

Olun's Chemise. An Episode from the "Secret History of the Mongols"

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BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

Ölün's Chemise.[1] *An Episode From the "Secret History of the Mongols."*

Most of the conquering peoples of the old world inaugurated the historical accounts of their military and political expansion by extolling their national heroes and the leading dynasties in legends and poems. The Mongols are no exception to this general rule. A few years after Genghis Khan's death, in 1227, a whole cycle of legends and tales of a genealogical, biographical, and epic character already glorified the rise of a tribal chieftain to imperial power and dignity.

The oldest evidence of the flowering of epic imagination among the Mongols is given by the famous *Yüán-ch'áo Pì-shĭh*, composed about 1240, and handed down in a Chinese phonetic transcription as well as in an abbreviated Chinese translation of the end of the fourteenth century.[2] Since the earliest official compilations of Mongolian chronicles in Persia and China, that venerable text was considered a fundamental historical document.[3] But nobody thought of interpreting it also as a literary monument, in spite of the many and striking poetical motives of a decided epic character which enliven this first narrative of the prodigious ascent of the Mongolian dynasty.[4] The interpretation of one episode among many others occurring in that narrative will contribute to the literary appreciation of this poetical rather than secret *History of the Mongols.*

Genghis Khan's biography is preceded by the account of the adventures of his father Yesügei Bagatur and his mother Ölün, the beautiful wife of Yeke Ciledu, a man originating from the Merkit tribe. When fair Ölün notices that Yesügei wants to abduct her, she bids her husband a pathetic farewell by giving him the garment she has hastily torn off in a flurry of love and despair. The scene is highly dramatic in its eloquent, uncouth simplicity.[5] As to the garment, the French orientalist E. Blochet thought it was a "robe."[6] Erich Haenisch, a German sinologist, took it for a shirt.[7] This seems to be the right interpretation

[1] On the name of Genghis Khan's mother (Hö'älün, Ölün etc.) cf. P. Pelliot, "Mots à *H* initiale dans le Mongol" in *Journal Asiatique* CCVI (1925). 230.

[2] The Mongolian text restored and published by E. Haenisch, *Manghol un Niuca Tobca'an*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1937/39 (I. Text, II. Vocabulary), reviewed by P. Pelliot in *T'oung Pao*, XXXII (1936). 355-9. Extracts with German translation, Introduction, notes and linguistic remarks by E. Haenisch, "Untersuchungen über das Yüan-Ch'ao-Pi-Shi" in *Abhandlungen der Philologisch-Historischen Klasse der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, XLI (1931), No. 4. The Chinese version in the Kuang-Ku-Tang edition, 1908. A French translation of the first section of the Chinese text by L. Blochet, *Introduction à l'Histoire des Mongols* etc. Leyden-London (E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, XII), 1910, 272-298. The present article was in the printer's hands when the author became acquainted with the new edition of the Mongolian text published by C. A. Kosin, СОКРОВЕННОЕ СКАЗАНИЕ, Vol. I, with introduction and glossary, АКАА. НАУК СССР, Moscow–Leningrad, 1941.

[3] The narrative was first incorporated, after a Uigur version, into Rashid-ed-Din's *Djami-el-Tévarikh* (end of the thirteenth century), then into the Chinese *Yüán-shĭh* compiled in the early years of the Ming dynasty (after 1371), and finally, in the seventeenth century, into the Mongolian chronicles. Cf. the short survey and appreciation of the different sources of the history of the Mongols by E. Haenisch, "*Die letzten Feldzüge Cinggis Han's etc.*" in Asia Maior, IX. (1933), especially pp. 540 ff.

[4] Paul Pelliot stressed the epic character of the alliterated passages of the Mongolian text and the "souffle assez sauvage qui les anime." Cf. *T'oung Pao*, XXVIII (1931), 156 (book-review of E. Haenisch's Untersuchungen).

[5] Cf. Haenisch, *Manghol un Niuca Tobca'an*, p. 7, par. 55, and the German translation of the Mongolian and Chinese versions in Haenisch's Untersuchungen, 28-9. Blochet's translation of the Chinese text in *op. cit.*, 294. A small part of the Mongolian text of this passage is corrupt (cf. E. Haenisch, "Mongolisch *Horohhu*" etc. in *Asia Maior*, X (1934), 140 f.) and suppressed in the Chinese version. Ölün's expression "smelling my odor" does not occur either in the Chinese text or in the corresponding passage of *Sanang Secen*, a seventeenth century Mongolian chronicle published with a German translation by I. J. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Ostmongolen*, St. Petersburg, 1829, p. 62.

[6] *loc. cit.*, 294.

[7] Untersuchungen, 28, 29; *Manghol* II (*Wôrterbuch*) art. *camca.*

of the Mongolian word *čamča* [8] and its corresponding Chinese term *shān*[a].[9]

However it may be, Ölün's gesture is not isolated in the Asiatic literature of the Middle Ages. In the four-act play *Hé-hàn-shān*[b] composed in the fourteenth century by a Chinese courtesan Chang Kuo-pin[c], a shirt (more correctly a sweater *hàn-shān*[d]) given by Chang Hsiao-yu[e] to his mother as "a token of remembrance and tenderness" solves the entanglement of the dramatic action.[10]

In the French *Chanson d'Antioche*, a poem inspired by legends developed in Asia Minor shortly after the first crusade, Grandor de Douai reports that when Baldwin of Edessa, a brother of Geoffrey of Bouillon, married the daughter of the Old Man of the Mountain, this legendary chieftain of the "Assassins" clothed his son-in-law with the bride's chemise "Pour ce qu'ele mieus a son coeur en sa baillie." [11]

In the *Quran* (Part XIII, Ch. 12, v. 93) Joseph discloses his identity by sending his father his shirt (*qamīṣ*)

Late in 1250, shortly before Mängü Khan ordered the conquest of Alamaut and the destruction of the Ismailites, the Old Man of the Mountain sent ambassadors to King Louis IX of France, then in Accon, probably in order to conclude a defensive alliance against the impending Mongolian expansion in the Near East.[12] Joinville reports that the leader of the dreaded Assassins sent the King his own shirt "en senefiance que aussi comme la chemise est plus près du cors que nul autre vestement, aussi veult le Vieux tenir le roy plus près à amour que nul autre roy." [13] In this case again the delivery of that garment is considered the most impressive sign of affection and faithfulness in a moment of imminent danger and heartbreaking affliction.

There is no example of a similar symbolism in the contemporaneous European literature, although a garment of that kind is frequently mentioned in mediaeval poems, novels and documents.[14] But the pathetic explanation given the French king by the sinister ruler of the Assassins also illustrates the dramatic episode of the *Yüan-ch'ao-pi-shih*.

Its Western counterpart is the mythical story of Nessus giving his tunic to Dejanire as a talisman of Hercules' marital fidelity. There is certainly no connection at all between this elaborate classical myth and the crude story of the rape of Ölün by the father of the future emperor. But the two tales give evidence of the similarity of the mythopoetical imagination within the peoples of the Euro-Asiastic world.

Therefore Ölün's dramatic gesture cannot be explained as a topic of Mongolian folklore.[15] Apart from the vagueness of such an interpretation, it seems certain that in mediaeval Asiatic society a shirt never was a popular garment. It was a rather exclusive article of luxury manufactured for the wealthy and the nobles.[16] For the Mongolian rhapsodist who sang the "enfances" of Genghis Khan, Ölün's chemise was a token of her nobility, not only a piece of underwear. A shirt was an aristocratic garment for all the authors who mentioned it in connection with extraordinary events and personages of legend, poetry, and history.

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[8] *Ch'an-ch'a* in the Chinese transcription.

[9] Cf. Giles, *Dictionary*, London, 1912, II. 1175, No. 9688.

[10] Cf. M. Bazin Aîné, *Théâtre Chinois*, Paris, 1838, pp. 212-220.

[11] Cf. A. Hatem, *Les poèmes épiques des Croisades*, Paris, 1932, pp. 181 f.

[12] On these events cf. *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, transl. and edited by Col. H. Yule, 3rd ed., London, 1921, (2 vols.) I. 145 ff.; and Jean Sire de Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, par Natalis de Wailly, 2nd ed., Paris, 1874, p. 251.

[13] Together with his shirt the Old Man of the Mountain, then probably in Syria, sent King Louis a ring, and declared that "by this ring did he make alliance with the king, for his will was that thence-forward they should be as one." Joinville, *loc. cit.*, and the English translation by J. Evans, Oxford University Press, 1938, p. 137.

[14] Cf. R. R. Goddard, *Women's Costume in French Texts of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (The Johns Hopkins Studies in Romance Literature and Language, VII) Baltimore, Md.—Paris, 1927, art. *Chainse* and *Chemise*. More examples and quotations in Tobler-Lommatzsch's *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, II, 1936, art. *chainse, chainsil and chemise*; furthermore W. von Wartburg, *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, art. *chemise*. For the Italian cultural and linguistic sphere, cf. Curzio Mazzi, "La Camicia: Ricerche di antico costume italiano" in *La Bibliofilia*, XVII (1915) 241-78 (with complete bibliography). The German literature is briefly considered by A. Schultz, *Das höfische Leben zur Zeit der Minnesinger* (2 vols.), 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1889, I. 290.

[15] E. Haenisch, Untersuchungen, 49.

[16] Kubilai Khan's shirt is described in the *Yüan shih*, 78. 2a (*KM* 6324.1b) as made of red silk material in form of a skirt, and decorated with sixteen rows of different embroideries (Cf. M. G. Pauthier, *Le Livre de Parco Polo* (2 vols.), Paris, 1865, I. 286, n.).

This circumstance prompted the Senate of Genoa to emulate the Old Man of the Mountain by sending the "Khan of the Tartars," toward the end of the thirteenth century, several elaborate linen shirts of Italian making.[17] The Genoese traders in the Caspian seaports knew which kind of merchandise was particularly appreciated by the Tatar rulers and nobles of Persia. That the shirts sent to the Il-Khan were made of linen only increased their value. In the Asiatic area flax-fibre was not employed in the manufacture of textiles.[18]

Ölün's chemise has also a philological aspect. The term *čamča* used in the original text of the *Secret History of the Mongols* does not seem to be an indigenous Mongolian word. One would be tempted to connect it with the late Greek *κάμισον*, which is regarded to be the etymon of Italian *càmice* and old French *chainse*,[19] as well as of Italian *camicia* and French *chemise*, and of Arabic or New-Persian *qamīṣ*. There are several words of Greek origin introduced into the Mongolian language through Persian and Turkish mediation.[20] The Mongolian designation of the crown (*titim*), which is, like the mediaeval chemise, an attribute of princely nobility, goes back to Greek *διάδημα*, as does, with the same transposition of the accent, the corresponding word in all Western European languages.

Yet neither Radloff's Dictionary[21] nor the contributions of Melioranski, Laufer, and other Altaists allow us to trace the way by which the Greek term finally reached its Mongolian form for the designation of Ölün's chemise. A Chinese origin of *čamča* cannot be excluded. Thus the solution of this interesting question must be left to specialists in different fields of Asiatic philology.

However it may be, the courtly and literary symbolism of the chemise turns out to be a Panasiatic motif of life and poetry that links together both ends of the world in some characteristic aspects of their respective civilization.

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[17] Cf. C. Mazzi, *op. cit.*, 266, after G. Barone, *La Camicia nella Storia delle Arti tessili e del Costume*, Sarno, 1910.

[18] Cf. B. Laufer, *Sino-Iranica*, Chicago, 1919, pp. 293 ff.

[19] Cf. *Romania*, XLVII (1921), 595; W. Meyer-Lübke, *Romanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3rd ed., Heidelberg, 1935, p. 144; J. B. Hofman, *Lateinisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3rd ed., Heildelberg, 1938, pp. 147 f.

[20] Cf. the list given by B. Laufer, *Sino-Iranica*, 630.

GLOSSARY OF CHINESE TERMS

a 衫
b 合汗衫
c 張國賓
d 汗衫
e 張孝友

[21] Cf. W. Radloff, *Versuch eines Wörterbuchs der Türkischen Dialekte*, 4 vols., St. Petersburg, 1893-1911.

Equation No. 5

(Chinese Fusion-Words)

In a previous publication I have sufficiently exposed my interest in Chinese fusion-words, and indicated a method for discovering them.[1] This communication can therefore be brief. The title is not intended to suggest that only four of these forms are heretofore known. Professor Peter A. Boodberg, for one, has information on many more, information which, unfortunately, remains in the pale lavender state of hectographed copies. It is for convenience of reference alone that I adopt a numbering system. The four generally accepted fusions, previously discussed by me, are as follows:

1 諸 = 之 + 於 or 與
2 耳 = 而 + 已
3 弗 = 不 + 之
4 盍 = 何 + 不

Nos. 1 and 2 will be found in the revised edition of Mathews' *Dictionary*, published by the Harvard-Yenching Institute. No. 3 has been convincingly argued by Dr. Ting Sheng-shu in *Studies Presented to Ts'ai Yuan P'ei on his 65th Birthday*. No. 4 hardly requires argument, though some discussion of it is given in *JAOS* 60 (1940) 201-3.

The present discussion concerns a word *chĭh*[a], which is found, by my count, 122 times in the *Book of Poetry*. The character has, of course, the

[1] A Study of the Particle *Yen*, *JAOS* 60 (1940) 1-22, 193-207.