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This is the forty-second issue of East Asian History, the fifth published in electronic form, March 2018. It continues the series previously entitled Papers on Far Eastern History.
ON A RECENTLY DISCOVERED MS. OF ČINGGIS-QAṬ’AN’S PRECEPTS TO HIS YOUNGER BROTHERS AND SONS

Igor de Rachewiltz

Činggis-qan’s wise sayings or precepts (bilīg), as distinct from his formal pronouncements, rules and regulations which eventually made up the now largely lost corpus of Činggiside laws (yeke jasay), have come down to us as individual collections, and in the body of larger works such as historical chronicles.

In either form, Činggis’ aphorisms, opinions and practical advice on statecraft and life in general, are usually expressed in alliterative verse, with connecting passages in (often rhythmic) prose, and are set in the context of poetic dialogues between the emperor and members of his family and/or faithful companions (nokd), at a feast (qurim), during a military campaign, or on other occasions.

These wise sayings (hereafter bilīgs) attributed to the great Mongol conqueror have a long and interesting history, and even though they contain obvious interpolations and later additions, it seems that much of their content is genuine and dating from the thirteenth century.

Anecdotes illustrating Činggis’ prudence and sagacity, and stories — true or semi-fictional — concerning his special relationship with some of his brothers (for example, Qasar), sons, wives and companions (Boyörcu in particular), no doubt circulated among the Mongols already in his lifetime. His remarkable deeds and feats of arms were declaimed and sung in the Mongol tents. As for his bilīgs, they were, appraently, duly recorded by specially appointed officials — a practice that must have been introduced in the latter part of his life.

Soon after Činggis’ death, these stories, songs and bilīgs became part of a growing body of traditions about the now legendary figure of the emperor from which Mongol bards and chroniclers were to draw both inspiration and information in the following decades. The bilīgs in particular were quoted and recited at the Mongol court, and we know that proficiency in bilīg-lore was so highly regarded that Temür-Ölǰeitü reputedly gained the throne in 1294 over his rival because he knew the bilīgs of Činggis-qan better and could declaim them with a pure accent.

Acknowledgement

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3 Individual collections can, of course, be made of extracts and quotations from larger works, as in the case of the Činggis boyda-yın duraşqal-un teğibārī, which consists of extracts from the Bolor Ėrike and Kēke sudur. See below, and nn. 22, 23.
4 For the literature on the bilīgs, especially the references in Doerfer, op. cit., II, No.835 (pp.417–18), see V. Kotvič (W. Kotwicz), ‘Iz poueniĭ Čingis-khana,’ Vostok 3 (Moscow-Petersburg, 1923), pp.94–96; B. Ya. Vladimirov, Etnologo-lingvistitcheskiye issledovaniya v Urge,
As is known, the preservation of the Secret History of the Mongols, its rich psychological content and the intimate details of Mongol life so vividly described in it are totally absent in the Yüan-Ming sources on the Mongols. This is probably the reason why the anonymous Mongol epic-chronicle was given this unusual title by its early Ming editors/translators, namely because it related the unofficial or ‘inside’ story of the former ruling family, a story which, by its very nature and character, had been excluded by Yüan official historiography of Chinese traditional type.

Among the most famous biligs are the ‘Holy Činggis–qayan’s precepts to this younger brothers and sons’, of which various versions are known. One of these was published by A. Popov as early as 1836 in his Mongolian Chrestomathy. Another version was edited by C.Ž. Žamcarano and published in Urga in 1915. It is now a bibliographical rarity. W. Kotwicz discussed both these versions, translating excerpts from them, in an article which appeared in 1923. The following year, the Mongol ulus–un sudur bičig–ün küriyeleng Altan Tobči. A Brief History of the Khalkha. An epic quality of the saga, or legendary cycle, of Činggis–qan, see the important recent contributions by W. Heissig, ‘Die Çaγadai–“bilig” und ihre Historizität’ in W. Heissig a.o. (eds), Tractata Altaica, Denis Sinor sexagenario optime de rebus altaicis merito dedicata (Wiesbaden, 1976), pp. 277–90, and L.V. Clark, ‘From the Legendary Cycle of Činggis–qayan: The Story of an Encounter with 300 Tayjilyud from the Altan Tobči (1655)’ in Mongolian Studies 5 (1978–89), 5–39 (esp. pp. 29, nn. 7, 8, for further references to the literature on the subject). See also nn. 7, 8, 16, 22–25.

The epic quality of the Secret History of the Mongols, its rich psychological content and the intimate details of Mongol life so vividly described in it are totally absent in the Yüan-Ming sources on the Mongols. This is probably the reason why the anonymous Mongol epic-chronicle was given this unusual title by its early Ming editors/translators, namely because it related the unofficial or ‘inside’ story of the former ruling family, a story which, by its very nature and character, had been excluded by Yüan official historiography of Chinese traditional type.

As is known, the preservation of the Secret History was not due originally to its intrinsic value as a historical or literary text, but rather to its usefulness as a textbook for the
published by Popov is in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, and similar MSS are known to exist in other collections.26

At the beginning of 1975, a MS of these biligs formerly belonging to the great Polish Mongolist J.S. Kowalewski (1801–78), was discovered by the late Professor Y. Rintchen in Vilnius University Library.27 The MS, entitled Činggis boya-yin suryal-un jarliy-un dam bayulysan debter, or Book That Has Handwritten Down the Instructions of Činggis the Holy One, is described by Rintchen in his article ‘Manuscrits mongols de la collection du professeur J. Kowalewski à Vilnius’ in Central Asiatic Journal 19(1975):105–17, at pp.114–15, no.68.

Like other MSS in the same collection, this too is a copy made for Kowalewski by a Mongol scribe in Transbaikalia and dates from the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It is written on bluish paper of Russian origin, and it is bound into a book 15cm x 12.5cm.28

With regard to the contents of the MS, Rintchen quotes in his article some of Činggis’ biligs in transcription, and a colophon (l̂ayavardi neretü qayan-u uliger quuli bayulysan Šastir tegisiye) which actually belongs to another work.29 All the biligs quoted by Rintchen appear, with minor differences, in Popov’s text.30 In a letter to me dated 17–19 January 1977, Rintchen wrote:

I think among these unknown Mongol manuscripts of the first quarter of the XIX century copied by Mongol scribes for Professor Kowalewski it would be very interesting for you and for the Mongolists of the world a book of Čingis khan’s aphorisms all rhymed and showing his great poetical and improvisatory talent, his high ethical and philosophical level, indispensable in my opinion for all the kings and emperors not only of his time but also of nowadays.

I am sure, the manuscript unknown in the Northern and South Mongolia after the annihilation of all monastic and hereditary libraries of Mongol intellectuals and nobles, is one of the most interesting monuments of the earlier Mongol literature remonting [sic] to the XIII century.

I hope the Vilnius university would procure you a microfilm of the book of Čingis khan’s aphorisms and you might publish it with a translation which would show to the world readers in English a quite unknown aspect of the great Mongol Emperor, who was my nayaču, because my late mother descended from the line of Čoytu qungtayiji of Qalq-ä.31

In view of the above and in compliance with Professor Rintchen’s wish, I immediately wrote to Vilnius University Library requesting a microfilm of the MS in question. This was kindly supplied and I was thus able to examine the text of the Vilnius MS and compare it with the other texts of the same work available to me.32

The Činggis boyda-yin suryal-un jarliy-un dam bayulysan debter occupies the first fourteen leaves of a ‘book’ containing other Mongol texts. The leaves are numbered 1 to 14 in Arabic numbers (=pp. lr–14r in my pagination). Each page contains seven lines of text. Various scribal errors and omissions have been subsequently corrected, either by the copyist himself or by a later hand, and a number of alternative readings have been inserted between the lines, also by an unknown hand.

The version of the biligs contained in the Vilnius MS is essentially the same as that published by Popov. However, quite a few readings are at variance with Popov’s text, but agree with those found in the Copenhagen MS. Conversely, some readings are at variance with the Copenhagen MS but agree with Popov’s text. Other differences between these three texts can be explained by the fact that in the Vilnius MS some words, or groups of words, study of Mongolian language and customs. See W. Hung in Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 14(1951), pp.452, 460. For other ‘unfavourable influences’ on the preservation of Mongol literary monuments, see Žamcarano, op. cit., pp.3, 5–6. The extent of the loss can be gauged by the fact that of all the Mongol works printed in China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, only one virtually complete book has physically survived to this day; of several others, mostly Buddhist texts, we only have fragments. See my forthcoming study ‘The Preclassical Mongolian Version of the Hsiu-ching’ in Zentralasiatische Studien. It should be pointed out, however, that a number of ancient Mongol texts may have perished in comparatively recent times as a result of civil wars and other catastrophes. See Žamcarano, op. cit., pp.3, 5; 8; W. Heissig, A Lost Civilization. The Mongols Rediscovered, tr. J.S. Thomson (London, 1964), pp.14–16.


14 See Poppe, op. cit., p.9 ff; Clark, op. cit., p.6.

15 A special tribute must be paid to Prof. W. Heissig of Bonn for his painstaking search for, collection of, and description of Mongolian MSS, books and documents scattered throughout the world.


17 I am not giving the Mongolian title of these biligs as it varies somewhat from version to version. See below and nn.18, 19, 25.

18 A. Popov, Mongol’skaya khrestomatiya dlya načinuyuščikh obuchať’ja mongol’skomu yazykú (Kazan, 1836), pp.54–65. No Mongolian title.


20 ‘Iz poučenič Čingis-khaña’. See above, nn.4 and 5. Kotwicz’s article is also not available.

21 Unavailable to me. On this edition, see Heissig, op. cit., p.1 and n.1, et passim. For the biligs contained therein, see below, n.22.
have been left out by a careless copyist; and, occasionally, the same material has been rearranged somewhat differently.

Thus, even though the Vilnius MS does not actually provide a new version of Činggis’ ‘Precepts to his younger brothers and sons’, it may certainly help in preparing a new edition of the biligs which will take into account all the variae lectiones offered by the extant MSS.

Two samples from the text of the Vilnius MS, namely the passages in pp.1r–3r, 3 and 13v,3–14r,7, are given in transcription at the end of this article, followed by the variae lectiones found in Popov’s edition (P) and the Copenhagen MS (C). For the present purpose, I have ignored all alliteration in the three texts. Obvious orthographic mistakes in our MS (for example, boydan for boyda, taryųja for taryqiayu) have been tacitly corrected. However, in a few cases I have preferred to retain the original form and insert my correction — usually an additional letter or syllable — within square brackets (for example, asay[u]ju, qar[ba]basu). In the case of a doubtful word, I have given the correct form, or suggested emendation, in square brackets following the word in question (for example, öni [?oni]). The alternative readings inserted between the lines of the MS are given in parentheses following the word(s) to which they refer.

Transcription


[3r] üli boluyu41 kūmiin keddii-ber sayın töröbesii suruyaly-tača42 öbere43 sečen üli boluyu44 kemen jarlyk bolusni ajiyu::


[14r] tüşìmel49 bolbasu50 türidkel ügei dayiun-ı daruqu čırığ-tüii bolbasu: tümen on dayystala齿轮51 köbügün52 ačii53 üri54 anu55 mendü bolbus: delekei-yan erketi mënke tengri ıbegekii56 bögesii57 tengel ügei ycke jiryalang58 tere bui59 kemen üğüliiișen61 ajiyu: Činggis-qayan deñjüner58 köbügür-iyen59 soyun surusyan jarlyk imu tüşïüşe60 :: ::
ON A RECENTLY DISCOVERED MS. OF ČINGGIS-QΓAN’S PRECEPTS TO HIS YOUNGER BROTHERS AND SONS

Variae Lectiones

1. P, C köbegüd-tür-iyen
2. P erke-dür oroyulqu kele
   C erke-dür-iyen oroyulqu kele
3. C alayan-dayan
4. P toytaqui
   C toytaquaqui
5. P, C İlayu
6. P, C jildebesü
7. P ildu-dur
   C ildu-dur
8. P, C bolbaçu
9. P ayulγatan
   C ayuγčin
10. P, C ilayu
11. P, C ğildebesü
12. P olan kümün-eče
    C tug tämen-eče
13. C yosu-yi
15. P, C kötöl
16. P örgen
17. P, C ulum
18. P ğöke
19. C kürümüi
20. C dayamui
22. C om.
23. P, C sonastamui
24. C dabamui
25. C getlesi
26. C getelkü
27. P getülüsügei
   C getelgügei
28. C getelmüi
29. P, C niğen
30. P bisi
31. P, C kemegdekü
32. P buruγu-yi
33. P, C medegdekü
34. C sečen-eče
35. P suryaydaqui
   C surutuyai
36. C mösü
37. C onamui
38. P ödün ügei
40. P qarbuγu
41. C bolamui
42. C suryayuli ügei ber
43. C öber-iyen
44. C bolamui
45. P, C yosun
46. after bolbasu P adds terigülegsen
   aq-a degüü tegüs bolbasu
47. after bolbasu C adds törögsen aq-a
   degüü tegüs bolbasu
48. P, C yosun-i
49. P täsumel-dü C tüsmed
50. C bui bolbasu
51. C ğerig-tei
52. C qatan
53. P köbegün
54. C aći yači
55. P ür-e
   C ür-e-tei
56. P aqa C om.
57. P, C ibegkü
58. P bolbasu
59. C jyralang-un sayin
60. C buj-f-a
61. P ügülegsen
62. C bolai
63. P boyda Činggis-qayan
64. P degüü-ner
65. P köbegüd-iyen
66. C om. last sentence. The colophon quoted by
   Rintchen, op. cit., p.115, does not belong to this
   MS, but to the one immediately following it in
   The colophon is on p.26v, 3–4.

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