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**The First Mongolian Manuscript
in Germany Reconsidered**

Abstract. In 1979, Walther Heissig published an article describing two manuscript folios kept at the Herzog August Bibliothek: one of them contains text fragments in Tibetan and Mongolian, the other one, text in Tibetan only. Heissig proved that these folios were the first manuscripts of this kind in Germany, brought there from Russia, where they had been found at Ablai Keyid on the River Irtysh. The present study goes further in refining some of these data: the history of the folios is elaborated, the text fragments are attributed. Above all, the study demonstrates an unquestionable codicological resemblance between the folios and the Golden Kanjur of Ligdan Khan, establishing a connection between these manuscripts.

Key words: Ablai Keyid, the Golden Kanjur, Ligdan Khan, “golden” manuscripts, codicology

In his 1979 paper titled “Die erste mongolische Handschrift in Deutschland,” Walther Heissig published and described two manuscript folios kept at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Lower Saxony which, as that study establishes, were the first Mongolian manuscripts ever brought to Germany.

The manuscript

The first one is a *pothi* format folio sized 33.5×20.6 cm. The beginning of the folio with the pagination and part of the text are torn off. On one side of the folio, there is text in Mongolian, on the other, eight lines of text in Tibetan. The text was written with a reed pen (*calamus*) in gold on blue paper against a glossy blackened background. On the middle axis of the folio, two double circles are drawn symbolizing the holes for the cords that used to bind Indian palm-leaf manuscripts.¹

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The handwriting style of the Mongolian text is characteristic of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The initial “teeth” do not have crowns, there are no diacritical marks for “n” and “γ” in front of the vowels, the texts do not make any distinction between the initial “j” and “y” as well as “c” and “j” in the middle position. The medial “t” and “d” are sharpened and the lower element of the letters is not connected with the vertical axis. In addition, they are often written in front of the vowels as a “loop” with a “tooth.” The final “a,” “e” and “n” are written in the shape of a horizontal “tail” that is turned down. The final “s” is a short horizontal “tail.” The *orkicas* have “snake’s tongues.” The “sticks” are almost of the same length as the “teeth” and differ from the latter only in their shape and the angle of their inclination. The use of the Galik alphabet is minimal.

The design of the folio and the handwriting style of the Mongolian text are absolutely identical to the appearance and ductus of the so-called Golden Kanjur,² 20 volumes of which are kept in the library of the Academy of Social Sciences of Inner Mongolia (China) in the city of Hohhot (AK).³ This manuscript collection was the final result of the Kanjur translation project carried out under Ligdan Khan (1588–1634) in the years 1628–1629.⁴

In modern Mongolian studies, it has been taken for granted that the Golden Kanjur was written as a single copy. However, the Mongolian historiographical tradition does not comment on the exact number of “golden” copies. Thus, for example, the Mongolian chronicle called the *Thousand Spoke Golden Wheel* (Mong. *Altan kürdün mingyan kegesütü*)⁵ states that “...the Kanjur was translated into Mongolian and written in gold.”⁶ Another Mongolian work, the *Golden Rosary* (Mong. *Altan erike*), reports: “It is extremely marvellous that they wrote golden and silver letters that are like the

¹ HEISSIG 1979, 199–200.

² The only difference is the size of the manuscripts. The folios of the Golden Kanjur are sized 72×24.9 cm. The width of the folio published by Heissig is almost four cm smaller, while its original length is unknown.

³ For more detail about this manuscript collection, see: ALEKSEEV, TURANSKAYA 2013.

⁴ The circumstances surrounding the creation of Ligdan Khan’s edition have been repeatedly described in the literature on Mongolian studies. See, for example, KASIANENKO 1993, 18–13; HEISSIG 1957; 1962; TUYAI-A 2008, 278–297; USPENSKY, 1997, 113–114.

⁵ In the transcription of Mongolian text, “c” and “j” are given without diacritic. The following symbols are used for the Galik letters and editorial marks: <...>—glosses and interpolations, {...}—eliminations and corrections of the text, d’—ϕ, e’—τ, g’—ϛ, m’—ϙ, o’—ϛ, t’—ϛ.

⁶ baka-a ‘agyur-i mongyol kelen-e orciyulun altan-iyar bicibei: DHARM-A 1987, 148.

Sun and the Moon on the sky of paper that is like blue turquoise and illuminated the darkness of ignorance of sentient beings.”⁷

The Content

Heissig states that the Tibetan text belongs to the *Vinaya* section, finding it difficult to precisely attribute the Tibetan and Mongolian fragments. We were able to fill in this gap: the Mongolian text is a fragment from the ninth part (Mong. onol) of the Mongolian translation of the *Śrī-sarvabuddha-sama-yoga-dākinījāla-saṃbara-nāma-uttaratantra*.⁸ The Tibetan text is a fragment from the 32nd chapter (Tib. bam po) of the Tibetan translation of the *Vinayavastu* (Tib. ‘Dul ba gzhi).⁹ In the tables below, the correspondence of the Mongolian fragment transcribed by Heissig with the text of PK (Table 1) and of the Tibetan fragment with the Beijing block print of the Tibetan bKa’ ‘gyur (Table 2) are given.

⁷köke bidura metü çayasun-u oytaryui-dur naran saran metü altan mönggön üsügüd-i orosiγulun qubitan amitan-u mungqay-un qarangγui-yi geyigülün jokiyaysan yeke γayiqamsiy: NA-TA 1989, 114. Scholars have also repeatedly commented on the five “black” or plain copies written down together with the Golden Kanjur (see, for example, ELVERSKOG 2003, 211, n. 176; KOLLMAR-PAULENZ 2002, 159; USPENSKY 1997, 114), nevertheless the authors of this study are not acquainted with Mongolian historical records mentioning them. At present, we know the following “black” manuscript copies of the Ligdan Khan’s Kanjur: one volume preserved in Copenhagen (CK; on this volume, see: HEISSIG 1957; KOLLMAR-PAULENZ 2002, 162–165), the 113 volume collection kept at the St. Petersburg State University library (PK; see KASIANENKO 1993); the bulk of the 70-volume collection preserved at the National Library of Mongolia as the Kanjur (UBK); 109 volumes kept at the Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies of the Siberian Branch of the RAS (UUK); the Kanjur preserved at the Library of the Academy of Social Sciences of Inner Mongolia, China (HHK1).

⁸KASIANENKO 1993, No.7.

⁹Q, ‘Dulba, ge, 79b/4–80a/3.

Table 1

W. Heissig, Mong.	PK, Dandir-a, ka, 52a–66b
<p>(1) si //m//i vati. siri-y-a sovaq-a nom-un degeđü //d/. (2) kemebesü. küsegsen qamuy jiryalang-i öggügci bolai. <u>oom</u> (3) <u>tari tutdari turi sovaq-a</u>. nom-un mutur abasu ele (4) burqan-u bodi qutuy-i sayitur bütügekü ele bügesü. <u>busud</u> (5) qatud-i daki jayun¹⁰ ügületele. <u>drang bau-a tata tr-a</u> (6) <u>tr-a tr-a</u>. qamuy бүкү egerel-i tegüskegci nom-un ene (7) degeđü mutur kemebesü qamuy egerel-i tegüskegci bolai. (8) <u>siri vcir-a badm-a bata ba muge</u>¹¹ <u>jokisvar-a</u>¹² <u>qi qi qi</u> (9) <u>qi qi</u> nom-un degeđü mutur kemebesü. qamuy (10) yirtincüs-i sayitur //////////////// (11) bolai. ayalyu dayun-u öndür buqui¹³ kiged qoyulai-yin (12) egesig-i jasaju uriqui luy-a cay-tayan masi amurliysan (13) degeđüs-iyer. <u>qung</u> terigüten-ü dayun-i dayulayad. qamuy (14) ayalyus-iyar <u>ke</u> kü///seger. yambar-iyar edügülküi-<u>dür</u> (15) qotala dayun-iyar. <u>qung</u> kemekü dayun-u mutur iyar. (16) coy-tu vcir satu-a-yi sayitur bütügekü bolai. (17) qamuy ökin tn[gr]is-ün degeđü ökin tngri-yin qubcad (18) cimeg-ün yosuyar büjijü. gekele¹⁴ sađbala...</p>	<p>[60b] (subha g'a-a sda ma ha-a-a d'e' bi hiri: miri ridi:) niri řri ye' süva ha-a: nom-un <u>ene</u>¹⁵ degeđü mudur kemebesü: küsegsen qamuy jiryalang-i öggügci bolai: <u>o'm' d'a-a re'd'utd'd'a-a re' süva ha-a:</u> nom-un mudur abasu ele: burqan-u bodi qutuy-i: sayitur bütügekü ele bügesü: qatud-i daki yayun ügületele: <u>d'r-am' bha ba t'a-a t'a-a: d'r-a d'r-a t'a t'a <re' va></u>: qamuy <bükü> egerel-i tegüskegci nom-un ene degeđü mudur kemebesü: qamuy egerel-i tegüskegci bolai: <u>řri baj'ar bad'm-a bhata bha muk'a yo'gi řuvar-a hi hi hi hi hi</u> nom-un ene degeđü mudur kemebesü: qamuy yirtincüs-i sayitur ebdegeci buyu: nom-<un> mudur-i medekü bolai:: ayalyu dayun-u öndör boyoni kiged: qoyulai-yin egesig-i jasaju uriqui-luy-a cay-tayan masi amurliysan degeđüs-iyer: <u>huum'</u> terigüten-ü dayun-i dayulayad:: qamuy ayalyus-iyar <u>ke</u> küsegseger: yambar-iyar edügülküi-<u>tür</u> qotala dayun-iyar: <u>huum'</u> kemekü dayun-u mudur-iyar: coy-tu vcir satu-a-yi sayitur bütügekü bolai:: qamuy ökin tngri-ün degeđü ökin tngri-yin: qubcad cimeg-ün yosuyar büjijü: kakala sadbala (terigüten: qamuy dayun-i dayulaydaqui:)</p>

¹⁰ We ventured to correct some words in W. Heissig's transcription: *yayun*.

¹¹ *muka* = Tib. *mu kha*.

¹² *yogisvar-a*.

¹³ *boyoni*.

¹⁴ *kakala* = Tib. *ka ka la*.

¹⁵ Double underlining indicates variant readings.

Table 2

W. Heissig, Tib.	Q, 'Dul ba, ge, 79b/4–80a/3
<p>(1) 'das gsungs pa la mngon par dga' nas rjes su yi rang ste/ bcom ldan 'das kyi zhabs gnyis la mgo bos phyag byas nas...</p> <p>(2) ...(b)ka' 'stsal pa// dge slong dag skabs su bab bar bram ze pad ma'i snying po 'phya bar byed kyi/ de lta bas na yon sngo ba byed ba na/ dge slong ...</p> <p>(3) (b)com ldan 'das lo ma bdun bar byon nas/ lo ma bdun par sangs rgyas bzhi rnams kyi gdan zhes bya ba gong ma bzhin du rgyas par sby?...'</p> <p>(4) ...n nas/ 'char ka na gnas tsher ma chan gyi nags na bzhugs so/ ko sa la'i rgyal po gsal rgyal gyis dge slong ko'u ta ma ko sa la'i...</p> <p>(5) ...r ma can gyi nags na bzhugs so zhes thos so// thos nas kyang mi zhig la bsgo ba/ kwa 'e nang rje tshur khyod dge sbyong go'u ta ma gang na ba der...</p> <p>(6) ...g byos la gnod pa chung ngam/ nyam nga ba nyung ngam/</p>	<p>[79b/4] (de nas bram ze pad ma'i snying po bcom ldan)</p> <p>'das <u>kyis</u> gsungs pa la mngon par dga' nas rjes su yi rang ste/ bcom (5) ldan 'das kyi zhabs gnyis la mgo bos phyag byas nas bstan la slangs te song ngo/ de nas bcom ldan 'das kyi dge slong rnams la bka' 'stsal pa/ dge slong dag skabs su bab par bram ze pad ma'i snying po 'phya bar byed kyi/ de lta bas na (6) yon bsngo ba byed ba na dge slong gis bza' bar mi bya'o/ zan 'gal tshabs can du 'gyur ro/ bcom ldan 'das lo ma bdun par byon nas lo ma bdun par sangs rgyas bzhi rnams kyi gdan zhes bya ba gong ma bzhin du rgyas par sbyar ro// bcom ldan (7) 'das ko sa la'i ljongs rgyu zhing gshegs pa na 'char kar byon nas/ 'char ka na gnas tsher ma chan gyi nags na bzhugs so/ ko sa la'i rgyal po gsal rgyal gyis dge sbyong gau ta ma ko sa la'i ljongs rgyu zhing gshegs ba na 'char kang byon nas/ (8) 'char ka na gnas tsher ma can gyi nags na bzhugs so zhes thos so/ thos nas kyang mi zhig la bsgo ba/ kwa'i nang rde¹⁶ tshur khyod dge sbyong gau ta ma gang na ba der song la nga'i tshig 'di dag gis gau ta ma'i zhabs gnyis la mgo bos phyag byos la [80a/1] gnod pa chung ngam/ nyam nga ba nyung ngam/ 'tsho</p>

¹⁶ = rje.

<p>‘tsho ‘am bskyod pa yang ngam/ stobs dang bde ba la reg par spyod dam zhes snyung gsol...</p>	<p><i>‘am/ bskyod pa yang ngam/ stobs dang bde ba la reg par spyod dam zhes snyun gsol</i> la ‘di skad du kye she ldan gau ta ma ko sa la’i rgyal po gsal rgyal snga <i>bcom ldan ‘das la blta bar (2) mchi ‘tshal na/ shes ldan gau ta mas ‘di ltar snga nas thugs su chud par mdzad du gsol zhes kyang gsol</i> gcig/ lha bka’ bzhin ‘tshal zhes mi des ko sa la’i rgyal po gsal rgyal gyi <i>ltar mnyan nas/ bcom ldan ‘das gang na ba der song ste (3) phyi pa dang/ bcom ldan ‘das kyi zhabs gnyis la mgo bos phyag byas te/ phyogs</i> (cig tu ‘dug go/)</p>
<p>(7) ...(bco)m ldan ‘das la blta bar mchi ‘tshal na/ shes ldan go’u ta mas ‘di ltar snga nas thugs su chud par mdzad du gsol zhes kyang gso(1)...</p>	
<p>(8) ...ltar mnyan nas/ bcom ldan ‘das gang na ba der song ste phyi pa dang/ bcom ldan ‘das kyi zhabs gnyis la mgo bos phyag byas te phyogs...</p>	

At present, it is not possible to explain for certain why two essentially different canonical works were written on one folio in two different languages.

The second folio kept at the Herzog August Bibliothek under the same pressmark contains text only in Tibetan. Its size and appearance are similar to the “Tibeto-Mongolian” folio. Heissig identifies the text as a fragment of the canonical work *Āryā-avalokiteśvara-padmajāla-mūla-tantrarājānāma*.¹⁷

The History

These two manuscript folios are enclosed with a letter written in French, dated February 1, 1723, and addressed by Abbé Jean-Paul Bignon, a member of the French Academy of Sciences, to Peter the Great.

The history of the correspondence between Peter the Great and the French scholar in connection with certain Tibetan manuscripts from Siberia is well covered thanks to the scrupulous study by Ye. Kniazhetskaia.¹⁸ In 1720, Tibetan and Mongolian manuscripts were found on the site of the half-ruined monastery Ablai Keyid (also known as Ablait) on the River Irtysh and brought to St. Petersburg. The monastery had been built by the Khoshut

¹⁷ HEISSIG 1979, 208. The work is located in Q, rGyud, ba, 256a/1–310a/6.

¹⁸ KNIAZHETSKAIA 1989.

Ablai-tayiji in the mid-1650s, and consecrated by the Oirat Jay-a Pandita in 1657.¹⁹ It was abandoned after Ablai's defeat in 1671.²⁰

The manuscripts were found by the expedition that the Tsar sent to Siberia under the leadership of Ivan Likharev in search of gold. They are believed to have later become part of the collection of the Asiatic Museum, although it is not known which specific manuscripts in the Institute's collection these could be.²¹

In 1721, after the manuscripts were brought to St. Petersburg, Peter the Great's librarian, Johann Daniel Schumacher, took the best preserved folio to Europe in order to have its text translated. None of the European scholars whom the Tsar's librarian consulted could identify the language of the manuscript,²² and yet in 1722 Jean-Paul Bignon ventured to try and translate the text. The letter enclosed with the two manuscript folios preserved at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel was written by Bignon after the French scholars finished their work on deciphering the text.²³ It is remarkable, however, that the letter does not concern the Wolfenbüttel folios: it is written about a completely different folio of a Tibetan manuscript. The folio in question has been described and published by Margarita Vorobiova-Desiatovskaia (based on the print published by J.B. Menke in the 1720s),²⁴ who identified it as a fragment from the *Mahamantranudharani-sutra* (Tib. *gSang sngags chen po rjes su 'dzin pa'i mdo*). The Tibetan text is written on glossed black paper in silver ink. This type of expensive design, as well as the large size of the folio (*circa* 68.7×19.4 cm), suggests that the manuscript was produced primarily for ritual purposes. On the basis of an 18th century print, it is not possible to date the manuscript.²⁵

Obviously, the details of the correspondence between Jean-Paul Bignon and Peter the Great were unknown to Heissig as he conducted his study of the Wolfenbüttel folios, and he knew nothing of the existence of the Tibetan folio from the *Mahamantranudharani-sutra* published by Menke. In an attempt to explain the connection between the two folios preserved at the

¹⁹ RADNABHADRA 1999, 75.

²⁰ KNAZHETSKAIA 1989, 18–19.

²¹ SAZYKIN 1988, 10.

²² In particular, Schumacher consulted M. La Croze and J.B. Menke, and the latter published a print of the folio in his journal *Acta eruditorum*. See: KNAZHETSKAIA 1989, 22.

²³ The text of the letter in French was published by Heissig. See: HEISSIG 1979, 192–193. The content of the letter and the details of the whole correspondence are described in the paper by Kniazhetskaia. See: KNAZHETSKAIA 1989, 22–23.

²⁴ VOROBIOVA-DESIATOVSKAIA 1989.

²⁵ VOROBIOVA-DESIATOVSKAIA 1989, 37–38.

Herzog August Bibliothek and Bignon's letter, Heissig comes to the conclusion that the letter must concern the one folio written entirely in Tibetan.²⁶ Now that a great deal more information is available we are faced with an even more perplexing question: knowing that Bignon's letter concerns neither of the two folios described by W. Heissig, how can the presence of both items in the Wolfenbüttel library be explained? The question is partly answered by Heissig himself, who comments that the manuscript folios and the letter belonged to the German scholar Jacob Friedrich Reimmann (1668–1743). Reimmann acquired them from Andreas Ernst Stambke, who served as the Duke of Holstein's envoy at the court of Peter the Great in 1723–24. Only at that place and time could Stambke have come into possession of the folios and the letter.²⁷ Although the circumstances of this acquisition are not known, an important fact has been established: the two folios written in gold on black and blue paper, which Heissig called the first manuscripts of this sort ever brought to Germany, were in St. Petersburg in the early 1720s. This means that these folios come from Ablai Keyid, as at that time there were no Mongolian or Tibetan manuscripts of any other origin in the Russian capital.²⁸

Besides the two manuscript folios at the Herzog August Bibliothek, Heissig gives valuable information about another similar folio kept in Linköping, Sweden. Based on the photocopy of the folio fragment and the descriptions published by Heissig, it can be stated that the ductus of the Mongolian text, as well as the design of the folios from Wolfenbüttel and Linköping, are identical. The size of the Swedish folio is not given, half of the folio is torn off, and its text has not been attributed so far.²⁹

This manuscript folio was brought to Sweden by Johan Gustaf Renat—an officer of the Swedish king Charles XII's army, taken prisoner after the Battle of Poltava and sent to Siberia in 1711. In 1716, the expedition party of which he was part was ambushed by the Jungar, and Renat remained a captive in Jungaria until he returned to Sweden in 1734. Renat is famous as the author of the first maps of Jungaria, and the manuscript page preserved in Linköping (named *Codex Renatus* after its owner) is enclosed with two such maps. On one side of the folio there is a note in Russian saying that it came into Renat's possession in 1720.³⁰

²⁶ HEISSIG 1979, 208.

²⁷ HEISSIG 1979, 210.

²⁸ The next contribution to the manuscript collection of St. Petersburg was made by D.G. Messerschmidt in 1728. See: PUCHKOVSKII 1954, 92.

²⁹ HEISSIG 1979, 200, 203.

³⁰ HEISSIG 1979, 200–201.

So we have established the existence of two Mongolian manuscript folios of similar form and ductus. While it can be safely assumed that the folios from the Herzog August Bibliothek were found in Ablai Keyid, the origin of Codex Rensus is not entirely clear. It is established, however, that both folios were found in Jungaria and came into the possession of their European owners in the early 1720s.

The striking similarity that the folios in the Herzog August Bibliothek and Linköping display to the Golden Kanjur from Hohhot indicates that these manuscripts were probably written at the same time, as part of one “project.” Since, at the moment, we have no reasons to doubt that the “golden” manuscript collection kept in Hohhot is the Golden Kanjur of Ligdan Khan,³¹ we can assume that the other manuscript fragments were also written in 1629, after the translation and editing of the Mongolian Kanjur had been completed. The question of how some of these manuscripts got to Ablai Keyid has still to be answered, calling for a further study of other “golden” fragments on blue paper preserved in European collections.³² Another mystery that remains to be solved is the attribution of the folios to a specific text collection: although the fragments come from canonical texts, the presence of different text fragments in different languages on the same folio has yet to be explained.

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Abbreviations

AK: Golden manuscript Kanjur

CK: Volume of the manuscript Kanjur. Copenhagen

HHK1: Manuscript Kanjur. Academy of Social Sciences of Inner Mongolia

PK: Manuscript Kanjur. St. Petersburg State University Library

Q: bKa’ gyurpecin par ma

UBK: Manuscript Kanjur. National Library of Mongolia

UUK: Manuscript Kanjur Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies of the Siberian Branch of the RAS

³¹ ALEKSEEV, TURANSKAYA 2013, 777.

³² Similar folios are to be found at libraries of Berlin, Glasgow and London (HEISSIG 1998, 158).

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