

Introduction

Some General Remarks

The year 2016 marked the 300th anniversary of two landmarks in the history of Mongolian literature and Chinese philology. It was in January/February and May respectively of the year 1716 that the Mongolian version of the Tibetan epic of Geser (in Tibetan Gesar) Khan and the famous Kangxi Dictionary (*Kangxi zidian*) were published in Peking.¹

Although these two works bear no direct relationship to each other, they reflect the syncretic cultural outlook of the Manchu court and of the newly established Qing dynasty (1644–1911). The Kangxi emperor (r. 1662–1722), who sponsored both projects, was the first ruler of China to introduce a multilingual culture in the empire, with three languages, *viz.* Manchu, Chinese, and Mongolian being used for official purposes. Before the Qing, the Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty (1260–1367) had employed ‘sundry aliens’ (*semuren*) — mainly central and western Asian Muslims — in their administration of China, but the mediums used in official documents were usually a hybrid vernacular Chinese²

1 The date of the Mongolian version of 1716, the full title of which is *Arban jüg-ün ejen Geser qayan-u tuyujū orosiba* (*Story of King Geser, Lord of the Ten Quarters* (hereafter GK)), that is, the 10 regions of the world (see Section II, n. 15), is found in the colophon of the blockprint, ch. 7, 5a; that of the *Kangxi Dictionary* at the end of the Kangxi emperor’s preface to the dictionary. The importance of the former is that it is the first printed edition not only of the Mongolian version but of the Geser epos, and of the latter not the huge number of characters it contains (three quarters of which are of little or no use) but their classification under 214 ‘radicals’ — a system of classification still valid today. See W. Heissig, *Die Pekinger lamaistischen Blockdrucke in mongolischer Sprache. Materialien zur mongolischen Literaturgeschichte, Göttinger Asiat. Forschungen 2*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1954, 35–36 (35). Cf., however, below, n. 40.

2 That is, Early Mandarin influenced by Mongolian, many samples of which were published by Ed. Chavannes in *T’oung Pao* 5:1904, 357–447, 6:1905, 1–42; and 9:1908, 297–428. This language is described in M.A.K. Halliday, *The Language of the Chinese Secret History of the Mongols*, Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1959.

and Mongolian in 'Phags-pa script.³ With a few notable exceptions, the Mongol ruling elite was not interested in the language and culture of its subjects, relying mainly on interpreters and translators.⁴

The Manchus, on the other hand, had, from the start, a cultural affinity with the Mongols because their script was the Mongolian vertical script they had adopted with slight modifications early in the 17th century.⁵ Besides, Manchu and Mongolian, being both Altaic languages, have many grammatical features and lexical elements in common.⁶ Political ties between the two peoples became especially relevant at the time of the Manchu conquest of China and the fall of the Ming dynasty in the first half of the 17th century. Concurrent with the acquisition and refinement of the Mongol script under the two Manchu pre-dynastic rulers Nurhaci and Ambahai (r. 1616–26 and 1627–43) was their commission of translating from Chinese into Manchu and from Manchu into Mongolian the Basic (= Imperial) Annals (*benji*) of the three alien dynasties of China, *viz.* the Khitan Liao (907–1115), the Jurchen Chin (1115–1234) and the Mongol Yuan (1260–1367) of the *Standard Histories* (*zhengshi*). This major project was completed in 1631 and presented to the throne in 1644, the first year of the reign of the Shunzhi emperor (1644–61), first Manchu emperor of China.⁷ Two years before, under Nurhaci's son Abahai, the Tibetan version of the *Sutra of the Wise Man and the Fool* (*Do dzang-lun*), a famous collection of Buddhist stories, had been printed in its Mongolian version in Peking under the

3 On this script, devised by Khubilai Khan's (r. 1260–94) Tibetan adviser 'Phags-pa Lama (1235–80) in 1269, see G. Kara in P.T. Daniels and W. Bright, *The World's Writing Systems*, OUP, 1996, 437–41. Known also as the 'square script', 'Phags-pa's script, based on the Tibetan alphabet, is the world's first truly international alphabet.

4 See H. Franke, 'Could the Mongol Emperors Read and Write Chinese?', *Asia Major* 3:1953, 28–41; H. Franke and D. Twitchett, eds, *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368*, CUP, 1994, 560, 610, 624–27, and Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing, *New Essays on the History of the Yuan Dynasty* (in Chinese), Taipei, 1999, 323–84.

5 See Daniels and Bright, *op. cit.*, 550–54. Cf. A.W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912)*, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1943, 213, s.v. Dahai.

6 Manchu belongs to the Tungusic family of the Altaic languages and its correlation to Mongolian, a member of the Mongolic family, is still unclear. However, cf. G.D. Sanzheev, 'Mančžuro-mongol'skije jazkovie paralleli' ('Manchu-Mongolian Language Parallels') in the *Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Department of the Humanities*, 8–9: 1930, 601–26, 673–708; N. Poppe, *Introduction to Altaic Linguistics*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965, 161: 'The Mongolian influence on Manchu is so strong that a good knowledge of Mongolian is a prerequisite for successful study of Manchu'; Kyōko Maezono, *Verbbildungs-Suffixe in Mandschu und Mongolischen*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007 (esp. pp. 11, 173–75). See also W. Rozycki, *Mongol Elements in Manchu*, UAS 157, Bloomington: Indiana University RIFIAS, 1994.

7 The Mongolian translation (via Manchu) of the *Yuan History* (*Yuanshi*) was reprinted in one volume in Peking in 1987 (Dudang, Öljeitü et al., trans., *Dayiyuwan ulus-un teüke*). See the original 1664 introduction, *op. cit.*, 4–5.

title of the *Ocean of Stories* (*Üliger-ün dalai*).⁸ This rich collection of narratives and the Geser epic were to become the two most popular and widely read works among the Mongols in the following centuries.

In the late 16th century, the Mongols had undergone a so-called ‘second conversion’ to Tibetan Buddhism — the ‘first conversion’ being ascribed to Khubilai Khan who, as is known, favoured Buddhism and the Tibetan clergy. There is no evidence, however, that Khubilai himself was a true and devout Buddhist.⁹ It was the Altan Khan of the Tümed (r. 1542–82), one of the last rulers of the line of Genghis Khan (after the collapse of the Yuan dynasty in 1367) who, in 1577, formally converted to the Yellow Sect of Lamaism and installed the first Dalai Lama as head of the Buddhist Church in Tibet, conferring this title posthumously also to his two predecessors. Gradually, with the establishment of numerous monasteries and the spread of Buddhist teachings through itinerant monks and religious treatises, mostly printed in China, all the Mongols also converted to Lamaism. However, their native shamanism, mingled

8 See B. Laufer, ‘Skizze der mongolischen Literatur’, *Keleti Szemle* 8:1907, 223–24; W. Heissig, *Die Pekinger*, 33 (27). Cf. J.W. De Jong, *Buddha’s Word in China*, 28th George Ernest Morrison Lecture, The Australian National University, Canberra, 1968, 23–24, n.39. A complete translation of the *Üliger-ün dalai* (1644 ed.) is found in S. Frye, tr., *The Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* (*mdo bdzans blun*) or *The Ocean of Narratives* (*üliger-ün dalai*), Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, Dharamsala, 1981.

9 There is plenty of evidence that Khubilai protected and actively promoted Buddhism, Lamaism in particular, and for that he is recognised by Tibetan and Mongol historiography as ‘the wise Cakravarti King who turned the thousand golden wheels’, hence his main epithet of Sečen Qan or Wise King. Cakravartin is an old Indian term for an (ideal) enlightened monarch under whom the entire world enjoys peace and justice. Cf., for example, I.J. Schmidt, tr., *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen und ihres Fürstenhauses, verfasst von Sanang Ssetsen Chungtaidschi der Ordus*, St Petersburg, Leipzig, 1829, 118–19. However, Khubilai’s faith, and that of his court, was rather shallow and ‘rested, in addition to the necessity for political instruction [through the regular appointment of Tibetan advisers as National Preceptors–I.R.], on the influence of Tibetan medicine as practiced by the Tibetan monks, which proved more convincing to the Mongols than the shamans’ prayers for health and on the greater magical effectiveness of Tantric magic. Marco Polo reported that the monks of the Red Sect of Lamaism at the court of Khubilai vied with each other at feats of magic. Until the early 14th century, they were also competing in this field with the court shamans’. See W. Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, tr. G. Samuel, London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, 24; Franke and Twitchett, eds, *op. cit.*, 457–62, 471–73. Tibet, as a subject and ally, had become part of the Mongol empire only a few years before Khubilai’s self-enthronement; however, it was chronically divided by religious — largely monastic — rivalry and sectarian conflict. One of the main reasons for Khubilai’s interest in Tibetan affairs was the internal pacification of this important border country and control over its troublesome people. This by no means easy task he tried to achieve by supporting the lamas of the leading Saskya sect, whose representative at the Mongol court in Ta-tu (Peking) was always a Saskya monk, like the earlier mentioned Phags-pa (see above, n. 3), Khubilai’s first National Preceptor (*guoshi*). Cf. T.-T. Li, *The Historical Status of Tibet*, New York: King’s Crown Press, Columbia University, 1956, 18–23; L. Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols. The Yüan–Sa–skeya Period of Tibetan History*, Rome: Is.M.E.O., 1990, *passim*.

with the new faith, continued to be practised until modern times in the daily life of the population at large as a 'folk religion', alongside the formal Buddhist teaching of the monastic establishments.¹⁰

The folk religion of most people, besides the worship and appeasement of powerful deities representing forces of nature, also includes the cult of deified heroes and superhuman beings whose protection and help are sought on special occasions. This too applies to the Mongols of Mongolia, as well as to those who settled in north China — that is, the present-day Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region — from the 15th century on.¹¹ After the 'pacification' of Tibet in 1720, two years before the Kangxi emperor's death, and the submission of the northern (Khalkha) and western (Oirat) Mongols in 1691 and 1750 respectively, the Manchus, by the middle of the 18th century, had achieved their aim, although the resulting peace along the border remained unstable.¹² Furthermore, the Treaty of Kyakhta with Russia in 1727 had sanctioned Qing control over both Inner and Outer Mongolia.

In this period, the spread of Buddhism and of the Lamaist-influenced folk religion continued unabated, the former finding expression chiefly in the construction of well-endowed monasteries, and intense translation activity in cities such as Peking and Köke Qota,¹³ resulting in the large-scale printing of sutras in Mongolian and Tibetan.¹⁴ Folk religion, also largely spread among the Mongols of Inner Mongolia, had its 'centres' in the numerous shrines consecrated, among others, to the cult of a number of deities in the form of armed heroes on horseback whose main role was to protect the welfare of men, in particular by safeguarding their health and the herds of horses, guarding them from misfortune, ensuring good hunting and increasing their possessions, as well as assisting them in

10 See Heissig, *op. cit.*, 26ff. *et passim*; C.R. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968–26ff.

11 The modern region (est. 1947) of north China comprising the former provinces of Suiyuan, Chahar, Rehe (Jehol), Liaobei, and Xing'an, as well as the northern parts of Gansu and Ningxia. For the establishment of Mongol tribes south of the Gobi and their political separation from the Mongols north of the Gobi, leading to the creation of Outer (predominantly Khalkha) Mongolia and Inner (or Southern) Mongolia, see Bawden, *op. cit.*, ch. 2.

12 See L. Petech, *China and Tibet in the Early 18th Century: History of the Establishment of Chinese Protectorate in Tibet, T'oung Pao Monographie I*, Leiden: Brill, 1950; Li, *op. cit.*, ch. 3; Bawden, *op. cit.*, chs 2 and 3.

13 That is, present-day Huhhot ('Blue City'), the capital of Inner Mongolia built by Altan Khan, 'the first permanent Mongol city of modern times' (Bawden, *op. cit.*, 25).

14 See Heissig, *Die Peking* and, by the same author, *Die Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung der Mongolen, 1: 16–18 Jahrhundert, Asiat. Forschungen 5*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965; Bawden, *op. cit.*, 35–37.

times of warfare. One of the three major ‘equestrian deities’ worshipped by the Mongols with invocations and prayers, incense offerings, and other ritual acts was Geser Khan.¹⁵

Later in the Qing period, the cult of Geser Khan was associated with that of Guandi, the Chinese God of War, who was none other than Guan Yu (d. AD 219 or 220), the famous hero of the wars of the Three Kingdoms in the 3rd century AD, ennobled in the 12th century, then made a god in 1594 under emperor Shengzong (Wanli) of the Ming dynasty. This cultural assimilation of a ‘Mongolised’ Tibetan epic hero to a Chinese deified folk hero is an interesting phenomenon of acculturation in the folk religion and state cult of the Mongols and the Chinese through a Tibetan–Manchu medium, and has been discussed in detail by W. Heissig and others.¹⁶

One factor that fostered the fusion of the two martial deities was, undoubtedly, the fictionalised accounts of the *gesta* of the historical Guan Yu that made him one of the most popular figures in Chinese lore for his military prowess, courage, and unswerving loyalty. He was immortalised by Luo Guanzhong of the late Yuan – early Ming in his renowned *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguozhi tongsu yanyi*).¹⁷ It is no coincidence that the Chinese title, as printed neatly on each folio of *Arban жүг-үн ежен Geser qayan-u tuyuji orosiba* (*Story of King Geser, Lord of the Ten Quarters* (hereafter GK)), is *Sanguozhi* — an abbreviation of its full title. G. Roerich is, undoubtedly, right in surmising that an elegant blockprint edition of a popular Mongolian epic such as GK was part of the Manchus’ policy of friendship towards the Mongolian people.¹⁸ However, the addition of the title of a well-known Chinese romance

15 See Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, 93–101.

16 *Ibid.*, 99ff.

17 The original Ming edition of the Hongzhi period (1488–1505) in 24 *juan* was first published in photo-reproduction by the Commercial Press, Shanghai, in 1929. A 24-*juan* edition of the *Romance* was translated into Manchu and printed in 1650. For a specimen of the printed Mongolian translation of the *Romance* see A. Pozdnev, ed., *Mongol'skaja kbstomatija dlja pervonachal'nago prepodavanija*, St Petersburg, 1900, 321–43. Cf. Heissig, *op. cit.*, 99, and H. Walravens, *Chinesische und manjurische Handschriften und seltene Drucke Teil 8: Mandchurische Handschriften und Drucke im Bestand der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 2014, no. 59 (pp. 137–39). As in the case of the Manchu translation of the Liao, Jin, and Yuan Imperial Annals, the Mongolian version of the *Romance* was done from the Manchu, not from the Chinese.

18 See Heissig, *op. cit.*, 99, 125, n. 387. Cf. R.A. Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar dans sa version lamaïque de Ling*, Paris: PUF, 1956, Introduction, 1: ‘En mongol, une seule version imprimée, publiée à Pékin en 1716, doit son existence au souci de la dynastie mandchoue de se ménager les Tibétains et les Mongols en adoptant le héros Gesar comme dieu tutélaire de la dynastie et en l’assimilant au dieu chinois de la guerre, Kouan-ti’.

extolling the personality and deeds of a native folk hero who by 1716 had been (for well over a century!) elevated to the rank of God of War, indicates more than a general similitude between two epic novels, one Mongolian of Tibetan origin, the other Chinese. It alludes and preludes, in my opinion, to a strong correlation between the two main heroes, *viz.* Geser Khan, Lord of the Ten Quarters, and Guandi, God of War, destined eventually to be fused into a single entity, Vaiśravaṇa, the Lamaist god ICam-sring, a warrior deity and guardian of wealth.¹⁹ This process of assimilation, which is of common occurrence with the gods and goddesses of ancient civilisations (Indo-Iranian, Greco-Roman, etc.), took its time, and it was not completed until the middle of the 19th century, by which time Guandi and Geser Khan were equated in worship in temples scattered throughout the Qing empire, with Guandi — hence Geser — well established as the tutelary deity of the dynasty. Some cities, such as Uliasutai in west central Mongolia, became famous for their temple of Geser Khan. It must be said, however, that matters of Lamaist theology and state cult were not of much concern to the population in general. Heissig writes:

For the Mongolian people on the other hand, Geser Khan remained the equestrian warrior-god, with traits taken from the folk epic. The syncretic arrangements remained without deeper effect. Occasionally, it is true, the title of a copy of an older Geser Khan prayer would now give the name of Kuan-ti in place of that of Geser Khan, without otherwise altering the previous wording; the Mongols regarded the Kuan-ti statues in the temples of the Manchu state god and god of war as representations of their beloved hero Geser Khan ... In his role of protective deity of the Mongols, guarding against harm to the flocks, from weather and from illness, the Geser Khan of the Mongolian Geser Khan epic continued to be worshipped up until the 1930s, at least among the East Mongolian tribes ... The Geser Khan epic was widely distributed in many impressions from the 1716 blockprint edition and in beautiful manuscripts agreeing with the printed version. On

19 That is, the Mongolian Bisman Tngri; this god is a late Mongol adoption from the Buddhist pantheon. See Heissig, *op. cit.*, Index, s.vv. Bisman Tngri and Vaiśravaṇa. When in the early 19th century Guandi was included into the Lamaist pantheon by the Lamaist Church, Guandi was equated with Vaiśravaṇa with whom Geser Khan had already been identified in Tibet. See *ibid.*, 100. The ancient Indian god Vaiśravaṇa was originally a king of evil spirits who became a god of wealth (like the Roman Pluto) and, as one of the four Mahārājas, he is a guardian at the entrance of Buddhist temples. See W.E. Soothill and L. Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index*, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1937, 306a–b.

occasions of illness, threatening danger and sickness in the herds, parts of the epic were recited by Lamaist monks. The texts of the epic were treated with great respect, and had always to be kept in a horizontal position in a 'pure' place, in order not to anger Geser Khan.²⁰

The Tibetan Epic of King Gesar

The epic cycle of King Gesar (*ge sar rgyal po* in Tibetan)²¹ is the national epos of Tibet and one of the great epics of the world's oral literature. Sung by itinerant bards in poetry or in a mixture of prose and poetry in Tibet, and in several neighbouring countries of Central Asia and northern India over many centuries, the epic was continually enriched and diversified, and its various versions were recorded in writing. Manuscript copies proliferated until printed editions finally appeared in recent times.

Having gained Baltistan and Ladakh in the southwest, the epic penetrated into Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. Tibetan bards also spread it among the Sino-Tibetan tribes of western Yunnan. In the northeast, through China (Inner Mongolia) and Mongolia, it reached Manchuria and Siberia, where, with the *Janggar*, it became a favourite Buriat epic. In the north and northwest, it reached the Uighurs and the Oirat Mongols. We have long and short versions, in Tibetan and its dialects as well as in Mongolian, Buriat, and Kalmyk. It is still sung and expanded today in Inner Mongolia, one of the latest version by the great contemporary bard Pajai (1902–62) being many tens of thousands

20 See Heissig, *op. cit.*, 101. Cf. also V. Veit. 'Some marginal notes on Geser Khan in Mongol tradition', in K. Kollmar-Paulenz, C. Peter, eds, *Tractata Tibetica et Mongolica. Festschrift für Klaus Sagaster zum 65. Geburtstag, Asiat. Forschungen* 145, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002, 299–304.

21 The name of the epic's hero, Gesar, is not Tibetan but the transcription of the Greek title *kaisar* 'king, emperor', which became known to the Tibetans through the intermediary of the Turks of Central Asia in the 9th and 10th centuries. Always, according to R.A. Stein, the fuller name designation of 'Gesar of Khrom (or better Phrom)' of the Tibetan epic 'represents Früm, an Iranian form of the name Rüm that is Eastern Rome (Byzance) and Turkish Anatolia'. See the English Introduction to *The Epic of Gesar* published by Kunzang Tobgyel, vol. 1, Thimphu, Bhutan: Jayed Press, 1979, 19; R.-A. Stein, *Recherches sur l'épopée et le barde au Tibet*, Paris: PUF, 1959, 279–99. Stein, *loc. cit.*, also connects the name-title of Kaisar/Gesar with the Indian notion of *cakravatin*, that is, of a world's monarch who establishes justice and peace, and the related concepts of subduer of enemies, leader of armies, master of wealth, protector-king, etc., inherited from ancient legends and myths concerning the great conquerors and rulers of the past (Alexander, Aśoka, Kaṇiṣka) later grafted to the figure and mission of the legendary Gesar. Blending these heterogeneous elements borrowed from local folklore with Lamaist culture was the work — the 'singing and narrating' — of centuries in different localities, making use of both the oral medium and the written (= manuscript) tradition handed down by professional bards.

of verses long. Here lies, of course, the difference between the cycle of Gesar/Geser and the great Indian and Greek epics, the former being still productive and open to additions and variations, while the latter are static, immutable and fixed in time.

Manuscripts of the numerous Tibetan oral versions are scattered in libraries and private collections all over the world and some of these have been published. Of the printed versions, one should mention the three-volume edition known as the Ling blockprint (from Gling-chang, the place of publication)²² of the second half of the 19th century; the Gyangtze blockprint in 10 chapters, undated but compiled (not printed) before the beginning of the 18th century;²³ and the long Bhutanese version, published in Thimphu by Kunzang Tobgyel (1979).²⁴ A Chinese compilation containing all the Tibetan versions is being prepared.²⁵

Except perhaps for one, Tibetan printed editions are comparatively modern. Thus, the earliest dated printed edition of the epic is actually the Mongolian version of 1716, issued in Peking, which will be discussed further on in more detail.

No single manuscript or printed edition contains the entire text of the Tibetan saga that may ultimately consist of 29 chapters altogether.²⁶ They usually contain a single chapter, the one that the bards learned and sang, that is their individual repertory. Some were more popular than others (as with the arias of Western operas), and the listeners also

22 Present-day Lingchang in eastern Tibet. This was the old kingdom of Khams established between the towns of Jyekundo and Dajianlu where Gesar, according to a local (and widely accepted) tradition, is deemed to hail from, although other areas of Tibet claimed this honour. Therefore, Gesar is often referred to as 'Gesar of Ling', usually followed by several other glorifying epithets such as Best of Beings, Jewel, and Conqueror of Enemies. A shortened French translation of the Ling blockprint edition, preceded by an important introduction is found in Stein, *L'épopée*. In *Recherches* the same author gives a critical list of the extant oral and written (manuscripts, blockprints, and books) versions of the Gesar epic in Tibetan and Mongolian (56–106).

23 See Stein, *Recherches*, 67–71.

24 See above, n. 21. There are also xylographs of individual chapters and prayers or invocations to Gesar, all listed by Stein.

25 See L. Harvilahti, 'Epos and National Identity: Transformations and Incarnations', *Oral Tradition* (Peking) 11: 1996, 42.

26 The number of chapters has progressively changed over the years. The Chinese compilation (see above, n. 25) divides the *corpus gesaricus* of Tibetan versions into 29 chapters. Cf. *Recherches*, 43–55, which gives a maximum total of 25 chapters, which corresponds to the number given by Zamcarano for the longest Mongolian version known, but unfortunately lost.

learned them by heart, and this till not long ago. The ‘stories’ of Gesar and his legendary feats were recited often to the accompaniment of a ‘horse-head fiddle’ or a drum with bells according to the circumstances.²⁷

The story of Gesar is the following, as one can extrapolate it from the Tibetan versions, which, we must emphasise, vary a good deal among themselves not only in the details but also in the presence or absence of religious, that is Buddhist, motifs and the like. At the beginning — as a prelude — the world was in a state of chaos, dominated by violent rulers assisted by demons and evil spirits. Tibet is the centre of the world. The legend relates how the country is converted to Buddhism by the great teacher Padmasambhava, and how the latter convokes an assembly of the gods and Buddhas to avert the danger of the destruction of religion on earth posed by a woman who vows to be reborn as a devil. Her curse would, in fact, materialise with the birth of the three Hor demon-kings, sworn enemies of Buddhism. Hence the assembly’s decision to send one of the gods, the future King Gesar, down to earth to destroy the demon-kings and their kingdoms, protect the dharma, and become lord of the world.

The designated god is, thus, miraculously born on earth.²⁸ He is ugly and gauche, and is named Joro.²⁹ However, as a divine incarnation, he is endowed with magical powers. Thanks to these powers, he establishes himself, eventually winning a race against many odds, the prize of which is the throne of Ling. As king, Joro drops his ordinary name and becomes Gesar. His first wife is ‘Brug-mo. He has also a vile old uncle called Khro-thung who hates him and tries to kill him and possess his wife. King Gesar now embarks on his divine mission, the first task of which is to destroy the enemies of Buddhism, the evil rulers and the powerful demons. He begins his campaign by going to China where the emperor’s wife is a Buddhism-hating demon. He also has problems with the emperor’s five daughters, who are all incarnations of the goddess Tārā. With his magic power, he overcomes all his enemies in that land and restores Buddhism. Next, and through several colourful adventures

27 The distinction between professional bards, often performing in temples, and itinerant and amateur ones, as well as the different types and styles of the recitals (with musical accompaniment and without), the dress of the bards and the religious character of the same, the events (marriages, festivals, etc.) requiring these performances, and many other matters concerning them are discussed in ch. 7 of *Recherches*. For the characteristic fiddle of Mongolian origin, see *op.cit.*, 379.

28 Different versions give different accounts on how Gesar was born and who his mother and father were.

29 Meaning ‘bastard, natural son’. According to one version, he was the son of a slave and the king of Ling.

and reverses, Gesar destroys the three kings of Hor, incarnations of the woman who had made the vow to suppress Buddhism in Tibet. There follow more conquests and submissions of kings and kingdoms in the south, in Iran, in Mongolia and further north. Gesar is also interested in the quest for precious stones, pearls, and exotic and rare objects. It is in search of these that he travels to Kashmir and beyond India. He goes to Nepal and obtains its submission too. After a further quest for a precious 'pearl with nine eyes', crowned with success, Gesar descends to Hell to rescue his mother.

The above résumé is only a brief excursus of the main episodes; it is by no means complete even within the confines of the Tibetan corpus and does not include the many episodes described in the Mongolian version, which are not found in any other version. For further details, the reader is directed to the lists of events and the analysis of the same provided by the late Professor R. Stein.³⁰

As for the translations of the Tibetan Gesar epos into Western languages, they are all partial versions as no translation of the 'entire' epic is possible at this stage because of the sheer size of what has been handed down and the fact that some chapters are apparently lost, most likely forever.³¹

The abridged French translation of the three volumes (out of nine) of the Ling blockprint edition has already been mentioned.³²

In German, there are three versions of Gesar stories recited mostly in the Ladakhi dialect, and collected and translated by A.H. Francke, a prolific Gesar scholar and author of several important studies on the subject.³³ His major work on the Lower Ladhakhi version has also appeared in English.³⁴

A version of the epic from Amdo in northeastern Tibet (Qinghai) was translated into German by M. Hermanns.³⁵

30 *Recherches*, 42–55. Cf. also the numerous references to the various episodes in the Tibetan and other versions — especially the Mongolian ones — in ch. 10. The volume of *Recherches* is still the most valuable tool and guide for the study of all the aspects of the Gesar epic.

31 Stein, *Recherches*, 43, 45; *L'épopée*, 2–3, 5.

32 See above, n. 22.

33 See Stein, *Recherches*, 12–14, 56–57.

34 A.H. Francke, *A Lower Ladakhi Version of the Kesar Saga. Bibliotheca Indica 1543*, Calcutta, 1941. Cf. Stein, *Recherches*, 13.

35 M. Hermanns, tr., *Das National-Epos der Tibeter Gling König Ge Sar*, Regensburg: J. Habel Verlag, 1965. Hermanns claims that the Gesar epic pre-dates Buddhism in Tibet and is a product of the nomadic culture of northeastern Tibet.

In English, the 1933 translation by A. David-Neel and the Lama Yongden (originally published in French) made the Tibetan epic known to the English-speaking public.³⁶ It was revised and reissued in 1959, with an informative introduction (34 pages). The translation (some 225 pages) is a summarised mixture of several Gesar stories collected in eastern Tibet and presented in narrative form.³⁷

The Tibetan cycle of Gesar is, of course, referred to in the many works — books and articles — on the Mongolian version of the epic to which we shall now turn.

The Mongolian Epic of Geser Khan

The seven books or chapters (*bölög*) of the 1716 Mongolian blockprint are regarded as the *editio princeps* of the epic; but it is not only the first printed edition, it is also the text edition first reprinted in Europe and translated into a Western language.³⁸ The merit for this remarkable achievement for its time goes to the Dutch scholar I.J. Schmidt (1779–1847), well-known author of the first scientific grammar of Written Mongolian and the first Mongolian dictionary, and the translator of the New Testament into Mongolian (Kalmyk and literary) and of Sayang Sečen's chronicle *Erdeni-yin tobči* (*Precious Summary*) from the Mongolian into German.

36 A. David-Neel and the Lama Yongden, *The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling*, translated with the collaboration of V. Sydney, London: Rider & Company, 1933, rev. ed., 1959.

37 For a critical appraisal see Stein, *Recherches*, 57–58. For a more scholarly English translation of a few chapters of a Tibetan version see R. Brooks Kornman, *A Comparative Study of a Buddhist Version of the Epic of Gesar of Ling*, PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1994, Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1997.

38 I.J. Schmidt, ed., *Die Thaten des Vertilgers der zehn Übel in den zehn Gegenden des verdienstvollen Helden Bogda Gesser Chan; eine mongolische Heldensage, nach einem in Peking gedruckten Exemplare aufs Neue abgedruckt unter der Aufsicht des Akademikers I.J. Schmidt*, St Petersburg: Kaiserl. Akad. der Wiss., 1836, repr. Osnabrück: O. Zeller, 1965 (Mongolian text); I.J. Schmidt, tr., *Die Thaten Bogda Gesser Chan's, des Vertilgers der Wurzel der zehn Übel in den zehn Gegenden. Eine ostasiatische Heldensage aus dem mongolischen übersetzt*, St Petersburg: Kaiserl. Akad. der Wiss., 1839, repr. Berlin: Auriga, 1925, and Osnabrück: O. Zeller, 1966 (translation). See H. Walravens, *Isaac Jakob Schmidt (1779–1847). Leben und Werk des Pioniers der mongolischen und tibetischen Studien. Eine Dokumentation, Abb. für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 56, 1, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005, 63–69, nos 48, 49. See also his other contributions to Mongolian and Tibetan studies cited in the volume.

About 100 years after the publication of Schmidt's translation of GK, the Russian Mongolist S.A. Kozin published his translation of the same text. Although he corrects some faulty renderings of Schmidt, his overall translation is not as good as the former's.³⁹

The Mongolian text of the 1716 blockprint⁴⁰ is written in a language that is different in many respects from written Mongolian and betrays a southern, that is, Inner Mongolian, dialect of the 17th–18th centuries. This was first pointed out in 1926 by N. Poppe, who, after a thorough analysis of its grammatical features, came to the conclusion that 'the language of the Gesserkhan is a mixture of a South Mongolian dialect and the literary language'.⁴¹ We are dealing, it seems, with a dialect close to the Ordos and Üjümüčin dialects as well as to Monguor, which tally with the tradition that the Mongol saga of Geser originates from the area of Qinghai (Kokonor and western Gansu) among the Mongol-speaking ethnic groups who had settled there.⁴² Thus while the cradle of the story is northeastern Tibet, when spreading north and northeast beyond the Tibetan cultural domain it acquired a Mongol character and a life of its own, retaining at the same time the main thematic features

39 S.A. Kozin, tr., *Geseriada. Skazanie o milostivom Geser Mergen-Khane iskorenitele desjati zol v desjati stranakh sveta*, Moscow-Leningrad: Izd. Akad. Nauk SSSR, 1935. See N. Poppe, 'Stand und Aufgaben der Mongolistik', *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 100:1950, 82–83.

40 The blockprint consists of 177 folios divided into seven books or chapters (52+5+12+27+60+7+5=177) with 25 lines of text per page, hence 50 in each folio. Except for ch. 1, 2a, which has only 19 lines. Each chapter is individually numbered in both Mongolian and Chinese. (The Chinese title *Sanguo zhi* on each page has already been discussed). The size of the blockprint is 56x18cm (text: 46x13cm). There are illustrations on the first page on both sides of the text, which has only eight lines, representing on the left the god Qormusda on an elephant with two attendants, on the right Geser Khan on a horse with two warriors. On the last page there is the image of a group of four personages (Geser, Jasa Šikir, and two others) each with two attendants. The colophon on ch. 7, 5a, gives the date corresponding to 'an auspicious day of the first month' (24 January – 22 February) 1716 preceded by a title of the work longer than the one on the first page (see above, n. 1). See Stein, *Recherches*, 75–76, 104, n. 92.

41 Poppe's masterful article on the language of GK, 'Geseric. Untersuchung der sprachlichen Eigen-tümlichkeiten der mongolischen Version des Gesserkhan', appeared in *Asia Major* 3: 1926, 1–32 and 167–93. The passage cited is on page 192. See also below, n. 42f.

42 Cf. G. Kara, *Chants d'un barde mongol*, *Bibl. Orient. Hung.* 12, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1970, 208–209. For the language peculiarities of GK, see also H.-P. Vietze, 'Zur Sprache der Pekinger Version der Geser-Sage', in W. Heissig, ed., *Fragen der mongolischen Heldendichtung*, III: Vorträge des 4. Epensymposiums des Sonderforschungsbereichs 12, Bonn, 1982, *Asiat. Forschungen* 91, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985, 549–54. Vietze also agrees with the southwestern nature of the Mongolian dialect of the GK. As is known, A. Bobrovnikov's *Grammatika mongol'sko-kalmyckago jazyka* (Kazan', 1849) describes the language of the GK in the mistaken belief that it was literary Mongolian.

and *dramatis personae* of the Tibetan cycle.⁴³ In short, we are dealing with a Mongolian *rifacimento* (with many additional episodes) of a Tibetan epic that has its roots in that country's Lamaist culture. Nevertheless, the discovery of some fragments of manuscripts concerning the Mongol epic and two complete texts (an incense offering and a prayer to Geser), all dating from the beginning of the 17th century, indicate beyond doubt that our hero and his deeds were known to the Mongols at least a century before the Peking blockprint edition.⁴⁴ One may, indeed, postulate that the beginning of the elaboration of the Mongolian Geser cycle coincides broadly with the second conversion of the Mongols to Buddhism, that is, the end of the 16th century.

So far, we have dealt with the Peking blockprint edition in seven chapters. We do not know the circumstances of its composition, but the printed text of 1716 no doubt rests on an oral tradition. We have, in fact, various manuscripts, that is, manuscript copies, of the Geser stories in GK with interesting variants, but all more or less contemporary with GK, although some scholars claim that the original of one of them goes back to the first half of the 17th century.⁴⁵ Several of these manuscript copies have been described by Stein, who also reviews Oirat and Buriat versions of the epic.⁴⁶ The investigation and publication of these manuscripts in the Soviet Union, Mongolia, and China in the second half of the 20th century led to further research on the Geser epic in various other countries, such as Germany and Hungary, resulting in the

43 See Ts. Damdinsuren, 'On the new edition of the Mongolian version "Geseriada"', in W. Heissig, ed., *op. cit.*, 593–99; L. Ligeti, 'Un épisode d'origine chinoise du "Geser-qan"', *Acta Orientalia Hung.* 1: 1950, 340–43; C. Damdinsuren, 'Explanation of some personal names in Mongolian epos about Geser', in W. Heissig, *Fragen der mongolisch Heldendichtung*, IV: Vorträge des 5. Epensymposiums des Sonderforschungsbereichs 12, Bonn 1985, *Asiat. Forschungen* 101, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987, 375–80.

44 See Kara, *Chants*, 209; E. Chiodo, *The Mongolian Manuscripts on Birch Bark from Xarboxyn Balgas in the Collection of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences*, Part 1, *Asiat. Forschungen* 137, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000, 148–49 and 164–68 (mss. XBM 66 & XBM 73). Cf. W. Heissig, 'Zu einigen Textvarianten des mongolischen Geser-Rauchopfers', in K. Kollmar-Paulenz, C. Peter, eds, *Tractata Tibetica et Mongolica*, 103–18.

45 This is the so-called Nomči Qatun's version of GK, which was published for the first time in two volumes in Ulan Bator in 1960 (*Corpus Scriptorum Mongolorum* 9, fasc. 4 and 4a), together with the Caya version (*CSM* 9, fasc. 2 and 2a). See below, nn. 47 and 49. Although in many respects superior to the 1716 edition, and therefore of great help in reading GK, these two manuscript copies are roughly contemporary with the former. See C. Damdinsuren, *Istoričeskije korni Geseriady*, Moscow: Izd. ANSSSR, 1957, 61ff. (note, however, that on page 56, D. mentions a Mongol tradition according to which GK was first recorded about 1630 by five Oirat bards of the Kokonor region) and by the same author, 'On the new edition', 598–99; cf. Kara, *Chants*, 209 and n. 379; U. Secenmunkh, *Issledovanie pis'mennogo mongol'skogo eposa o Gesere*, St Petersburg, 2004, 142, 233; and Heissig, 'Zu einigen Textvarianten', 104.

46 Stein, *Recherches*, 60ff., 92ff.

identification of several more chapters of the epic previously unknown. In 1927, N. Poppe had announced the discovery of seven 'new' chapters, representing chapters 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15, as the continuation of GK. In the early 1950s, W. Heissig found, in Belgium, two more songs corresponding to chapters 8, 9, and 10. In 1956, an important Chinese edition of the epic was published in two volumes, the first one containing the text of GK, and the second that of six additional chapters (8–13), which, according to Heissig, actually correspond to chapters 8, 9, 10a, 10b, 11, 13, 14, and 16/17. In 1960, in the series *Corpus scriptorum mongolorum* (CSM) of the MPR Academy of Sciences, several manuscript copies of Mongolian versions of the epic (some just variants of GK) and an Oirat version were published in facsimile under the editorship of B. Rintchen. The interrelation between the 'old' seven chapters of GK and the 'new' chapters, with their similitudes, repetitions, and analogical episodes recurring in different chapters, have been analysed over the years by Damdinsuren, Heissig, and others. Themes and logical sequences were duly taken into account.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, on a subject like the open, evolving saga of Geser, subject to all sorts of variations by individual bards and storytellers, nothing is clear-cut and scholars have reached different conclusions. For Damdinsuren, the Mongolian cycle, as it can be established on the evidence of the sources available at present, consists of 12 chapters (seven of the GK plus five 'new' ones), but these can actually be reduced to nine because three (chapters 10, 11, and 12) are similar to chapters 4 and 5, and the episodes described in Chapter 12 are 'depicted' in the other chapters. For Heissig, on the other hand, the 'new' chapters are eight (chapters 8, 9, 10a, 10 [15], 11, 13, 14, 16/17).⁴⁸

47 On all these questions, see N. Poppe, 'Stand und Aufgaben der Mongolistik', 83; W. Heissig, *A Lost Civilization. The Mongols Rediscovered*, tr. by D.J.S. Thomson, London: Thames and Hudson, 1966, 134–51; *Arban jug-ün ejen Geser qayan-u tuyuñi orosiba*, I–II, Peking-Kökeqota: Öbör Mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriya, 1956; Rintchen, ed., *Nomči qatun's Version of Kesar Saga I*, CSM 9: 1960, fasc. 4; *idem II*, CSM 9: 1960, fasc. 4a; *Caya's Version of Kesar Saga I*, CSM 9: 1960, fasc. 2; *idem II*, CSM 9: 1960, fasc. 2a; *Žamcarano's Version of Kesar Saga I*, CSM 9: 1960, fasc. 3a; *idem II*, CSM 9: 1960, fasc. 3b; *Version oirate des chansons de Guesser I–II*: CSM 9: 1960, fasc. 1; *Camling Senčin-ü namtar orosiba*, CSM 10: 1959; and, above all, W. Heissig, *Geser-Studien. Untersuchungen zu den Erzählstoffen in den 'neuen' Kapiteln des mongolischen Geser-Zyklus*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1983, as well the numerous volumes of *Acts of the Bonn Symposia on the Mongolian Epic* edited by W. Heissig and published in the series *Asiatische Forschungen*.

48 Cf. Damdinsuren's 'On the new edition', 597, and Heissig, *Geser-Studien*, 7–8, 21–228. Stein, *Recherches*, 94, breaks down the new chapters in vol. 2 of the 1956 Peking-Kökeqota edition as follows: ch. 1: Geser's heroes (= ch. 8); ch. 2 (= ch. 9, Angdulman); ch. 3 (var. of ch. 6, Lubsaga); ch. 4 (= ch. 10, Saixulai Goa); ch. 5 (= ch. 12, Gumbü-xan); ch. 6 (= ch. 13, Način-xan of the North). The correspondences are with the Khalkha manuscript version discovered by Žamcarano (*Recherches*, 94 [50]). Cf. above, n. 47.

An indispensable tool for the study of the Mongolian cycle of Geser is the *corpus gesericus*, currently being published in 12 volumes in Peking under the general editorship of Professor Sechenmönḡke: *Geser-ün bürin bičig. A Complete Edition of Mongolian Geser*, Peking: Ündüsüten-ü keblel-ün qoriya, 2002–. ⁴⁹

In this project, we intended to deal only with the seven chapters of GK. They are of uneven length and their contents can be summarised as follows:

Chapter 1: Council of the gods to send a son of Qormusda Tengri (= the Indian god Indra) to earth to fight evil demons and ruthless humans, and establish peace, thus saving mankind by ruling over it like a Cakravartin King. Qormusda's youngest son accepts the task and is born as Joro (Joru), the future Geser (Gesar), Lord of the Ten Quarters. His youth is spent as a physically unattractive boy endowed with superhuman powers, and a regular prankster always in conflict with his evil uncle Čotong and his envious brother Rongsa. He fights ogres and demons and foils many attempts on his life. Still a teenager, Joro wins and marries the beautiful Rogmo in spite of Čotong's many attempts to take her for himself. He assumes the name Geser. Romantic interlude with Aju Mergen, daughter of the king of the dragons.

49 Professor Sechenmönḡke of the Institute of Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), has been researching the Geser epic for many years. The *Geser-ün bürin bičig*, vol. 1, is entirely dedicated to the GK *plenior*, that is, the seven chapters of the 1716 edition plus the six additional chapters included in vol. 2 of the 1956 Peking-Kökeqota edition (see above, n. 47) of which the editor gives: 1. the full text transcribed in modern standard Mongolian script or *uyiyurjın*; 2. the romanised transcription; 3. the photo-reproduction of the original texts; 4. 1,268 notes to 1. This volume thus replaces the often faulty 1956 Peking-Kökeqota edition, but one must continually check the transcriptions (especially 2.) against the facsimile of the text. Vol. 5 (2008), 1243–1325, contains the Oirat version of GK with the *todo* script of the Oirats turned into *uyiyurjın*. Vol. 6 (2009): 1. 1–293, contains the text, transcribed into *uyiyurjın*, of the *Nomči qatun-u Geser-ün tuyuǰı*; followed by 2. the *Caya-yin Geser-ün tuyuǰı* (299–627); 3. the romanised transcription of 1. (759–1051); 4. the romanised transcription of 2. (1057–1404); 5. a photo-reproduction of the manuscript of 1. (1415–1574); 6. a photo-reproduction of 2. (1577–1839). The above are some of the most important versions of the Mongolian text of particular usefulness in the translation of GK. In this connection one should mention also the two-volume edition of Y. Čimeddorǰı, *Geser Qayan-u tuyuǰı*, Kökeqota: Öbör Mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriya, 1985, in 16 chapters (seven plus nine additional ones), which is a conflation of several versions to produce a more coherent narrative in more or less logical sequence. It contains numerous annotations that, combined with those of Sechenmönḡke's edition, are of much help in understanding many difficult passages. For GK, one must take into account also the posthumous work in Cyrillic prepared by the great Mongol scholar C. Damdinsuren edited by Š. Gaadamba entitled *Geser*, Ulan Bator: Academy of Sciences of the Mongolian People's Republic, 1986, a valuable revised edition of the 1716 version with numerous interpolations in square brackets from other versions and modern equivalents, in round brackets, of obsolete terms.

Chapter 2: This brief chapter describes Geser's defeat, with the help of his good brother ǰasa Šikir and his 30 companions, of an ogre (*mangyus/manggus*) who has transformed himself into a colossal black-striped tiger. After an epic fight with the ogre, they kill him and out of his skin and fur fashion various articles (helmets and shields).

Chapter 3: Geser's journey to China (Kitad) to assume control of the country whose ruler, Güme Qayan, is in deep mourning following his wife's death and is unable to conduct affairs of state. Geser buries the empress, soothes the emperor, and brings order to the administration. Before returning home, he takes Güme Qayan's daughter Güne ʒooa as his wife.

Chapter 4: Geser is ill and his evil uncle Čotong and his principal wife Rogmo put the blame on Aralya ʒooa (the Arulya ʒooa of Chapter 1), now also a wife of Geser known as Tümen ǰiryalang ('Myriad Joys'), and banish her to the north, where, in despair, she marries a 12-headed ogre. Geser travels north, fights and kills the *mangyus*, seizes the country and settles there for nine years. Aralya gives him a magic potion that makes him forget all about his past.

Chapter 5: This chapter is entirely taken by the war with the country of Siraiyol (= Šaraiyol), that is, the country of Hor of the Tibetan version⁵⁰ and its kings, involving also Čotong, as usual up to no good, Rogmo ʒooa, all Geser's companions, and his brother ǰasa Šikir, who are killed one by one. Eventually Geser, who frees himself at last from the bewitching effect of the potion of forgetfulness, returns home. He punishes Čotong and penetrates into the Šaraiyol territory, defeats its three kings and rescues Rogmo ʒooa.

Chapter 6: An ogre in the guise of a lama captivates Geser's wife Rogmo, who persuades Geser to receive the lama's consecration. Thereupon Geser is magically turned into an ass, which the *mangyus*-lama takes to his home and uses for grinding flour. He also seizes Rogmo ʒooa. Another wife of Geser's, Aǰu Mergen (first met in Chapter 1), deceives the false lama and takes away the ass. Then, by means of a holy drink, Qormusda Tengri restores Geser's human form. The *mangyus*-lama is promptly killed by Geser, who takes Rogmo home, punishes her, and shows his gratitude to Aǰu Mergen.

50 See the numerous references in Stein, *Recherches*, 601a, s.v.

Chapter 7: Geser finds out that his mother (Sanglun's wife) Gegše Amurčila is dead and has gone to Hell (*tamu*). He immediately follows her to the underworld. He punishes Erlig Qayan, the ruler of the underworld, for having unjustly placed her there. She is released and reborn in Heaven, in the land of bliss.

While the seven chapters of GK are suffused with Lamaist culture, this is not the predominant influence in the Mongolian narrative, which relies more on the profane, entertaining value of semicomical human-like situations, flavoured with tricks, deception, magic, and picaresque interludes, the emphasis being on the bizarre, unusual, and unexpected. The 'new' chapters included in vol. 2 of the 1956 Peking-Kökeqota edition are, on the other hand, strongly influenced by Lamaist culture and in general less 'entertaining' than the episodes in GK. For a summary of the contents of these additional chapters, the interested reader can turn to the already mentioned works by Damdinsuren and Heissig.⁵¹ In any event, there is no foundation in the claim, sometimes made in the past, that the new chapters, more so than the standard seven, reflect the popular opposition to the oppressive regime of the Mongol nobles and the lamas.⁵²

Within the limited scope of this introduction, we cannot deal with the rich fields of Oirat, Buriat, and Khalkha epics;⁵³ however, we must say something about the translations of the GK into other languages and about the present version.

51 Damdinsuren, 'On the new edition', 595–97; Heissig, *Geser-Studien*, 8.

52 Cf. C.R. Bawden, *Letteratura mongola*. Estratto dalla *Storia delle letterature d'Oriente* diretta da Oscar Botto, Milano: Vallardi, 1969, 356.

53 The Oirat, Buriat, and Khalkha versions of the Geser epic are touched upon also by Stein in *Recherches*, 60–64, 93–94. Many important contributions on the subject (including translations) were published in Russian and German by N. Poppe, as well as by Russian, Kalmyk, Buriat, and Mongol scholars past and present like C. Žamcarano, B. Rintchen, S. Nekljudov, Ž. Tumurčeren, T. Basangovoj, B. Okonov, E. Mučkinova, G. Šarakšinova, A. Sakharovska, V. Soloukhin, and many others.

The German version by I.J. Schmidt of 1839 and the Russian one by S.A. Kozin of 1935 have already been mentioned.⁵⁴ Together with B. Bergmann's shorter version of two chapters of the GK,⁵⁵ Schmidt's translation of the GK served as the basis for I. Zeitlin's *Gessar Khan*, the story retold in English, very freely and selectively, for the general public and published in New York in 1927.⁵⁶ Zeitlin's work was, in turn, 'adapted' for another popular edition published in Berkeley, California, in 1991.⁵⁷ None of these versions renders the poetical passage in the GK in verse form.⁵⁸

In 1962, W. Heissig published a German translation of the two 'songs' on Geser that he had found a few years earlier in Belgium (see above), corresponding to chapters 8, 9, and 10 of the 1956 Peking-Kökeqota edition (vol. 2, 1–52).⁵⁹ Two further chapters, this time both from the GK (chapters 3 and 6) were translated into English by C.R. Bawden and published in 2003 in his rich *Anthology*.⁶⁰

For readers who know Hungarian well there is an interesting and original version in that language (with plenty of argot!) by the well-known contemporary Mongolist and writer L. Lőrincz, published in Budapest in 1982.⁶¹

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean scholars have also been active in translating the GK into their respective languages. In 1985 and 1989, two modern Chinese versions appeared in China, both translations

54 See also above, nn. 38 and 39.

55 B. Bergmann, *Nomadische Streifereien unter den Kalmüken in den Jahren 1802 und 1803*, vol. 3, Riga, 1804, 233–84.

56 *Gessar Khan*. Told by Ida Zeitlin, illustrated by Theodore Nadejen, New York: G.H. Doran, 1927.

57 *Gesar! The Wondrous Adventures of King Gesar*, adapted by Z. Wallace, illustrations by J. Witwer, Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1991. The cover title is, however, *Gesar! The Epic Tale of Tibet's Great Warrior-King*. See the review by K. Hitchins in *Central Asiatic Journal* 38: 1994, 113.

58 The GK is a mixture of prose and alliterative poetry. The latter is used 1. for citations of short sayings and proverbs, and 2. for longer passages that require declaiming or singing; however, very often the 'poetical' value of such passages is not apparent in translation and it is better to just ignore them. Cf. L. Lőrincz, 'Vers und Prosa im mongolischen Gesser', *Acta Orientalia Hung.* 24: 1971, 51–77.

59 Corresponding to chs 8, 9, and 10a in Heissig's classification of the eight 'new' chapters. See W. Heissig, tr., *Helden-, Höllenfahrts- und Schelmengeschichten der Mongolen*, Zurich: Manesse, 1962, 81–167, 306–307. Cf. W. Heissig, *Geser-Studien*, 8 and 14–15.

60 C.R. Bawden, *Mongolian Traditional Literature. An Anthology*, London-New York-Bahrain: Kegan Paul, 2003, 223–40.

61 L. Lőrincz, tr., *Geszer Kán, a tíz világtáj ura (Geser Kan, The Lord of the Ten Regions of the World)*, Budapest: Europa Könyvkiadó, 1982. The poetical passages are in verse form in italics. The book contains numerous illustrations.

made by teams of Mongolian and Chinese scholars from Inner Mongolia. The former is not only a full version of the GK in Chinese prose, but has also a number of poetical passages rendered in italicised verse form. Although quite free, it is the best Chinese version available at present.⁶² The latter, completed in 1987 but actually published in 1989, is the Chinese translation of the popular abridged Mongolian version by Jirumtu published in Huhhot in 1985.⁶³ Although it is, therefore, an incomplete translation of the GK, it has the advantage to offer to the Chinese readership a nicely produced and readable shorter version of *both* volumes of the 1956 Peking-Kökeqota edition.⁶⁴

A new and no doubt excellent Chinese translation by Professor Dulaan of the Department of Oriental Languages and Literature, Peking University, is being prepared and, hopefully, will be published before long.⁶⁵

The elegant Japanese translation by H. Wakamatsu of Kyoto Prefectural University is likewise done on the revised edition of Jirumtu.⁶⁶

As for Korean, the volume with the prose and verse translation of W.-S. Yu of Seoul National University has the great advantage of containing a photo-reproduction of the GK in much reduced but still legible size.⁶⁷ All the alliterative passages of the GK are meticulously rendered in Korean verse form with alliteration.

62 *Beijing ban 'Ge-si-er zhuan'* (The Peking Blockprint of the 'Biography of Geser'), a joint translation of the Research Institute of the Academy of Social Sciences and the 'Geser' Working Bureau of the IMAR, Huhhot, 1985.

63 Jirumtu, ed. & rev., *Geser-ün üliger* (*The Story of Geser*), Huhhot: Öbör Mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriya, 1985. The editor has considerably revised the 1956 Peking-Kökeqota edition retaining, however, most of the contents of the latter in abbreviated and simplified form to make it more readable and comprehensible to the contemporary general reader. This revised edition consists of 12 chapters (seven of the GK plus five new ones).

64 Na-ri-su (Narasu), tr., *Ge-si-er de gushib* (*The Story of Geser*), Huhhot: Nei Menggu renmin chubanshe chuban faxing, 1989. For the editorial committee see the page opposite the Foreword (page 1). This translation is entirely in prose.

65 Personal communication of B. Ulaan of 20 October 2015.

66 Wakamatsu Hiroshi, tr., *Geseru-Han monogatari. Mongoru eiyū jojishi* (*The Story of Geser Khan. A Mongolian Epic Poem*), *Tōyō Bunko* 566, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1993.

67 Yu Wōn-su, tr., *Geser Khan. Mongol taesōsasi* (*Geser Khan. The Great Mongol Epic*), Seoul: Sagyejōl ch'ulp'ansa, 2007.

The Present Translation

The version that we offer to the public is not a literal translation of the GK nor a literary one. Our primary aim has been to make a difficult and rather unusual text in Mongolian not only accessible to the general public, but also as readable and enjoyable as the subject permits. Smooth and reliable — this is what we have tried to achieve. Hence there are no passages in brackets except for those that, from the context, are obviously parenthetical in the original. On those occasions where an explanation in the translation itself is necessary for the understanding of the text this is added after a dash. Therefore, all that is inserted between the dash and the full stop, or between dashes, is not in the original. Whereas long and unnecessary repetitions are not regarded as boring or superfluous in Mongolian they are in English.⁶⁸ For this reason in a small number of cases they have been left out in translation and substituted with a short expression to the same effect.

Footnotes have been added to explain background matters and supply essential information on a variety of topics related to the subject, and on technical terms. We have kept them to a minimum and have not regarded it necessary to give bibliographical references.

In the translation and the footnotes, we have used a simplified system of transcription, that is, romanisation, of Mongolian, different from that used in the present introduction, which is the standard one used by Mongolists. Thus in the former *č* is rendered as *ch*, *γ* (a voiced deep velar stop) as *g*,⁶⁹ *ǰ* as *j*, *q* as *kh*, and *š* as *sh*. The word *qayan* 'king, chief' is transcribed 'khan' throughout. Long (double) vowels in Mongolian are not marked as such.

Many of the personal names in the story are, of course, of Tibetan origin, and the original name can, in most cases, often be reconstructed from the corrupt Mongolian form.⁷⁰ However, in the present translation they are usually given as they appear in the GK, minor misspellings being tacitly corrected. Since consistency is not the forte of the Mongolian

68 In Mongolian, especially in an epic narrative, such repetitions are actually necessary and required when reciting and declaiming in public as bards do.

69 If the *g* occurs in a word or name containing the vowels *a*, *o* or *u*, it should be pronounced like the *g* in the German *wagen*, not as the *g* in English *get*.

70 See for example, C. Damdinsuren, 'Explanation of some personal names'. See above, n. 43.

version, there are occasional passages with different forms of the same name. In such cases we have given an explanation in the notes or have added an extra element or a variant form in round brackets.⁷¹

The various sections of the first chapter — the one we have translated so far — are not numbered in the original text, which is continuous except for the break between chapters. They are, therefore, arbitrary and used only for convenience.⁷²

Only some significant passages in poetry, whether short or long, have been rendered as such following the example of the 1985 Chinese translation and Lőrincz's Hungarian version. We feel that most of the other alliterative passages in Mongolian do not lend themselves to versification in English.

If the reader is interested in furthering their knowledge of the Tibetan and Mongolian saga of Gesar/Geser, we recommend the works mentioned in the earlier section of this introduction by R.A. Stein, W. Heissig, C. Damdinsuren, N. Poppe, L. Lőrincz, V. Veit, and the other authors who have contributed to the rich and informative *Acts of the Bonn Symposia on Mongolian Epic* published in O. Harrassowitz's *Asiatische Forschungen* series.⁷³

We are most grateful to Professor Sechenmöngeke of CASS for graciously presenting us with a full set of the invaluable *Geser-ün bürin biig*, and to Professor Yu Wōn-su of Seoul National University for sending us a digital copy of the GK as well as his own translation of it. Since Professor Yu's digital copy is from a photocopy of the original blockprint in the possession of the National Library of Mongolia (NLM), Ulan Bator, we wish to thank also the NLM for making it available. Our sincere thanks to Dr P. Rykin of St Petersburg for providing an excellent photocopy of U. Sécénmunx (Sechenmöngeke)'s *Issledovanie*;⁷⁴ Dr B. Ulaan of Peking for bibliographical and other useful data; Dr J.R. Krueger of Bloomington, Indiana, for supplying a photocopy of I. Zeitlin's *Gessar Khan*; Professor A. Sarközi of Budapest for sending

71 Usually this applies to proper names; however, changes occur in the recollection or repetition of the account of an earlier event. See e.g. the final section of ch. 1.

72 In most translations of the GK the narrative is continuous. Kozin, followed by the 1985 Chinese translation and Damdinsuren's edition of the text (1986), divides ch. 1 into 22 sections. We have reduced the sections to 18.

73 The Internet can also supply further references on the subject of Tibetan epic, Gesar, etc.

74 See above, n. 45.

us a copy of L. Lőrincz's *Geszer Kán*; Professor G. Barmé formerly of Canberra for the loan of relevant publications; Professor A.D. Cendina of Moscow for sending additional material on Geser; and Professor B. Batjav of Ulan Bator for helpful suggestions.

For any errors or omissions, the translators are solely responsible.⁷⁵

75 Igor de Rachewiltz is responsible for the Introduction and the draft translation of Chapter 1. Li Narangoa, a native Khorchin Mongol, has revised the draft and dealt with many textual problems.

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