

**“Explanation of the Knowable”  
by ‘Phags-pa bla-ma  
Blo-gros rgyal-mtshan (1235–1280)**

Пагба-лама Лодой-Гьялцэн

## **“Объяснение познаваемого”**

Факсимиле монгольского текста

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**“Explanation of the Knowable”**  
**by ‘Phags-pa bla-ma**  
**Blo-gros rgyal-mtshan (1235–1280)**

Facsimile of the Mongolian Translation  
with Transliteration and Notes

by

*Vladimir Uspensky*

*With special assistance from INOUE Osamu*

*Preface by NAKAMI Tatsuo*



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## CONTENTS

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Preface</b> .....                             | <b>vii</b> |
| <b>Introduction</b> .....                        | <b>ix</b>  |
| <b>Transliteration of the Text</b> .....         | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>Notes</b> .....                               | <b>39</b>  |
| <b>Table 1: Sanskrit Loan-words</b> .....        | <b>47</b>  |
| <b>Table 2: Fifty-one Mental Functions</b> ..... | <b>57</b>  |
| <b>Facsimile of the Text</b> .....               | <b>61</b>  |

## PREFACE

This is the third work that Dr. Vladimir Uspensky, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Oriental Studies (St. Petersburg Branch), the Russian Academy of Sciences, has published from our Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa.

This book includes research, transcription and annotation, and a facsimile reproduction of the Mongolian manuscript entitled *Medegdekün-i belgetey-e geyigülügči ner-e-tü šastir*, which is a Mongolian translation of *Shes bya rab gsal*, that was written by 'Phags-pa bla-ma in Tibetan language on behalf of Činggim, the third son of Qubilai. *Shes bya rab gsal* has also been translated into Chinese and is well known under the name of *Zhang suo zhi lun* [彰所知論].

The manuscript had attributed to an item of the private collection of Prince Yunli, the seventeenth son of the Kangxi Emperor, whose life was elucidated by Dr. Uspensky in his first book, *Prince Yunli, Manchu Statesman and Tibetan Buddhist*, published by our Institute in 1997.

The manuscript is now deposited at the library of Sankt-Petersburg State University, which houses a rich collection of Mongolian manuscripts and xylographs that have been classified by Dr. Uspensky, and then introduced in his second work or *Catalogue of the Mongolian Manuscripts and Xylographs in the St. Petersburg State University* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 2001).

Dr. Uspensky at first planned to publish it in Russia, but he met some difficulties. Our Institute consented to publish it, in accordance with our Institute's tasks of introducing rare and important materials written in Asian and African languages.

Dr. Inoue Osamu, professor at the University of Shimane, kindly and carefully checked Dr. Uspensky's draft again as he did with second work. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Uspensky and Dr. Inoue for the effort that they have put into this publication. I also wish to extend my special thanks to Ms. Nina Raj for her kind editorial advice.

NAKAMI Tatsuo

## INTRODUCTION

“The Explanation of the Knowable” (Tib. *Shes bya rab tu gsal ba*) is a small but important treatise which influenced the subsequent Tibetan and especially Mongolian historical and cosmological works. It was written in 1278 by the Imperial Preceptor (Chin. 帝師 *dishi*) 'Phags-pa bla-ma Blo-gros rgyal-mtshan (1235–1280). This hierarch of the Sa-skyapa School is one of the most famous figures in the history of Tibetan Buddhism and needs no special presentation. He is especially celebrated for establishing the “patron-priest” relationship with Qubilai (reigned in 1260–1294), the Great Mongol Qayan and the founder of the 元 Yuan dynasty. Also he is the inventor of the so-called “Phags-pa script” or “square script.” 'Phags-pa bla-ma wrote the above-mentioned work at the request of Qubilai's heir-apparent—his third son Čingim (1243–1286).

The Tibetan original of the text is found in vol. 12 (Tib. *pa*) of the *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (“The Collected Works of the Great Masters of the Sa-skyapa School”) printed in sDege in 1734. The whole collection was reprinted in Tokyo in 1966.<sup>1</sup> There exists an English translation of this work.<sup>2</sup>

Already in the days of the Yuan dynasty “The Explanation of the Knowable” was translated into the Chinese language and was incorporated into the Chinese Buddhist Canon. The title of this translation is 彰所知論 *Zhang suo zhi lun* (大正新脩大藏經; No. 1645).

As for the Mongolian translation of “The Explanation of the Knowable,” even the fact of its existence has been unknown to scholars until very recently. I discovered it in 1993 while compiling the catalogue of Mongolian manuscripts and xylographs in the St. Petersburg University Library Collection. It is entitled *Medegdekün-i belgetey-e geyigülüg ä šastir*. Here is a short description of this *pothi*-style manuscript: ff. 1-52a; 36.8×8.8 (31.6×6.6) cm; 28-30 lines per page; partially written in red ink: call number Mong. C 64.<sup>3</sup> This text once belonged to Prince Yunli (允禮 1697–1738), the seventeenth son of the Kangxi 康熙 Emperor. This and other books from his private library were purchased in Beijing in the 1840s by the famous Russian scholar V.P. Vassiliev (1818–1900).<sup>4</sup>

Though the text of “The Explanation of the Knowable” has no impressions of any of the four of Prince Yunli's seals, its paper, hand-writing and the general design of the manuscript undoubtedly conclude that it belonged to him. In the second half of the nineteenth century it must have been registered under the library call number Xyl. Q

429. According to the register of Oriental manuscripts kept at the St. Petersburg University and dated 1892, under this number there were kept, “more than 300 treatises, for the most part mystical in contents, bound into six bundles.” In the early 1930s, after a severe flood which hit Leningrad in 1924, these six bundles were divided into separate books, in some cases very improperly.

The text was copied for Prince Yunli in the 1720s or 1730s. However, the book which served as the original must have been a very old one, most probably dating from the times of the Yuan dynasty. It is clear from the text that the copyist in many cases failed to understand the original, for there are some incorrect spellings of even easy Mongolian words. Also, it should be noted that the text of the *Arban qoyar jokiyangyui* (“The Twelve Deeds of Buddha”) by Chos-kyi ’od-zer,<sup>5</sup> which attracted the scholarly interest a long time ago as being richly illustrated, is also a copy of a very old Mongolian book made for Prince Yunli.

The language of the text is the main witness to the fact that this Mongolian translation of “The Explanation of the Knowable” was made in the days of the Yuan dynasty. Here are a few examples of these archaisms.

a) Archaic spellings: *qijayar* for *kiजार* “frontier”; *übül* for *ebül* “winter”; *üdür* for *edür* “day”; *üder* for *üdter* “quick,” and many others.

b) Obsolete meanings: *čay* “size, measure”; *idesi* “life”; *sonin* “new.”

c) Frequent occurrence of the plural forms of the words. E.g. *uridus jayayad-tur buyan üiles üiledügsen-ü küčün-iyer* (f. 28b) “by force of doing virtuous deeds in the former rebirths.” The usage of plurals was not required by the corresponding passage in the Tibetan original (f. 19b:2).

d) No numerals higher than *tümen* “10,000” are used in the text (once occurs *tüg tümen* for “100,000”).

e) A special system of alphabetical signs for adequate transliteration of the Sanskrit and Tibetan words (Mong. *galig*), which was elaborated in the seventeenth century, is not used. The eighteenth-century copyist “amended” with some *galig* signs a few familiar loan-words and names (sometimes mistakenly).

f) Almost all the Sanskrit names were reconstructed and are given in the forms which were used in the Uighur Buddhist texts. It should be noted here that the Tibetans were translating almost all the Indian names and Buddhist terms into their native language. The Mongols who were translating Buddhist texts almost entirely from Tibetan, usually reconstructed the original Sanskrit names and terms. The text of “The Explanation of the Knowable” shows that this tradition existed since the first Buddhist texts were translated into Mongolian. This tradition was in turn borrowed from the Uighurs who, when translating from Chinese, always reconstructed Sanskrit names. In some cases these reconstructed Sanskrit equivalents are obscure and differ from the generally-recognised ones (see the attached Index of the Sanskrit loan-words).

The manner of translating “The Explanation of the Knowable” into Mongolian differs from the major part of the translations from Tibetan. The translator usually made a word by word translation, which followed the Tibetan original as closely as possible, even at the expense of the requirements of the Mongolian language. The unknown translator of “The Explanation of the Knowable” was freely adding words and phrases, dividing or combining Tibetan sentences, or re-arranging some parts of the original in order to make it understandable to Mongolian readers.

A comparison of the Tibetan original and the Mongolian translation also shows that the Tibetan text which served as the original for the translator must have differed from the version printed centuries later in the *Sa skya bka' ’bum*. Most of the dissimilarities



are indicated in the notes to the transliteration. In two cases these incongruities are very grave. The first is the genealogy of the legendary Indian kings from Mahāsammata up to Gautama (not Buddha). Most surprising is the fact that the two texts, Tibetan and Mongolian, disclose two different traditions. This becomes obvious from the comparison with the *Abhiṅṣkramaṇa-sūtra* (*mNgon par 'byung ba 'i mdo*).<sup>6</sup>

The second dissimilarity between the texts concerns the “Fifty-one mental functions” (Skt. *caitta*; Tib. *sems las byung ba*; Mong. *sedkil-eče boluysan*). The exposition of this topic in the Tibetan original differs from the Mongolian translation so greatly that there is no direct correspondence. For these reasons I have assembled the corresponding terms in an attached table.

The correspondence of chapters between the Tibetan and Mongolian texts as follows:

|              | <i>Mongolian</i> | <i>Tibetan</i>    |
|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Introduction | ff. 1a:1–2b:1    | ff. 1b:1–1b:11    |
| Chapter I    | ff. 2b:1–8b:6    | ff. 1b:11–12a:1   |
| Chapter II   | ff. 9a:1–26b:3   | ff. 12a:1–39a:19  |
| Chapter III  | ff. 26b:3–28a:5  | ff. 39a:19–41b:18 |
| Chapter IV   | ff. 28a:5–34a:5  | ff. 41b:19–50a:19 |
| Chapter V    | ff. 34a:5–34b:5  | ff. 50a:20–51a:9  |
| Colophon     | ff. 34b:5–35a:6  | ff. 51a:10–52a:8  |

The words and phrases, which appear in red ink in the original manuscript, are printed in bold letters in the transliteration. The Sanskrit words are not necessarily given in the forms in which they occur in the *Mahāvvyutpatti* though the references to this dictionary are given whenever possible.

The main purpose of the present publication is to introduce an extremely valuable written source for Mongol studies. The notes and comments made by the publisher are in no way supposed to be exhaustive. The text of “The Explanation of the Knowable” is of unrivalled value for studying the process by which Mongolian Buddhist terminology first took form.

When I discovered this text in 1993 I thought that it would not be fair on my part to continue the cataloguing without exposing this treasure to the scholarly world. For some time I put aside my cataloguing and began to prepare the text for the publication. I am very grateful to my friends and colleagues who have, in different ways, helped me to accomplish this work very quickly: Alexandre Ye. Andreev (St. Petersburg), Dr. L. Yu. Tugusheva (St. Petersburg), Prof. Dr. Veronika Veit (Bonn), Diana Cousens (Melbourne), Elena M. Denissova (St. Petersburg), Geshe Michael Roach (New Jersey). However, the already announced publication in a St. Petersburg publishing house failed for financial reasons. The appeals to Russian foundations were rejected. After several years of fruitless waiting I addressed Professor Nakami Tatsuo 中見立夫 whose unfailing support and friendship has already enabled me to publish several important works. As always, Professor Nakami showed his understanding of the importance of this text. Finally, due to the efforts of Professor Nakami the Mongolian version of the “The Explanation of the Knowable” has found its way to scholars. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Inoue Osamu 井上治 for his painstaking checking of the final version of the book and his useful corrections and advice.

This book can be regarded as a second companion to the “Catalogue of the Mongolian Manuscripts and Xylographs in the St. Petersburg State University Library,” the first being “Prince Yunli (1698–1738): Manchu Statesman and Tibetan Buddhist.” There is

no doubt that the present publication merely commences the study of the Mongolian version of “The Explanation of the Knowable.”

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<sup>1</sup> Sa Skya Bka' 'Bum. The Complete Works of the Great Masters of the Sa skya Sect of the Tibetan Buddhism. Facsimile Edition. 15 volumes. Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Prince Jiñ-gim's Textbook of Tibetan Buddhism: The Śes-bya rab-gsal (Jñeya-prakāśa) by 'Phags-pa Blo-gros rgyal-mtshan dPal-bzañ-po of the Sa-skyapa. Translated and annotated by Constance Hoog. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Uspensky, V. L., with assistance from O. Inoue. Catalogue of the Mongolian Manuscripts and Xylographs in the St. Petersburg State University Library. Edited and Foreword by T. Nakami. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999, p. 302, No. 313.

<sup>4</sup> Uspensky, V. L. Prince Yunli (1697–1738): Manchu Statesman and Tibetan Buddhist. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1997, pp. 26–33.

<sup>5</sup> Uspensky, V. L., Catalogue, p. 255, No. 186.

<sup>6</sup> Peking Edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka, No. 967, vol. 87, f. 119b:3–8.

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