



ORANSKIĪ, IOSIF MIKHAILOVICH

ORANSKIĪ, IOSIF MIKHAILOVICH, prominent Soviet (Russian-Jewish) Iranologist (b. 24 April 1923 in Petrograd [St. Petersburg], d. 16 May 1977, from a heart attack at his place of work in the Institute of Oriental Studies in Leningrad [St. Petersburg]) ([FIGURE 1](#)). His works played a significant role in the development of Iranian studies in the second half of the 20th century, especially in the former Soviet Union. His education at Leningrad University was interrupted by World War II, in which he served as a soldier in a field engineering company. After his recovery from an injury, he headed an ambulance unit carrying the wounded from the front line to hospitals. After demobilization in May 1945, Oranskiĭ returned to the newly restored Oriental Faculty of the University and was highly active both as a student and a researcher, also as the leader of the students' scientific organization. Apparently in these years, the wide range of his scholarly interests took shape under the influence of great Russian scholars of the older generation still active then at the university, such as [A.A. Freĭman](#) (1879-1968), the distinguished Iranologist and specialist on comparative Indo-European linguistics. It is difficult to name a field of Iranian studies which was not included into his studies: history of Iranian studies, history of the teaching of Persian and other Iranian languages, the study of the languages themselves, the development of their grammatical structure, etymology, language contacts, dialectology, ethnology, etc.



In 1948, Oranskiĭ graduated with honors from the Oriental Faculty of Leningrad University and entered postgraduate studies with specialization in “Afghan language” under the guidance of A. A. Freĭman. His first published articles were on the history of research on the Pashto language (1949 [see bibliog.], written in part together with his classmate Vladimir Livshits, who became famous later as a specialist on Sogdian and other Middle Iranian languages) and on Pashto grammar. At this time, he was also a member of the faculty of the Iranian department of Leningrad University, teaching the history of the Persian language and preparing his fundamental work *Vvedenie v iranskuyu filologiyu* (Introduction to Iranian philology, Moscow, 1960; 2nd rev. ed., Moscow, 1988).

Oranskiĭ successfully defended his doctoral thesis on the Pashto verb in 1951. Thereafter, he was unable to obtain work in Moscow or Leningrad, due to the anti-Jewish, so called anti-cosmopolitan campaign of the Stalinist period. Therefore he moved to [Dushanbe](#) (then Stalinabad) and taught in various higher educational institutions of Tajikistan, for instance as Associate Professor of Tajik at the State University’s Pedagogical Institute. During his residence in Tajikistan, Oranskiĭ made one of the outstanding discoveries in Indo-Iranian philology during the 20th century he discovered in the Hissar valley the speakers of the till then unknown Indo-Aryan language of Parya.

On the basis of materials collected in these years Oranskiĭ wrote an extensive treatise *Indoiranskie dialekty Gissarskoĭ doliny* (Indo-Iranian dialects of the Hissar valley, Leningrad, 1967), which in 1967 he defended as his Habilitation thesis. His conclusion that the Parya dialect belongs to the Central group of Indo-Aryan languages and is nearest to the Panjabi-Lahnda dialect groups is well argued and seems very convincing. In addition to studying the Parya language, Oranskiĭ also gathered unique materials on Tajik dialects and professional argots of the gypsies of Central Asia. These were published in a series of articles and posthumously as a separate book (1983).

In 1959, Oranskiĭ was made a member of the Leningrad branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences, where he worked till the last day of his life. In 1963 his book “Iranian languages” was published and later translated into Italian and French. His “Introduction to Iranian Philology,” which was translated into Persian (1979), was highly useful for both students and specialists in Iranian studies. It summarizes the achievements of the Russian school of Iranian studies founded by Karl Salemann and Alexander Freiman, whose most gifted and faithful pupil was Oranskiĭ himself. Of note is



his article on the origin of Old Persian cuneiform writing system dedicated to the memory of Academician Vasilii Struve (in *VDI*, 1966, no. 2, pp. 107-16). More than two dozen of his articles are on etymologies of Iranian words. He discovered the Iranian origin of a number of words in language groups that were in contact with Aryans in ancient times: Finno-Ugrian, Semitic, Turkic (e.g., the Turkic word *kumāč* “bread baked in ashes,” semantically identical to Iranian *nān* < **ni-kan-*, lit. “[baked] buried [in the ashes]”), and, of course, his native Slavonic. Of particular interest is a series of articles on relationships between Old Iranian and the Russian language (see, e.g., 1975). He also detected contact between Iranians and Indo-Aryans (e.g., Tajik *buruj* “birch bark” from Indian *bhurja-* “birch”).

Several articles were published by Oranskiĭ on general problems of Iranian studies, such as “On correlating the periodization of the history of language with that of literary monuments (On materials for the history of Iranian languages)” (*O sootnoshenii periodizatsii istorii yazyka c periodizatsiey pis'mennykh pamyatnikov* [no materiale istorii iranskikh yazykov], *Voprosy yazykoznaniya*, 1979, no. 2, pp. 32-46) and “Investigation of Oriental languages and the problems of history of culture of the peoples of the East” (*Narodny Azii i Afriki*, 1977, no. 4, pp. 95 – 107). Professor Oranskiĭ also wrote articles on the history of Iranian linguistic studies (e.g., 1975) and obituaries about Russian iranologists, such as Freĭman and N. A. Kislyakov. His surveys and book reviews regularly appeared in different periodicals both in Russian and in English, and his two-volume *Neuiranische Sprachen der Sowjet Union* was published in 1975 (The Hague, Mouton). It is to be regretted that the results of Oranskiĭ’s meticulous research were in part suppressed under the prevailing censorship of the Soviet era. His last book was published under the title “Folklore and language of the Hissar Paryas” and not, as he was insisting during the last days of his life, “Language and folklore ...”—a change of title that caused him much suffering (Steblyn-Kamensky, 1979, p. 140a).

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