



LUKONIN, VLADIMIR GRIGOR'EVICH

LUKONIN, Vladimir Grigor'evich (b. Leningrad, 21 January 1932; d. Leningrad, 10 September 1984, [FIGURE 1](#)), outstanding Russian scholar in the field of history and history of culture and arts of ancient Iran, from the earliest times until the end of the Sasanian period, as well as of the Kushan chronology. His father was a well-known General of the Soviet Army, and his mother was a physician. At the end of 1941, during World War II, he was evacuated to Samarqand together with his mother and his younger brother, and they returned to Leningrad in 1944. Perhaps owing to some influence on his life by his stay in Central Asia, Lukonin entered the Oriental Faculty of the Leningrad State University in 1950. After graduating from it, in 1955-56 he did his postgraduate studies at the Oriental Department of the State Hermitage Museum under the supervision of Iosif Abgarovich Orbeli (1887-1961) and Kamilla Vasil'evna Trever (1892-1974). From 1951 to 1963, each year he participated in archeological excavations in Sarkel on the River Don, in Pandjikent, at Kara-tepe, and at various other sites in Central Asia, where he learned to deal with artifacts and apprehended applied arts. In 1957 Lukonin joined the staff of the Oriental Department of the State Hermitage Museum, and in 1965 he was appointed the Head of the Oriental Department of the Hermitage, where he worked until the end of his life.

In 1961 Lukonin obtained his Ph.D. degree for the thesis "Iran in the 3rd-4th Centuries. Formation of the Sasanian State and Artifacts of the Official Art" (in



Russian). The Sasanian period remained the field of special interest throughout all his life. He received his D.Lit. degree in 1972 for the dissertation “Early Sasanian Iran. Some Problems of History and Culture” (in Russian). His works devoted to Parthian kingdom are also important contributions to Iranian studies. Lukonin published fourteen books (several of them in collaboration with other authors), some of which appeared posthumously. A few of his books were published in Western languages: *Persia II. From the Seleucids to the Sassanids* (Geneva, Cleveland, and New York, 1967; London, 1970), this book was translated into French, German, and Spanish; *Kunst des alten Iran* (Leipzig, 1986); *Persian Art* (Bournemouth and Leningrad, 1987), in collaboration with A. A. Ivanov; *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge, 1989), in collaboration with M. Dandamayev. Among his books published in Russian, the following should be mentioned: *Iran v èpokhu pervykh Sasanidov: ocherki po istorii kul'tury* (Iran under the first Sasanians: essays in the history of culture), Leningrad, 1961; *Sasanidskie gemmy* (Sasanian gems), Leningrad, 1963, in collaboration with A. Ya. Borisov; *Kul'tura sasanidskogo Irana. Iran v III-V vv.* (Culture of Sasanian Iran: Iran in the 3rd-5th centuries CE), Moscow, 1969, translated into Persian by ‘Enāyat-Allāh Režā in 1971; *Iran v III v. Novye materialy i opyt istoricheskoi rekonstruktsii* (Iran in the 3rd century. New materials and an essay in historical reconstruction), Moscow, 1979; *Drevniĭ i rannesrednevekovyiĭ Iran* (Ancient and early Medieval Iran), Moscow, 1987—a posthumous collection of his works published earlier. All these books make an important contribution to the knowledge about ancient and medieval Iran.

Lukonin published many significant studies on different aspects of ancient Iranian culture. He was a first-class expert in this field and owned a sagacious perception of the development of culture from its very beginning during Median times until the end of the Sasanian period. He offered an integral description of the basic traits of Iranian culture in the pre-Achaemenid, Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian epochs and analyzed distinctive features of artifacts from these periods, beginning from archaeological objects dated to the late 2nd and early 1st millennium BCE. Besides, he studied the socio-economic and religious characteristics of that time. Lukonin maintained that Iranian culture and art had undergone an indivisible cycle of development under the Medes, the Achaemenids, the Parthians, and the Sasanians. In his opinion, by the 7th century BCE this art was based on ancient local pre-Median traditions which, however, soon radically changed their style of decoration. Compositions borrowed from various ethnic groups—sometimes as complete



“quotations,” but often taken out from their contexts and used as paraphrases from artistic traditions of earlier epochs—were supplemented in the Median and Achaemenid art with a new layer of images. Thus, such selections of symbols, alien to Iranian culture, were viewed from a new angle, and, with Iranian images being added to them, all these symbols were interpreted in a new way. For instance, the Medes used representations of Assyria, Urartu, and Elam, as well as of the indigenous population of western Iran, but the level of this selection was rather restricted. During Achaemenid times, a unified “imperial style” was created. According to the opinion of Lukonin, the master craftsmen, who made these works of art, were mostly Medes who inherited their methods and practices from their **Mannean** teachers. Median art became one of the most important components of the Achaemenid culture, but the original specimens of early Median art gradually lost their traditional link and preserved only its old technique. As Lukonin demonstrated, artifacts from different parts of western Iran testify to a certain artistic unity, but nevertheless there also existed various samples of a mixed style among them, and different influences developed into a new, integrally shaped art.

Iranian art under the Achaemenids, when Iran became an integral part of the world history, was also a subject of special interest to Lukonin. The art of the Achaemenid Empire was chiefly ceremonial, declarative, and monumental art of the court of the king of kings. The norms of the Achaemenid art, and especially of its palace style in the middle of the 5th century BCE, were supplemented with new motifs and images. The Achaemenid palace style became widespread, and, in effect, it created a unity of culture over a vast territory from the Indus to Asia Minor. Samples of toreutics (e.g., rhytons), manufactured in various parts of the Achaemenid Empire, had the same standards and ornaments and even dimensions, regardless of where they were made. This cultural unity of East and West was achieved as early as in the first half of the 5th century BCE. Although Achaemenid art had borrowed many elements from various cultures, once absorbed, they lost their original features. Taken as a whole, these elements had a specifically Iranian nature.

During the Parthian period, Achaemenid traditions continued to develop in a number of Iranian provinces, but at the same time the assimilation of the Hellenistic culture was also taking place. Besides, many features typical for early Sasanian art can be traced back to Parthian and even to Achaemenid civilization. Parthian and Sasanian political, social, and administrative institutions are studied by Lukonin in the chapter “Political, Social and



Administrative Institutions: Taxes and Trade” included into *The Cambridge History of Iran* (vol. 3, pt. 2, 1983, pp. 681-746). His publications on Sasanian rock reliefs and their inscriptions revealed new data, which allowed him to restore important historical facts that had been unknown before.

Lukonin reconsidered the common opinion regarding the sources of the Sasanian state and its art in the 3rd and 4th centuries. As a result of his study of Sasanian inscriptions, rock reliefs, objects of toreutics, gems, and coins from the unrivalled collections of the State Hermitage Museum, Lukonin rejected the so-called theory of the “Achaemenid Renaissance,” according to which the formation of the Sasanian kingdom and the peculiarities of its historical processes, specific traits, and cultural phenomena were the result of “revival of national spirit” (Sarre, pp. 227-28) or “a reaction of the eastern ideas to Hellenism” by means of modification of Achaemenid traditions, which were consciously accepted by the Sasanian kings (Herzfeld, p. 77). As a result of his analysis of some late Pahlavi works, Arabic-Persian literature, and historical traditions, as well as the study of relics of applied arts, Lukonin came to the conclusion that the period of the “Achaemenid Renaissance” was restricted only to the 5th century CE, that is, to the time of the Mazdakite movement, when the unsteady throne was in need of its former glory. Therefore, legendary genealogies of the Sasanian kings were created in order to glorify the royal dynasty. According to the opinion of Lukonin, in reality the Sasanian state and culture were based on historical, ideological, and cultural traditions of Persia, which was the homeland of the Sasanian rulers.

Lukonin allotted a special attention to Sasanian Persia in the 3rd and early 4th centuries CE (Lukonin, 1966). The State Hermitage Museum possesses a collection of over 800 Sasanian gems which are a valuable source for history and culture. These gems were first studied by A. Ya. Borisov (1903-42) and then by Lukonin who selected for publication those of them which contain portraits of kings, ministers, and priests depicted with the emblems of their authority (head-dresses with insignia, etc.). Such official portraits clearly show political and ideological concepts of the Sasanian period. Judging by the general tendency in the development of the portrait and by the paleography of the inscriptions, these gems were produced in the 4-5th centuries CE. The gems that bear no inscriptions can be dated to the same time as those with inscriptions, if their technique is taken into consideration. The catalogue of this collection contains a systematic study and the dates of the gems (Lukonin, 1963).



In one of his articles Lukonin considered the problem of the Sasanian conquests in the East and of the chronology of the Kushans (Lukonin, 1969b). Based upon the description of the borders of Iran given in the trilingual inscription on the “[Ka'bah of Zoroaster](#)” of Šāpur I (r. 241-71) at [Naqš-e Rostam](#), composed in 262 CE, Lukonin came to the conclusion that the Kushan state was a dependency of Sasanian Iran. Judging by the data provided by Ṭabari (pp. 17-18) and Moses of Khorene (Movses Khorenatsi, p. 73), he demonstrated that the statement in Šāpur I's inscription about his triumph over the Kushans is not definitive, and the only direct evidence for the date of the seizure of the Kushan state by the Persians is provided by the Kushan-Sasanian coins from the end of the 4th century CE.

Lukonin published and introduced to scholarship many artifacts of Iranian culture preserved at the Hermitage Museum, including the unique hoard of Iranian silver drachms of the 3rd century CE and some objects of early Sasanian toreutics. He also published a catalogue of the coins of the first Sasanian king Ardašir I (r. 224-41) as a supplement to his book *Iran v èpokhu pervykh Sasanidov* (Iran in the epoch of the first Sasanians; Lukonin, 1961). In 1979, in collaboration with A. Rajabli, he published a hoard of 159 coins from Chohur Kabala, which are at present preserved at the State Museum of History of Azarbaijan (Lukonin, 1979, pp. 74-85 and plates 6-19). In collaboration with A. A. Ivanov and L. S. Smesova, he published various specimens of Iranian jewelry art from the Hermitage collection (Lukonin, 1984).

Lukonin attended numerous international congresses and gave lectures in the U.S.A. (the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York), Belgium (the University of Ghent), as well as at the Universities of Leningrad, Yerevan, Tbilisi, Baku, and Tashkent. He was a member of the editorial board of the journal *Èpigrafika Vostoka* (in Russian), *Iranica Antiqua*, of the [Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum](#), and a Corresponding Member of the German Archaeological Institute.

The British Museum established annual Lukonin Memorial Lectures and a Seminar, at which eminent scholars in the field of ancient Iranian studies are invited to speak. So far the following three volumes of these proceedings held in honor of Lukonin have been published: *Early Mesopotamia and Iran: Contact and Conflict. C. 3500-1600 BC* (London, 1993), *Later Mesopotamia and Iran: Tribes and Empires 1600-539 BC* (London, 1995), and *Mesopotamia and Iran in the Persian Period: Conquest and Imperialism 539-331 BC* (London, 1997). Similarly, the State Hermitage Museum organizes annual conferences in



memory of Lukonin, and three volumes of the papers presented at these meetings have already been published under the title *Érmitazhnye chteniya pamyati V. G. Lukonina* (St. Petersburg, 2000, 2006, and 2008). For obituaries of Lukonin see *Iranica Antiqua* 19, 1984, pp. ix-x (by L. Vanden Berghe and Ch. Langerart-Seuws); *The Times*, 17 October 1984 (editorial); *VDI* 1985/2, p. 215 (editorial); *Stud. Ir.* 14/1, 1985, pp. 7-13 (by B. I. Marshak and V. G. Shkoda); *Mezhdunarodnaya assotsiatsiya po izucheniyu kul'tur Tsentral'noj Azii* 8, Moscow, 1985, pp. 108-9 (by M. A.-K. Dandamaev and V. A. Livshits); *Iran* 25 (1987), pp. vii-viii (by T. C. Mitchell); and *Soobshcheniya Gosudarstvennogó Érmitazha* 52 (1987), pp. 97-98 (editorial).

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