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### Front cover:

"Desvarāti (Varāri, Varādi) Rāginī", watercolour, gouache and gold on paper.  
Deccan, second half of the 18th century. Album (*Muraqqa'*) X 3 in the Karl Fabergé collection  
at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, fol. 25 a, 11.5×17.0 cm.

### Back cover:

"Lalita Rāginī", watercolour, gouache and gold on paper. Deccan, second half of the 18th century.  
Same Album, fol. 34 b, 13.5×23.0 cm.

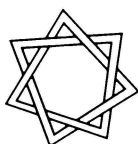
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One can consider the first issue in the series a trial edition. We repeat that, despite all of the flaws mentioned, this is a serious scholarly work that will undoubtedly draw the attention of the scholars both in Russia and abroad. One hopes that future issues will be prepared more carefully (many deficiencies could have been avoided if the editors of the Moscow Publishing House "Vostochnaia literatura",

primarily V. V. Volgina, who was responsible for the first issue in the series, had made their work more professionally). I am convinced that the Arabic alphabet should be used in the series, as its absence is the main shortcoming that considerably hinders using the catalogue.

*I. Wojewódzki*

**Elisabetta Chiodo. *The Mongolian Manuscripts on Birch Bark from Xarbuksyn Balgas in the Collection of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. Part 1. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000, X, 305 pp., plus facsimiles. — Asiatische Forschungen, Bd. 137.***

When perusing the catalogues and descriptions of Mongolian manuscript and xylograph collections, one constantly encounters the names of well-known Mongolian studies specialists who brought numerous collections of Mongolian written materials to dozens of currently existing repositories of Eastern manuscript and print books. From the very beginning of Mongolian studies as an academic discipline, seeking out and collecting Mongolian books was a key part of the process that allowed us to appreciate properly the diversity and breadth of the Mongolian peoples' written legacy, which took shape on the vast expanses of Mongolia over nearly eight centuries.

Apart from the archaographic expeditions that brought to light not insignificant number of unique Mongolian literary texts, archaeological expeditions also turned up extremely valuable ancient Mongolian manuscripts and xylographs. Among the finds best known and most valuable to scholars are the fragments of fourteenth-century manuscript and print books from Turfan and Khara Khoto. More than 200 manuscript fragments from the sixteenth — seventeenth centuries were found in the wrecked *suburgan* in Olon Süme in Southern Mongolia.

The last discovery was made in 1970 by a Russian-Mongolian archaeological expedition that found a large number of manuscript texts in Mongolian and Tibetan stored in a partially destroyed *suburgan* in the village of Xarbus on the site of the ancient city of Xarbuksyn Balgas, not far from the centre of the Dašinčilen *sum* of the Bulgan *ajmag*, 240 km north-west of Ulan-Bator. Most of the manuscripts and manuscript fragments (approximately 1,000 items) are in Mongolian: 240 of them are published by Elisabetta Chiodo in the monograph under review here.

One of the notable aspects of this collection is that all of the manuscript texts were executed on birch bark. Some other instances of the Mongols' using birch bark in place of paper are also known. The oldest such example, the so-called "Golden Horde manuscript", was discovered on the Volga in 1930; it dates to the fourteenth century. Numerous other birch-bark manuscripts dated to the first half of the seventeenth century, the period when all of the manuscripts included in the collection under review were written. Such a large number of manuscripts on birch bark appeared, of course, because of a shortage of paper, always an extremely expensive and rare commodity in the steppes. Imported Chinese paper was usually used, but often turbulent mo-

ments in Mongolian history, for example, the events of the late sixteenth — early seventeenth centuries, led to the dropping of the availability of Chinese goods, including paper. The solution to the paper shortage was to write on birch bark (the areas surrounding Xarbuksyn, Elisabetta Chiodo remarks, to this day abound in birches).

The manuscripts extracted from the *suburgan* were a rather sad spectacle, consisting of birch-bark folios and fragments covered in lime, stuck together thanks to animal droppings and dirt, and partly damaged by fire. It demanded a great deal of painstaking restoration to clean and preserve the material; only then could the manuscripts be studied.

The task of enormous difficulty stood before Elisabetta Chiodo: to identify and analyse the numerous scattered folios and fragments, which required a great deal of attention and patience, not to mention a solid knowledge of Mongolian palaeography and texts. No less difficult was the attribution of the identified texts, as the published volume includes only 14 complete or "almost complete" manuscripts. All of the remaining manuscript texts were preserved in the form of fragments, sometimes minuscule.

Naturally, a significant part of the collection consists of Buddhist works, but there are, however, several manuscripts of non-Buddhist content. Among them the records of the so-called "Eighteen Steppe Laws", published in 1974 by the Mongolian historian Kh. Perlee, a participant in the expedition that discovered the treasure-trove of birch-bark books, deserve special attention. The publication of these laws is an event of great importance in Mongolian studies, since the laws were adopted at the gatherings of the Khalkha princes in the late sixteenth — early seventeenth centuries, making them the earliest known Mongol code to appear after the fall of the Yüan dynasty. The manuscript of the "Eighteen Steppe Laws" discovered was abraded and frayed from extended use and unreadable in places; some of the folios had been lost. Luckily, a few folios missing in Perlee's publication were discovered during the preparation of the monograph under review here (fols. 14b—17a). They contain the text of the so-called "Great Distribution" linked with worship of Genghis Khan.

Among manuscripts Elisabetta Chiodo discusses there are several copies of astrological and fortune-telling reference works. These include, for example, guides to the location of the soul for each day of the month (XBM 93—96) and predictions of fortuitous days for weddings (XBM 97—99). We find also collections of dream interpretations and indications of means to dispel bad dreams (XBM 100—103). Such literature was widespread among the nomad Mongols who did undertake nothing without first appealing to oracles. To meet this demand, collections were drawn up

to include all manner of fortune-telling devices, portents, predictions of lucky and unlucky days for various undertakings, etc.

Of much interest are also previously unknown works introduced into scholarly circulation for the first time, for example, a prayer addressed to Altan-khan of Tumet, of which unfortunately only a small fragment (XBM 79) has survived, and the oldest known prayers to the Panchen-lama and Dalai-lama (XBM 78). To these one can add the text of a hitherto unknown prayer to Geser in Mongolian (XBM 73).

Also valuable are manuscripts that contain examples of ritual texts with elements of ancient Mongolian folk beliefs. Among them we find fragments of the records of the *dalalga* ritual, directly related to the cult of fire (XBM 82—85), as well as the ritual of burning incense (XBM 80, 81), different from what was later recorded (after it was influenced by Buddhism).

An examination of the Buddhist texts included by the author in the first volume reveals that they consist primarily of ritual literature used in everyday Buddhist practice: descriptions of rituals (XBM 60, 66—71) and a series of prayers, hymns, invocations (*dharaṇi*) read during Buddhist rituals and services. In particular, we find folios and fragments of 21 copies of the prayer *Itegel* (XBM 1—21), the text of which was used during the ritual profession of the faith. It is the first text that was memorized by each Buddhist, and that it the reason why in some manuscripts this prayer comes directly after the Mongolian alphabet.

The publication also includes such texts as the "Three Masses", a prayer of repentance (XBM 22—27), prayers to free the soul of a deceased person from a long stay in the "area in-between" (*bardo*) (XBM 110), and a brief redaction of the canonical "Sūtra of the Golden Light" (XBM 29—40), which were widespread among the Mongols.

One should note that when discussing the spread of this or that text among the Mongols, we usually mean manuscripts of later origin, generally the eighteenth — nineteenth centuries. The manuscripts from Xarbuxyn Balgas were written in the first half of the seventeenth century; they represent the earliest Mongolian versions of works that later gained fame among Mongolian followers of Buddhism.

The manuscripts introduced by the author contain valuable material for all those whose interests lie in the field of Mongolian literature and history. Linguists will also find here much to interest them: written in the first half of the seventeenth century, a period of transition from the pre-classical language to the classical, these birch-bark records display a fair number of archaic forms that can throw more light on the early period of the Mongolian language's development. The glossary included in the monograph renders all of the material from Xarbuxyn Balgas extremely accessible and convenient for such research.

We must note that the author of this book has already completed a significant study on the language of the manuscripts. This is treated in a separate section at the beginning of the book (pp. 21—35), as well as in the thorough philological commentary that accompanies the transcription of the manuscripts' texts.

In sum, Elisabetta Chiodo's monograph is a carefully conceived and professionally executed work that includes all the necessary components; it complies fully with the demands contemporary scholarship makes on such publications. One can only wish the author an equally successful continuation of the work she has already undertaken to publish the birch-bark manuscripts from Xarbuxyn Balgas.

*A. Sazykin*