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THE PROBLEM OF INTERRELATION BETWEEN THE "SECRET HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS" AND MONGOLIAN FOLKLORE

Most of the scientists who have investigated this literary monument point out that there are elements of folklore in it. In the opinion of the great Soviet scholar, academician V. V. Barthold, this interesting literary monument must be connected to the tradition of the heroic epos.[1] In the words of the great representative of Soviet Oriental studies B. Ya. Vladimirtsov, "From the literary point of view, this is a most remarkable example of a work of local legend, highly developed and later put down in written form."[2]

The Soviet Mongolist academician S. A. Kozin, as a result of studying it for many years came to the conclusion that in oral composition, as in folklore, proverbs, aphorisms, wite sayings, folk songs, bits of historical songs, ballads, fragments of epic cycles have been included in this literary monument.[3]

The French sinologue Prof. P. Pelliot was the scholar who restored the most acceptable Mongol text of the monument, from the Chinese phonetic transcription. He emphasized in the introduction to his book that: "Furthermore, if we think of the XVII century chronicles, which had only incomplete and poor passages of the ancient text, the Secret History of the Mongols also preserved sections of the poetry of the popular epic.[4] However, we are not limited to comparisons of various scattered fragments of popular folklore that are to be found in this ancestral chronicle. From our point of view there are sayings, songs, legends and mythological elements of the ancient Mongols in the "Secret History", but what is significant is that there are important materials here which can be applied to explanation of the meaning and content of the many kinds of folklore that have been handed down by tradition to our own times. As to these materials in the Secret History, in the first place, they confirm the opinion of scholars that it contains folklore elements. Secondly they demonstrate the very ancient origin of some of elements which still survive in Mongolian folklore. Thirdly, they help us to understand

1 V. V. Barthold work 1. Moscow, 1963, p. 91

2 B. Ya. Vladimirtsov, „Mongolian Literature Collection", „Literature of the East" published in Petersburg 1920. p. 94.

3 C. A. Kozin, „The Secret History of the Mongols", a Mongolian chronicle of 1240, under the title of „Yuan-chao-bi-shih, Mongolian ordinary collection, vol, 1, Introduction to the study of the monument, translation, texts, glossary, Pub. of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow-Leningrad, 1941, p. 50.

4 P. Pelliot, Histoire Secrete des Mongols· Restitution du texte mongol et traduction francaise des chapitres 1 à VI. Paris, 1949, p. 3

the origins and causes of many of the factors which are a part of the truth of history.

In our opinion, these three main points define the significance of the interrelation between the "Secret History of the Mongols" and Mongolian folklore. But in our view, this problem, so closely linked to the study of this document, has escaped the close attention of scholars. It is justifiable to say that except for the Belgian scholar professor. A. Mostaert, there are few investigators who have paid attention to this problem.

Accordingly, we would like to draw the attention of the Mongolists to just one aspect of this problem. The "Secret History" has something to say on the origin of the image of the Mangas as the stock enemies of the heroes of Mongolian folk tales and heroic legends. For instance, in paragraph 195 the expression "gurelgu Mangas" occurs. Why are these two words so linked? Without claiming to have found the complete answer to this question, I venture some preliminary words. In paragraph 78 of Pelliot's reconstruction of the phonetic text of the "Secret History" page 17, there occurs the curious proverbial expression, "Amidu zalgisu keky Mangus, metu,"—"Like Mangas who swallow living things". Following a quarrel about a petty matter, Temujin and Khasar had brutally murdered Bekter, their younger brother by the same father but a different mother. Their mother Oelun-ujin was condemning them as harshly as she could for this brutal action, and in comparing them in proverbial terms with various savage animals and birds, she used this curious proverbial expression, "Like Mangas who swallow living creatures".

This comparison, in our opinion, reflects the idea of the ancient Mongols about the "Mangas" as a monster, who is ready to swallow all living beings. In this paragraph it is mentioned that Oelun-ujin accused her guilty sons "quoting the ancient words and using the words of the old people (hauchin uges hadalun, utugus uges urkidun mashi maulabi) (see P. Pelliot, p. 17.)

Therefore we can consider this to be the image of mangas of the ancient Mongols. According to this image, the main characteristic of the Mangas was to swallow alive all living beings. This idea of the ancient Mongols undoubtedly passed from generation to generation, from folklore to folklore and at last came down to us as a traditional image. For. instance: in one version of the famous Khalkha-Mongol epos, "Khan Kharanhui" there is the following: The ninety-headed, purple-faced mangas suddenly appeared to Khan Kharanhui and Uladai Mergen on their way, and stood between them. Then he swallowed the younger brother before the eyes of the elder one and fled away. Then Khan Kharanhui followed the Mangas all over Hindustan and at last he overtook him and shot him through the head and killed him. When he cut open his stomach whole families of people appeared, camels with their loads and other living beings in crowds. And there was his younger brother Uladai Mergen on his horse.[1]

In this description of the character of the mangas it is remarkable that the main characteristic, the swallowing of everything, is the same as in the "Secret History". This means that this description of the Mangas is a very ancient tradition in Mongolian folklore, and widely dis-

1. G. D. Sanijeev „Kizil manuscript of the Mongolian epic story, „Khan Kharanhui. „Collection" Turkish-Mongolian linguistics and folklore study", 1960. p. 333

tributed. That it is the same as in the „Secret History" we have seen above. We can see that this is because the Secret History and the folklore legends that are told to this day are founded on the very ancient tradition. The feudal version was secretly preserved, and the "Secret History" lay hidden away from men's eyes in the archives of the Ming emperors of China. It is therefore certain that it could have exercised no specially strong influence in later times on the Mongolian popular legend. Nor is it possible to speak of the popular legend having exercised, in later times, a reverse influence on the "Secret History". There is, accordingly, no explanation but that in both the above-mentioned moralising folklore legends and the fragments written down in the "Secret History" there is the influence of a still earlier folklore.

We can examine extremely interesting material from paragraph 195 of the "Secret History." Here the story of the battle between the Mongol and Naiman tribes is told. Dayan Khan of the Naimans and Jamukha the Clever are standing on the top of a high mountain, watching the course of the battle. Dayan Khan asks: And that one coming from the north, who is he? Jamukha replies: He is the son whom Oelun-eke brought up on the meat of men. He is three spans in height, he can eat a three-year old cow without being sated, he wears armour of triple thickness, and he comes dragged by three (harnessed) bulls. He can swallow an archer with his bow without their sticking in his throat. Though he gulps down the whole body of a man, his belly is still empty.

When he is angered and looses the arrow from his bow it carries beyond the mountain and destroys ten of twenty people. When he draws his bow the ornamented arrow flies across the full width of the steppe to shatter and slay the comrade with whom he has quarrelled. When he draws his bow to the full he shoots to 900 spans; his ordinary shot is 500 spans. He is different from ordinary men, he is Jörch Khasar, and they call him the Gurelgu Mangas. (See P. Pelliot's phonetic text, p. 71)

In this excerpt we can say that the fearsome mangas creature and its characteristics correspond in every feature to that of the ancient Mongols. In this similarity the Curelgu Mangas is distinguished by being monstrously large ("three spans in height"); it is voracious ("can devour a three-year-old cow"); it is exceedingly heavy ("dragged by three bulls").

But it is significant that its main characteristic is that it is able to swallow a man entire with his bow and arrow without its choking his throat. It seems to us that here the full description of the Gurelgu Mangas comes out more circumstantially than that of the Mangas in some of the tales and legends that have come down to us by oral tradition. Moreover this excerpt from the "Secret History" shows us that by that time the description of a man as huge and strong, warlike and savage as Jörch Khasar as resembling a Curelgu Mangas had in the imagery of story-telling already become conventional. In this imagery of likening to a Gurelgu Mangas Khasar' s physique and appetite, eminence in archery, and prowess in war, it is remarkable that the description of the mangas in Mongolian tales and legends uses exactly the same kind of exaggerated language. In fact, when Yesunge Khongodor, the famous son of this very Khasar, at an assembly of all the Mongol

nobles, shot an arrow to a distance of 335 spans, it was considered at the time such a marvellously long shot that a stone monument was raised to commemorate it[1]

To say, as described above, that Khasar was able to shoot as far as 500 or 700 spans was, of course, simply an exaggeration conforming to the convention of the migthy "gurelgu mangas" Otherwise, it would not have been considered worthwhile to inscribe a stone monument to commemorate the feat of Yesunge Khongodor's archery.

Scholars have interpreted the expression "gurelgu mangas" in many ways. For example, P. Kafarov translated it as "like a great serpent"[2]. E. Haenisch rendered it as "Gurelgu-serpent" (in German, Schlange), explaining it as "a kind of great snake". (See his p. 158)[3] S. A. Kozin gave it as "real demon."

P. Pelliot rendered the "mangas" described in paragraph 78 of the "Secret History" as "boa", i. e. a. "giant snake,"[4] and in addition in another book which he published jointly with L. Hambis suggested that "Mangus" is a loan-word from the Chinese "mang" (giant snake), noting that "Mangust" as a clan-name is a plural form from this "mang".[5]

No attempt has been made to explain the word "gurelgu" from the point of view of the Mongolian language. It has been thought that it may have the meaning of "great snake" taken from the chinese text in the "parallel" translation of the "Secret History". And yet it is possible and necessary to explain this word from the point of view of the Mongolian language. In our opinion the word "gurelgu" does not have the meaning of "great snake" as many scholars have supposed, but that of the word "uleg gurvel," "great lizard." As the present author believes, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the modern Mongol "gurvel" is a phonetic variant of the ancient pronunciation "gurelgu". The fact is that in Mongol, in several local dialects, the word is "gurgul" rather than "gurvel." This final "gurgul" in our opinion, is the ancient Mongol word "gurgul," which has been changed by the law of syllabic exchange and vowel variation. There is the phenomenon of the mutual avoidance of the phonemes "R" and "L"in Mongolian. Thus it would be possible for original word "gur plus el plus gu" to change its composition and become "gur plus gu plus l (e)". This would be similar to the way in which the classical (written) Mongolian "gu plus li plus r" has in modern Mongol become "gu plus ri plus l. "So we suggest that the variation has been from "gu plus le plus gu" to "gur-gu plus l (e)" to "Gur plus uul", and finally "gurvel".

This being the case, it is possible that "gurelgu" is not something like "snake", as explained by the Chinese who made the phonetic transcription, but a word meaning "lizard." Moreover, there is reason to speculate

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1 J. Nadmid, „The Mongolian language, a short review of the history of its writing," Ulan-Bator, 1967, p. 35

2 The Ancient Legend of Chingis Khan, translated from the Chinese, with notes, by the Archimandrite Palladius (Kafarov), Works of the Members of the Russian Church Mission, Vol. IV, no, 2, Peking 1910,, p. 52

3 Die Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen, Aus einer mongolischen Niederschrift des Jahres 1240 von der Insel Kodé e im Keluren-Fluss. Erstmalig übersetzt und erläutert von Erich Haenisch. Zweite verbesserte Auflage. Leipzig, 1948, p. 83

4 P Pelliot, Histoire secréte des Mongols, Paris, 1949, p 136

5 P. Pelliot et L. Hambis, Histoire des campagnes de Gengis khan, Leiden, 1951. pp. 51, 169.

that the ancient Mongol image of the Mangas is connected with its resemblance to a giant lizard or dinosaur. The reason for this idea is, first, that dinosaur eggs and skeletons, complete of in part, have frequently been found in Mongolia. It is impossible to prove that what the palaeontologists have been finding, the ancient Mongols, born children of nature and the wide plains and high mountains, seeking pastures, tracking game and wandering over the vast steppes could not discover. And of course the great bones of these huge beasts, imperishable after some hundred and fifty million years, could not but be regarded with awe and fear by these naive, simple, backward, ignorant Mongols of long ago, hunters and herdsmen, who could not but imagine what fearful creatures these were when they were alive, and so thought of them as if they were alive, and this would explain why in the course of time the tales that they created out of their vivid imaginations created the fearful image of the mangas.

In the second place, the details of the outward appearance of the mangas in some of the tales and legends of the people suggest that the original physical image of the mangas that emerges from the oral literature could have been a giant lizard something like a dinosaur. In the collection of oral literature in the folklore section of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences there is a tale called Mergen Khan (Wise Khan), (No. 4) which was written down on 10 May 1944 in Khashaat sum, Arkhangai Aimag, as told by the arat Gochoo. The chief hero of this tale, Gunan Baatar (the word "gunan" means a three-year-old ox) looks upon the mangas "in the manner of a diviner" (Shinjilj) and says, (in alliterative verse, here roughly rendered):

Heads has he two and twenty
Hollow-nosed (i. e. "saddle-nosed") black mangas
His one eye
Has a bowl like the rim-mark of a tent ot nine
Khanas (wall-sections of a round tent).
How like a swollen tick his yellow eye
Heaves up out of that hollow, gleaming green.
Like eight knife-blades the spikes of his beard
Lean outward
Looking like dried-out larches.
Nails of his fingers outward turn, like steel sickles
Nails of his toes curve forward, like forged iron sickles
No other than like that is the mangas said he.

We may summarize the foregoing by saying that a traditional likeness of the outward appearance of the mangas is to be encountered in Mongolian popular legendary tales from very early times. Its combination of realism and fantasy could well have originated from the acute visual observation of dinosaur bones by early hunters and wanderers in Mongolia, whose vivid imaginations (for we must remember that all men lived at that time in a world of magical ideas) then clothed these bones with flesh, as it were, and created an imaginary living monster.

In the changing folklore of the evolving steppe society of Mongolia, such an image would of course have a changing relevance, a different social application, in successive phases of social evolution. We may here

refer to the discussion of the concept of "The origin of antri-anto" in the work of the Soviet scholar G. E. Mikhailov."[1]

In time, the image of the prehistoric supernatural monster could be used as a symbol, metaphor, or epithet with social, human references. Thus we find it as a symbol of power in the tribal name "Mangut". (Compare also the tribal name "Karlykom," for a similar phenomenon.) Still later, in the early feudal period, it was used as an epithet to symbolise the ferocious greed of rival feudal nobles and warriors.

We believe that this enquiry proves once more the methodological fruitfulness of the observation of Engels that "fantastical images, which first reflected only the secret power of nature, now acquire also a public quality and become representative of the forces of history."[1]

In conclusion, it may be remarked that the image of the boa, of giant snake, common in world folklore, is often met with also in Mongolian folklore, but in a rather different form. It is interesting that some Soviet scientists have connected the genesis of the image of the many-headed snake in the folklore of many nations with prehistoric recollection of "lizards". Thus, analysis of the word-combination "gurelgu mangus" in the "Secret History of the Mongols" shows in our view a possible connection between the image of the Mangas in Mongolian folklore and a real prototype of the image of the huge lizard, in the form of the dinosaur, whose skeleton is often found in the territory of our country. We suggest that the word-combination "gurulgu mangas" in the "Secret History" can be identified with the folklore expression, "Gurvel mangas."

1 G. E. Mikhailov, „The problem of the Evolution of the Mongolian Heroic Epos," in the collection, „Turkish-Mongolian linguistics and folklore study," Moscow, 1960, p. 215

1 K. Marx, F. Engels, *Works*, Vol. 20, Moscow, p. 329