Codicology: an Introduction to the Study of Manuscripts in Arabic Script* (London, 2005); A. Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography* (Leiden, 2001).