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## The Identity of Chinggis Khan's Father According to Written Mongolian Accounts

It is generally accepted that Chinggis Khan's father was Yisügei ba'atur. Most of the Mongolian accounts support this idea, but other answers to this question also emerged. As the Mongols' way of thinking changed, other figures were also brought up who were regarded as the great Khan's father. Vajrapani and Qormusda were also mentioned as his father, but in several cases the identity of Chinggis' father was irrelevant. The reason for this is that the descendants traced back their power and legitimacy to Chinggis, not to his father, and they wanted to emphasize the illustrious origin of the Great Khan.

**Key words:** Chinggis Khan, Yisügei, Mongolian historiography.

In the Inner-Asian steppes many dynasties followed one after the other, and their founders were forgotten after their empire had fallen. The only exception is Chinggis, whose descendants made up the major part of the Mongolian elite from the reign of Dayan Khan (1464—1516), who for a short time was able to reunite the Mongolian territories and appointed his sons leaders of his domain, displacing the old, non-Chinggisid elite from rulership [MuT, 2008. P. 125]. They did not want to forget their ancestors, so a great number of family trees were prepared by their order. Later on, Chinggis' cult was also supported by the Manchu emperors of the Qing era [Elverskog, 2006. P. 63]. Thus, the memory of Chinggis has always been cultivated, and he is remembered even today [Khan, 1994].

Chinggis' cult started after his death. In the *Bolor Toli* (written by Jimbadorji in 1849) Bogorchi, one of his paladins, says upon his master's death that he will maintain the great Khan's memory — Chinggis' father, however, is not mentioned<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, even though the

sources do not refer to Yisügei's cult in the Mongolian Court<sup>2</sup>, he was not forgotten. Khubilai Khan established the *Ancestors' Temple* (*ebüged-ün süm-e*) where offerings were made to Chinggis and his descendants. In 1266, Yisügei and three more generations of Chinggis' ancestors were also added to those for whom official offering ceremonies were made<sup>3</sup>. In spite of this, in the *Cayan teüke*, which was compiled in Khubilai's era, we can find references only to Chinggis' cult, but there is nothing about the other members of his family [Cayan teüke, 1976. P. 92—93]. After the collapse of the Yuan Empire, the ancestors' cult objects were rescued to Ordos. Nevertheless, there is no shrine now, neither for Yisügei nor for Chinggis' other ancestors in Ordos or elsewhere. Prayers or offerings for Yisügei cannot be found in the sources that have come down to us. There were some representations of the ancestors among the Mongols concerning to the cult, but Yisügei did not appear in any of them [Charleaux, 2010. P. 209]. The cult of Chinggis' ancestors has disappeared during the centuries.

<sup>1</sup> *When Chinggis Khan became god [i. e. passed away], everybody saw and wondered that his ashes shined as a rainbow and it [Chinggis' body] became one cubit long. Many counsellors and noble ladies met in council, and they agreed to put the ashes into a golden chest. It was taken and worshipped in a palace called Comcog, which looked like the god's abode. After that they wanted to choose a dutiful officer to make offerings for the ashes from that time on forever. Noble Küliüg Boghorchi said, «Since my childhood I and my holy lord have been friends, and we were together in weal and woe. Despite the fact that the Khan's will remained hidden, I would like to make offerings for his ashes that are like precious stones». Everybody approved of his words, and noble Bogorchi was appointed to make the offerings. (Chinggis qan-i Inгри болуһсан чар-ту шарил-и үјебесү солонгы-а метү miraljiyad nigen toqui kiritei болуһсан-и бүгүдегер үјежү яайылдайад olan түсимед ба қатуд жөбледүн кеҗеҗү. altan qayircay dorot-a jalaҗад Inгри-yin ordo qarši-yin bayidal-tu comcoҗ kemekü ordon-du orosighulju takibai... tende-ece шарил-и egүride takiqiu-*

*dur kiciyeltei түсимед-и сонгон кеҗеҗекү-дүр күлиүг бойорци нойан өгүлеbei. бойда ежен-луҗ-а-бан би бай-а-аца қанилм қатауу жөҗелен уйы-а жидкүжү ябулу-а . қан-у gegen sedkil dalda болуһсан болбасу erdeni metü шарил-и би бер takiqiu-и күсемүи кемегсен-е бүгүдегер жөбсиyeжү бойорци нойан-ду тусиҗауу takiyulbai)* [Bolor Toli, 1984. P. 422; Ratchnevsky, 1970. P. 420].

<sup>2</sup> Plano Carpini's report of his Mongolian journey is a valuable account, it said that *The Tartars have mad an idol of the first emperor which they have put in a cart in a place of honor before the horde of the current emperor* [Plano Carpini, 1996. P. 46], and he also wrote that there was an Chinggis' image in the Bat's court [Plano Carpini, 1996. P. 46] Yisügej was not mentioned anywhere. When Carpini starts the history of the Mongols nobody was mentioned before Chinggis Khan [Plano Carpini, 1996. P. 55].

<sup>3</sup> *Taizu-aca degegsi dörben üy-e-yin ebügen nemejü* [DYUB, 1987. P. 188].

In the following I will examine how Chinggis' father appears in the accounts. The oldest Mongolian source, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, claims that Yisügei Ba'atur was Chinggis' father [SHM, 2006. P. 13 (§ 60)]. Almost all later works adopted this idea: for example Sayang Secen's *Erdeni-yin tobci* [Erdeni-yin tobci, 1959. P. 55]. This work was the most widespread chronicle, because it was the only Mongolian historical work that was published by xylograph during the Manchu period (it was published in 1777, its title: *Mongyol qad-un eki ündüsüin* [Ulayan, 2005. P. 73; Qasgerel, 2013. P. 417]. The other historical works spread only by copied manuscripts. Other examples included Gombojaw's *Gangy-a-yin urusqal* [GyU, 1999. P. 10]. Lomi's *Mongyol-un Borjigin obuy-un teüke* [MBOT, 2000. P. 58]. Mergen Gegen Lubsangdambijalsan's *Altan tobci* [MGAT, 1998. P. 49]. Rasipuncuy's *Bolor erike* [Bolor erike, 2000. P. 25]. Na Ta's *Altan erike* [Altan erike, 1999. P. 23] and Jimbadorji's *Bolor Toli* — all these works present Yisügei as Chinggis' father [Bolor Toli, 1984. P. 391]. In these sources information about Chinggis' father can be found not only in the part dealing with the ancestors, but later parts also contain some references. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century *Quriyangyui Altan tobci*, for instance, Önebolod refers to Yisügei in his speech: *Our father, Yisügei Ba'atur was the same. We, Temüjin, Kasar, Kacugun and Ocigin are from the same, Höelün mother's womb*<sup>4</sup>.

Similarly to the historical sources, some offering texts mention Yisügei as Chinggis khan's father [Rintchen, 1959. P. 69] but many of them do not say anything about this question. Nevertheless, all of them note that Chinggis' origin can be traced to the Heaven<sup>5</sup>. The *Altan uruy-un saculi*, in which almost all members of the *Altan uruy* are listed, starts with Chinggis khan, and there is not any word about his ancestors [Rintchen, 1959. P. 84].

In the 17<sup>th</sup>—18<sup>th</sup> centuries, several chronicles have two different parts: the first part is about history, focusing on Chinggis khan, while the second part is about his descendants. Such chronicles are the *Asarayci neretü-yin teüke*, the *Sir-a Tujuji*, etc. The historical part can be understood as a preface to the genealogy. These works might have been written at the request of some noble families to show their illustrious origin. Generally, the author also belonged to their lineage. One of these chronicles is the *Dörben jüil-ün teüke*, of which only two copies<sup>6</sup> survived, and it seems that they were copied

<sup>4</sup> Önebolod ong ögüleriin yisügei bayatur ecige manu nigen büllüge . eke manu keelen eke-ece temüjin . qasar . qacuyun . ocigin bida nigen kbelitei büllüge [QAT, 2002. P. 86].

<sup>5</sup> Suutu ngri ijayurtu, ingrlig törögsen Cinggis qayan etc. [Rintchen, 1959. P. 63, 67]. *Erketü ngri-yin köbegün / Erkin yeke kücütü / er-e törögsen sutu boyda cinggis qayan*. (These sentences are the starting words of the *Arban nigen secid-ün üges*, quoted by Владимирцов, 1927).

<sup>6</sup> National Library of Mongolia, 15/96 and 1094/96. Both of them are book format and they consist of 35 and 33 numbered pages. There is a similar work from Library of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Its call number is F 215 (without title). The

from an old (?) manuscript in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The author is unknown, but he claims to be a descendant of Batu Möngke khan<sup>7</sup>, and he refers to himself with the following sentence: *Do not listen to a fool like me!*<sup>8</sup> There is no exact date of composition in the colophon, but on the last pages there are several genealogical tables of Khalka nobles, the last names in which are from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which may indicate that the whole work was compiled at that time. The main source of the historical part of *Dörben jüil-ün teüke* might have been Sayang Secen's *Erdeni-yin tobci*. It starts with the formation of the world and the history of India, goes on with the history of Tibet, and finally arrives at the history of Mongolia. The genealogy begins with the first Indian king. According to the *Dörben jüil-ün teüke*, Höleün was the wife of Yeke Chiledü, who belonged to the Olqonud tribe. She was abducted from him by Yisügei Ba'atur, and she became his consort. At this time she was already two months pregnant. After the ninth month Temüjin was born<sup>9</sup>. This story inevitably raises the question: If Chinggis khan's father was Yeke Chiledü, why were Yisügei Ba'atur's ancestors listed? He was only the foster father — according to this work. However, the bloodline was also broken in *The Secret History of the Mongols* and in almost all other works, since Bodonchar did not have blood relation with his own ancestors whose names are listed in the previous genealogy, because his father was a celestial man. Kidnapping a pregnant woman was not unknown in Mongolian history. The above-mentioned Bodonchar, for example, also abducted an expectant mother, the child was named Jajiradai, because he was the son of strangers<sup>10</sup>. Other examples can be found as well for different foster- and genetic fathers. It is assumed that Chinggis khan's oldest child, Jochi, was conceived in captivity, when Yeke Chiledü's younger brother, Chileger bökö, *laid his hands on the noble lady (i. e. Börte, Chinggis khan's wife)* [SHM, 2006. P. 42 (§ 111)]. Nevertheless, Chinggis raised him as his own child, but later Chagatai accused Jochi of being a *bastard offspring of the Merkit* [SHM, 2006. P. 183 (§ 254)]. Despite this, later sources do not stigmatize Jochi's origin. According to a legend, Toghon Temür khan's son was Yung-lo emperor from the Ming dynasty. In spite of this legend, however, none of the Mongolian works mention this emperor to be the Mongol khan's child. These examples suggest that the

connection between this work and the *Dörben Jüil-ün Teüke* is an unsolved question.

<sup>7</sup> *Dörben jüil-ün teüke* 15/96. P. 34, 1094/96. P. 32.

<sup>8</sup> *Minu metü bidayu oyungtu buu üjegtiin. Dörben jüil-ün teüke* 15/96: 35, 1094/96: 33. The «modesty» of the author was very common in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the author of the *Altan erike* refers to himself as *arkiy-a ebügen Na Ta (old, drinken Na Ta)*. ([Altan erike, 1999. P. 7] (In the introduction part by Choyiji)).

<sup>9</sup> *Olqonud kemekü ulus-un ciletü mergen-ü gergei öelüng ekener-i buliyan abuyad qatun bolyabai .. yurban sar-a-tai dayaburi kuu arban sar-a güicejü [...] törögsen temüjin.* (*Dörben jüil-ün teüke* 15/96: 10, 1094/96. P. 10).

<sup>10</sup> The root of *jajiradai* is *jat*, meaning 'foreign, other'.

upbringing and the family background was more important for the Mongols than the identity of the father. Presumably the author of the *Dörben jüil-ün teüke* considered the blood relationship between Chinggis khan and Yisügei to be irrelevant, as well. Yeke Chiledü's fatherhood has not been found either in any other written works.

As soon as the doctrine of reincarnation spread by Buddhism in the time of Khubilai, it appeared in the Mongolian works. In the *Caγan teüke*, there is nothing about Chinggis' father; he was described as a reincarnation of *Vajrapani*<sup>11</sup>, which fact was more important than the identity of his father, who was not mentioned at all. From the time of Khubilai Khan there is another work that is of interest for us: the *Explanation of the Knowable (Medegdekün-i belgetey-e geyigülügci)* by 'Phags-pa lama, which was originally written in Tibetan, but was soon translated into Mongolian. This work includes a little genealogical tree starting from Chinggis khan. His father is not mentioned, probably because his identity was irrelevant from the perspective of Buddhism<sup>12</sup>. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the *Erdeni tumal neretü sudur (Altan qaγan-u tuγuji)* has the same point of view. It focuses on the life of Altan khan, who was the first Buddhist ruler after the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, and it says of him that he was Chinggis khan's descendant. The Mongolian history in this work starts with Chinggis — nobody is mentioned before him [ETNS, 2003. P. 62]. The same idea can be found in the colophons of some other Buddhist writings such as the *Pancaraksa*, for example [MӨНХСАЙХАН. 2011. P. 136]. In addition, there are some historical works (for instance, *Bilig-ün jula* [BJ, 2007. P. 20], *Subud erike* [SE, 2007. P. 36, 107] etc.) in which Chinggis is described as Yisügei's son and at the same time as a reincarnation of *Vajrapani*.

There is another theory about Chinggis khan's father. While in the 13<sup>th</sup> century only the khan's origin was traced back to the gods, later he became a god himself. Because of the lack of sources this process is not clear. In the colophon of the *Bilig-ün cinadu kijayar-a kürügsen jayun mingyan toya-tu* from the *Kanjur*, written presumably in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Ching-

<sup>11</sup> [Caγan teüke, 1976. P. 92—93]. It is not clear why exactly *Vajrapani*. According the Biography of Phags-pa lama, when he met with Khubilaj, the khan asked who was great man in Tibet. Phags-pa said that there was there buddhist ruler and the third was Ralpacen (tib.: Khri-gtsug-lde-brtsan, reigned: 815—836), he was the reincarnation of *Vajrapani* [PPBT, 1999. P. 13]. Not only Chinggis was described as a reincarnation of *Vajrapani* in the Mongolian history. Altan khan, Abatai Sain khan and Gushi khan also were mentioned as a reincarnation of *Vajrapani* [Баясгалан, 2012. P. 122].

<sup>12</sup> *Burqan nirvan bolju γurban mingyan jayun on-u qoyin-a . umara mongγol-un ulus-tur uridus jayaγaad-tur buyan üiles üiledügsen-ü kücün-iyer törögsen temüjin neretü cinggis qaγan bolbai. [...] cagirvad qan metü bolbai* [EK, 2006. P. 23].

gis khan is described as Qormusda khan's incarnation<sup>13</sup>, and his father is not mentioned. At that time this was a common idea, for example Ligdan khan (1604—1634) had the title *Qormusda khan* as well [LuAT, 1992. P. 119]. There are several references to Chinggis being the son of god: for example, in the *Asarayci neretü-yin teüke* he is described as the Son of the khan Heaven<sup>14</sup>, who can be identified as Qormusda.

The connection between Chinggis khan and Qormusda is clarified in the *Erdeni-yin Erike* by Galdan (1796—1880), who came from a noble family and worked as an officer in Tüsiyetü khan's territory. His work was wide-spread; there are lots of copies both in Mongolia and Inner-Mongolia, and it contains a peculiar description of Chinggis khan's parents and his conceiving:

*Qormusda god examined into the decline of one of his cities and realized that he had forgotten the prophecy given by Buddha's Brightness: «In the future in the lower direction [= on the Earth] twelve evil emperors will be born. They will get the title of khan and make the people suffer. At that time send one of your sons [to the Earth] to amend it [i. e. the city]!» Thus, Qormusda descended by magic. He enjoyed happiness with Höelün. Then she woke up and could not decide whether it was real or just a dream. Therefore she looked out [of the yurt] and noticed only one trail of footprints leading outside in the snow. So she realized that it was real and gave birth to a child who had perfect marks. When he was born in his hand he grasped a black blood clot which was of the size of an ankle bone. At first the child got the name Temüjin because the captured Tatar Temüjin was brought there when he was born. He became famous as the reincarnation of Vajrapani*<sup>15</sup>.

In this work the idea of the khan being Qormusda god's descendant is mentioned at another part, in which the birth of khans are generally said to be accompanied by dream signs<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Sün dalai metü tngri-ner-ün qaγan qormusda anu . sutu boyda cinggis qaγan bolun qubilju töröged* [CdK, 1942. P. 167].

<sup>14</sup> *Qaγan tngri-yin köbegün cinggis qaγan* [ANT, 2002. P. 43].

<sup>15</sup> ... *qormusda tngri ber nigen balyasu-ben öngge bayuraysan-i sinjileged . urida burqan-u gegen-ber iregedüi cay-tur door-a jüg-tür arban qoyar kücütü arad töröjü . qad-un ner-e-ber ulus-i jobayaqu bolqu . tere cay nigen köbegün-iyen ilegejü jasyul kemegsen boşuy-i martaysan-ıyan medejü ridi-ber bayuju ögelen qatun-a amuyulang egüskeküi-dür qatun-ber serigsen-ü qoyin-a jegüden biliü ünün biliü kemen yadaγši qayiju . casun-u deger-e giskigsen γayca mör-i üjejü itegemjilegsen-ece üliger belge tegülde nigen köbegün şıyay-yin cinege qara nöjin adquju sayitur boluγsan [...] mendeljügüi ... [...] tatar-un temüjin-i oljalaju ireküi-dür tokiyaldun mendülügsen-iyer eng terigün ner-e inu temüjin kemen nerey-ıdıwırcıbanı-yin qubilıyan-dur aldaraşıγıyui* [EyE, 1999. P. 131].

<sup>16</sup> ... *qan kümün kemebesü qan qormusda tngri-yin ür-e mön . jegüden-ü belges-iyer iregsen ajuγu* [EyE, 1999. P. 141].

The story described in the *Erdeni-yin erike* is a mixture of different elements. The first part is identical to the beginning of the xylograph version of the Geser epic (*Arban жүг-үн ежен Geser qayan-u tuyuji*):

*Long time ago, before Shakyamuni Buddha reached the enlightenment, Qormusda god wanted to show his respect for him. He went there [i. e. before Shakyamuni Buddha] and bowed. Buddha gave him an order: «In 500 years chaos will arrive to the Earth. Go back to your home, and in 500 years, send one of your three children [to the Earth] and make him the khan of the Earth! [...] Qormusda agreed and went back. After that he forgot about Buddha's order»*<sup>17</sup>. The motif of the twelve evil emperors can be traced back to *Quriyangyui altan tobci*, which says that *Twelve evil khans will be born, and they will make every living being suffer. Buddha foretold that they [i. e. the twelve evil khans] would be defeated, and Chinggis khan was born*<sup>18</sup>.

After that, Alan Goa's dream can be recognized. It is a well-known legend, which appeared first in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, and it can be found in almost all of the Mongolian accounts.

The last borrowed element in the *Erdeni-yin erike*, the idea that Chinggis is the reincarnation of Vajrapani,

is also very old; as it was shown above, it was also mentioned in the *Caγan teiike*.

As we have seen, Chinggis khan's father is identified in different ways in the Mongolian accounts. Yisügei Ba'atur is mentioned generally, but many times Qormusda god is the father, or Chinggis is described as Vajrapani's reincarnation. He was a self-made man; he did not inherit any power from his father, who was killed when Chinggis was young. The great khan never referred to his father as the source of his power/legitimacy in any of the sources known to us. Since Chinggis was worshipped by his descendants, it was necessary for them to demonstrate that their ancestor was not an *ordinary black-headed man* [SHM, 2006. P. 5 (§ 21)], but a man of celestial or other supernatural origin. Thus, for the descendants two things were important: 1) their forefather was Chinggis (not Yisügei or somebody else); 2) Chinggis had celestial or other illustrious origin. This is the reason for the disappearance of Yisügei's cult, and for the description of Chinggis as the son of Qormusda or as Vajrapani's reincarnation, and sometimes both of them.

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<sup>17</sup> *erte nigen caγ-tur . sigimuni burqan-i nirwan düri üjegülkü-yin urida . qormusda tngri burqan-dur mörgüy-e geжü ecibe . kürcü mörgүgsen qoyin-a . burqan qormusda tngri-dür jarliy bolba . tabun jayun jil boluyсан-u qoyin-a yirtincü-yin caγ samayu bolqu bui . gertegen qariju tabun jayun jil boluyad . yurban keüked-iyen nigen-i ilege . tere yirtincü-yin qan tere boltoyai [...] qormusda tngri jöb geжü qariju irebe . iregsen-ü qoyin-a burqan-u jarliy-i martaju . qormusda tngri doloγan jayun jil boltal-a saγuba* [AJEGQT, 1955. P. 1].

<sup>18</sup> *Arban qoyar maγu qad töröжü . qamuy amitan-i jobayaju yabuqui-dur tedен-i doruyitayulqui-yin tulada burqan-dur biwanggirid ögteжü . cinggis qayan törөbe* [QAT. 2002. P. 41].

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