

## RESEARCH NOTES

# The Past and Present State of the Saint Petersburg School of Classic Mongolology

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From the moment Oriental studies formed as an academic discipline in Russia, Mongolology has been one of its strongest and oldest fields. Mongol studies in this country date back to the time when the Russian Academy of Sciences was created by Peter the Great and they are associated with some of earliest academicians invited from abroad-Theophilus (Gottlieb) Siegfried Bayer (1694-1738) who included the first entry about the “Mungal language” in the *Transactions of the Academy*, and participants in imperial academic expeditions - Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt (1685-1735), Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705-1783) and Johann Eberhard Fischer (1697-1771). Sent off to Siberia and the Far East for scientific purposes, they managed to gather information about the Mongolic peoples living there and to bring written materials back to Saint Petersburg that later became the foundation of the Mongolian stocks of

the Asiatic Museum and today’s Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

In the 19th century, Mongol studies were enriched by the works of Isaak Jakob (Yakov Ivanovich) Schmidt (1779-1847) who, after publishing the first grammar of the Mongolian language as well as a number of sources translated into Russian and German, made a name for himself as the founder of the Russian academic school of Mongolology. In the decades that followed, this field of learning developed rapidly in Russia, and its school became foremost in the world thanks to ground-breaking works by Archimandrite Hyacinth (Nikita Bichurin, 1777-1853), Osip Kovalevsky (1800-1878), Alexander Popov (1808-1880), Archimandrite Palladius (Piotr Kafarov, 1817-1878), Vasily Vasilyev (1818-1900) and Konstantin Golstunsky (1831-1899). The traditions they established

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were continued in the 20th century by Alexei Pozdneyev (1851-1920), Vladislav Kotvich (1872-1944), Sergei Kozin (1879-1956), Boris Vladimirtsov (1884-1931), Nikolai Poppe (1897-1991) and a constellation of brilliant Buryat scholars - Gombozhab Tsybikov (1873-1930), Bazar Baradiin (1878-1937), Tsogto Badmazhapov (1879-1937) and Tsyben Zhamtsarano (1881-1942).

An important feature of Mongology in the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th was its university-based character. The first centre of university Mongol studies was the department of the Mongolian language established in 1833 at the University of Kazan. There, thanks to the expeditions and activities of Osip Kovalevsky, as well as other lecturers, it became possible to make use of the experience of practical Mongol studies accumulated over many years by the Russian Empire in Siberia, where the Mongolian language had been taught since 1724 under the auspices of the Ascension Monastery in Irkutsk.

With the establishment of the Faculty of Oriental Languages at Saint Petersburg Imperial University, the formation began of a field of learning that became known as *Classic Mongology*. In the early 20th century, the Asiatic Museum and Saint Petersburg University formed a united centre for Russian Oriental studies in the capital. Members of the faculty worked with manuscripts from the Asiatic Museum, describing, studying and translating them, while some of the museum staff taught at the university. Within Mongology, which had previously been considered an indivisible complex of knowledge about Mongolia,

specialist disciplines began to emerge at this time, focussing on the study of the history, literature, language and folklore of the Mongolic peoples.

After the October Revolution, the Faculty of Oriental Languages was reorganized to become the Central (Petrograd) Institute of Modern Oriental Languages, later the Leningrad Oriental Institute, that made its contribution to training Mongolists and maintaining the continuity of research in Mongology. Over the years, its graduates included such future staff members of the Institute of Oriental Studies as Georgy Rumiantsev (1903-1966), Vladimir Kazakevich (1896-1937), Leonid Puchkovsky (1899-1970) and Garma Sanzheyev (1902-1982). It also had Mongolian students, one of whom, Biambyn Rinchen (1905-1977), went on to become an academician.

With the formation in Leningrad in 1930, on the basis of the Asiatic Museum, of the Academy of Sciences Institute of Oriental Studies, a Mongolian Cabinet was created within it. In the pre-war period, it engaged in work in several fields: linguistic research, the publication and study of historical writings, literary studies. All these fields were provided with materials for their work from the stocks of the Asiatic Museum, as well as items collected by members of staff during expeditionary journeys to Mongolia and Buryatia in the 1930s. In 1933, a Mongology Association was created attached to the Mongolian Cabinet with the aim of consolidating all the country's efforts in Mongol studies. Written sources on the history of the Mongolic peoples were prepared for publication, including

the *Shara Tuji* chronicle (by Kazakevich). One of the main fields of activity for the Institute of Oriental Studies as a whole was compiling dictionaries, and in 1935 work began on compiling a large academic Mongolian-Russian dictionary that, as fate decreed, would only come out many years later, in 2001-02. The staff actively engaged in teaching work, participated in the activities of the Scholarly Committee of Mongolia and in work to latinize the writing systems of the Mongolic peoples. The repressions of the later 1930s thinned the ranks of the Mongolian Cabinet, while the postgraduate students from Mongolia, who included the future Academician Tsendiin Damdinsuren (1908-1986), were recalled to their homeland.

The Great Patriotic War of 1941-45 that forms a heroic chapter in the history of our country became a grave trial for the staff of the Institute of Oriental Studies, which was at that time entirely located in Leningrad. Yet even during the Siege, the Institute remained alive - a number of sessions were held at which the discussions included current issues in Mongol studies. In 1944, the Oriental Faculty was revived at Leningrad University, and Academician Sergei Kozin (1879-1956), who researched the *Gesera* and *The Secret History of the Mongols*, was appointed to be its dean.

After the war, the country's leadership gave Oriental studies fresh tasks that were primarily connected with safeguarding the state's political interests in the East. In 1950, the government took the decision to relocate the Institute of Oriental Studies to Moscow, and the majority of the staff made the move as well. Meanwhile, it was determined that

the extensive library and manuscript collection of the Asiatic Museum should remain in Leningrad. It was primarily to work with these stocks that in 1956 the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences was created. A major role in its organization was played by Iosif Abgarovich Orbeli (1887-1961), who determined the main vector of development for the Leningrad-Saint Petersburg school of classic Oriental studies for years ahead.

In the 1950s, the scholarly work of Leningrad Orientalists was, as before, based upon the study of written materials from the unique manuscript funds, the description of which had been allotted primary importance from the moment of the Asiatic Museum's foundation. Work on describing the items, making textological studies and commentaries on them rose to a qualitatively new level. The cataloguing of the Mongolian fund was carried out at that time by Leonid Puchkovsky, who published a description of those works with historical, administrative and legal content. The inconspicuous, but necessary work of stocktaking and preparation for scholarly descriptions was performed in the 1950s by Tamara Goregliad. Through efforts of Ilya Yorish (1904-?), the study of the history of Mongology in Russia acquired a systematic character. At this time, too, staff of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies laid the foundations for reference and bibliographical works that were published in the 1960s and 1970s and still remain relevant to this day.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Vladimir Uspensky took on the processing of the Mongolian and Tibetan funds of the Leningrad-Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. He also published a catalogue of the collection of Mongolian manuscripts and woodblock texts in the library of the Oriental Faculty of Saint Petersburg State University. The University's manuscript collection is notable for including the oldest complete set of the *Kanyur* Buddhist canon in the Mongolian language. The *Kangyur* was the object of many years' study by Zoya Kasyanenko (1925-2016), a member of the Department of Mongolian philology at the University who fostered more than one generation of experts on the Mongolian manuscript tradition.

The completion in the 1970s-90s of the cataloguing of the Mongolian fund at what would become the Academy of Sciences Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, the oldest and largest collection of Mongolian manuscripts and books outside of Mongolia and China, is associated with Alexei Sazykin (1943-2005), who published the results of his labours in the three-volume Catalogue (1988, 2001, 2003). He identified and brought into scholarly circulation some unique translated works of Mongolian literature and Buddhist texts - *The Tale of Choijid Dakini*, *On the Use of the Diamond Sutra* and others.

As the study of the funds has progressed, the contents of the unique manuscripts identified there have determined the subjects for Mongolists' research from the early 1960s right up to the present day. Prominent among them are the study of the mediaeval Mongolian

literary tradition, Buddhist canonical literature, dictionaries, didactic writings and travel notes. Mongolic literatures are also examined with regard to their connection with the Central Asian and Indian traditions.

The study of the manuscript tradition was not the only field in the work of the Mongolists at the Leningrad-Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. Boris Vladimirtsov, who is rightly regarded as the founder of the modern (Soviet) school of Mongol studies in this country, determined the main directions for the study of the history, language, writing system, literature, oral folk tradition, ethnography and so on. The authors of the first major collective work on the history of Mongolia (*Istoriia Mongol'skoi Narodnoi Respubliki*, 1954) included the Leningrad scholars Alexander Yakubovsky, Sanzhi Dylykov, Boris Pankratov and Nina Shastina. From 1963 to 2013, the Sector for Turkic and Mongol Studies was headed by the historian and archaeologist Sergei Kliashorny (1928-2014) who made a great contribution to the study of the genesis of the nomadic peoples of Eurasia.

The traditions established by Mongolists of earlier generations are presently being developed by the staff of the Central Asia Sector of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (as the Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies became in 2007).

Natalia Yakhontova studies writings in the Oirat literary language from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts and has published, among other things, an Oirat version of *The*

*Tale of Molon Toyin*, as well as an Oirat dictionary of poetic expressions whose author is considered to have been Zaya Pandita, the famed creator of the Oirat script. This research has revealed the direct link between the literary tradition adopted by the Mongols and Oirats through the Tibetan language and Sanskrit lexicons.

Irina Kulganek is drawn to Mongolian manuscripts in connection with her study of Mongolian oral folk tradition. Her many years of research into folklore, including songs and sayings, is founded chiefly on the field notes of early 20th-century ethnographers that are kept in the Orientalists' Archive in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts. The range of questions that Irina Kulganek and her student Dmitry Nosov are investigating relate to the genre characteristics of Mongolian folk literature and the distinctive feature of folk poetry.

The work of three young researchers is connected with the Mongolian manuscript fund. Natalia Yampolskaya is studying translations of canonical religious texts from Tibetan into Mongolian, Mongolian versions of the *Kangyur* and the Oirat "clear script". Anna Sizova is making an inventory of the bilingual Tibeto-Mongolian, Mongolian and Oirat texts, studying and publishing bilingual Tibeto-Mongolian writings from the stocks of the Institute. Anna Turanskaya's work focusses on translations of Tibetan didactic and poetic literature into Mongolian.

The historical aspect of Mongology is represented in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts by the works of Tatiana Skrynnikova, who researches questions in

political, social and cultural anthropology, nomadic studies, the traditional culture of the Mongolic peoples, their identification and ethnic consciousness.

Without exception, all the Mongolists at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts draw upon archival materials in their works and publish them.

One distinguishing feature of the formation of the Saint Petersburg school of classic Oriental studies for more than a century now remains the extremely close interaction between the Academy and University traditions. Now as before members of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts staff teach at Saint Petersburg State University, while lecturers from the Oriental Faculty work with manuscripts from the Institute.

The centre for Mongology at Saint Petersburg State University is the Department of Mongology and Tibetology, headed by Vladimir Uspensky. The department was created in 2008 on the basis of the Department of Mongolian Philology (headed for many years by the specialist in literary studies Liudmila Gerasimovich) and the Mongol studies course in the Department of the History of the Countries of the Far East (run by the historians Boris Melnichenko and Anton Popov).

At various times, the Department's faculty has included Dmitry Alexeyev, Taisia Burdukova, Bronislav Kuznetsov, Yevgeny Kuzmenkov and Badma Narmayev. Working there now are the philologist and literature specialist Maria Petrova and the Mongolist-Tibetologist specializing in manuscript culture Kirill Alexeyev.

Mongol studies are also represented in the State Hermitage's Department of the East (by Yulia Yelikhina), the Russian Academy of Sciences Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (the Kunstkamera) (by Dmitry Ivanov) and in the Saint Petersburg branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Science and Technology History (by Tatiana Yusupova and Alexander Andreyev).

Extremely rich collections assembled by generations of predecessors, long-standing traditions, accumulated experience and close ties with Mongolian colleagues provide the present-day representatives of the Saint Petersburg school of Oriental studies with superb opportunities to move ahead and accomplish their research projects.