Obituaries

Vladimir Aronovich Livshits (1923-2017)

Iranian and Central Asian studies suffered a great loss on June 10, 2017. Vladimir Aronovich Livshits (Владимир Аронович Лившиц), full professor, the foreign member of the British Academy and the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, the eldest research fellow of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, and a member of the Advisory Board of *Scrinium*, died peacefully in his apartment in Saint Petersburg on his 94th year of life.

He was born on October 6, 1923 in Petrograd, in Liteyny district, in the family of an engineer. From his childhood, Vladimir Aronovich grasped some knowledge of Yiddish (which became useful later in conversation with German scholars such as W.B. Henning), but of course his native language was Russian. During Stalin’s persecutions, his father was repressed but after several years in deportation returned to Leningrad (albeit with seriously damaged health) and lived until 90 years of age. Despite being son of a “political criminal,” Livshits managed to enter a high school. First it was a technical university; during those young years already, however, his heart was attracted to oriental cultures, especially since his class-mate entered the Oriental department of the Philological faculty of the Leningrad State University. He studied externally Persian language, the fairy-tale collection of *Ṭūṭī-nāmah*, which was and still is the principal study book in the first year of the course, and enrolled into the second grade of the Iranian philology.

On June 22, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union, and, since then, the World War II engaged almost the whole male population of the Soviet Union. Livshits, who was an expert in telling anecdotes of his life and of fellow scholars, did never narrate about the severe years of the war. He dug trenches, survived the first year of the siege of Leningrad, was in a hospital and on the front line, and finally returned to his home city and in 1945 resumed studies at the university.
Apart from studying Persian and other oriental languages, and, of course, scholastics of Marxism, he attended many courses in general philology and linguistics taught by distinguished professors. Since 1946, he started his fieldwork in the framework of the “Tajik-Sogdian Archaeological Expedition” under the leadership of Alexander Yu. Jakubovski (1886-1953). During his university years, from which he graduated ahead of schedule, he was noticed by the budding Assyriologist Igor M. Diakonoff (1914-1991), whom Livshits considered his teacher.

Since 1948, Igor Diakonoff, his brother Mikhail M. Diakonoff (1907-1954), and Livshits were working on the recently discovered ostraca in Aramaic script from Nisa, the capital of the Parthian empire in the present-day Turkmenistan. They demonstrated that these texts were written not in a dialect of the Semitic Aramaic language, but in the Iranian, Parthian language in an Aramaic script with numerous heterograms, and served as a kind of labels for wine storage. The first stages of decipherment were done by the three scholars, the later by Igor Diakonoff and Livshits, and the last volumes of the complete edition of more than 2000 ostraca, with the images, transliteration, translation, and glossary, were published in the respectful series of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicae* by Livshits himself. In 2010, the dictionary of the proper names from Nisa and various papers of Livshits on Parthian language appeared as a book.

After having been graduated from the university, Livshits and Iosif M. Oranski (1923-1977; in his stories about post-war decades, Livshits always narrated in the first person plural, when his “we” meant “Oranski and me”) attended the PhD course (“Aspirantura”) under supervision of academician Alexander A. Freimann (1879-1968), both studying Pashto language. Livshits's dissertation was about personal pronouns in Pashto language, and it was published only in a handful of journal articles.

After the successful defense of their dissertations, Livshits and Oranski were directed to Stalinabad (today Dushanbe) in Tajikistan and returned to Leningrad only in 1958 / 59, thanks to the efforts of Bobojon G. Gafurov (1908-1977; the ex-first secretary of the Communist party of Tajikistan and later the director of the Institute of Oriental studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences), and Igor Diakonoff. The years in Stalinabad were very fruitful, and the young city herself in the 1950s was extremely friendly and energetic according to memories of many scholars who started their carriers in Tajikistan. Livshits worked in the Institute of Language and Literature, and was a lecturer at the Pedagogical University. In those years he was engaged in compiling the dictionary accompanying the “Yaghnobi Folk-Tales” collected by M.S. Andreev and E.M. Peshchereva, where etymological remarks on this mountainous minority language, which show a number of similarities with the Middle Iranian