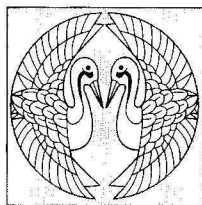


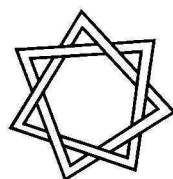
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES
ST.PETERSBURG BRANCH



Manuscripta Orientalia

International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research

Vol. 3 No. 1 March 1997



HESSA
St. Petersburg-Helsinki

M. I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya

TIBETAN EIGHTH-CENTURY DOCUMENTS ON WOOD FROM MIRAN

To reconstruct the history of East Turkestan in the eighth—ninth centuries it is necessary to take into account not only Chinese literary sources — official chronicles and documents, reports, memoirs of Chinese pilgrims, etc., but also documents written in the languages of the natives of the land, the aboriginal population of East Turkestan. Only in this way we can gain insight into political, social and economic relations of that time.

A considerable number of written sources of this kind have been introduced into circulation during the last years. The eighth-century Tibetan documents on wood considered in this article belong exactly to this group of written sources. Their introduction is important in many respects. First of all, these documents provide direct evidence on the lives of Tibetan garrisons in occupied territories, on all difficulties and problems they had to encounter. This material cannot be replaced by any chronicle. Second, these documents provide valuable information on the administration of the occupied territories, its bureaucratic institutions, on the system of accounts and management. The analysis of person and place names gives some idea on the ethnic composition of the Tibetan army as well as on the confessional association of its soldiers. The documents give the actual location of Tibetan garrisons on the territory of East Turkestan, the directions in which goods, mainly provisions, were transported; by the time required for their delivery one can estimate the distance between different garrisons and the practicability of the roads. Finally, these documents are the only and the earliest monuments of the Tibetan language of the seventh—ninth centuries. This language was close to the one spoken in daily life, not yet affected by the influence of other languages, like Sanskrit and Chinese, from which Tibetan pandits were beginning at that time to translate Buddhist scriptures.

The collection of Tibetan documents on wood (call number TD — Tibetan documents, TD-1—58) considered here is preserved in the Manuscript fund of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences [1]. This collection actually includes 57 documents on wood, of which 53 are written in Tibetan cursive *dbu-can* script, two documents (TD-31a and TD-31b) — in North Turkestan Brāhmī script in Tocharian B (Kuchine) language, one is a piece for gambling or divination with dots — from one to six — drawn on its sides in China ink; two wooden plaques (TD-56a and TD-56b) are blank.

The collection was acquired from the natives by S. E. Malov during his second expedition to East Turkestan (1913—1915) when he was commissioned by the Russian Committee for the Study of Central and East Asia to collect materials on the Turkic tribes. The exact date of the acquisition is known — June 15, 1915. It took place in the settlement of Miran near the Lobnor lake. Initially the collection was preserved in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg—Leningrad. On 20 March 1925 it was transferred to the Asiatic Museum (in 1930 transformed into the Institute of Oriental Studies).

The site of Miran, when N. M. Przhevalsky first surveyed and mapped it in 1878 (under the name “Ruins of an Old City”) [2], presented ruins of a Tibetan fortress built at the time of the Tibetan domination in East Turkestan. Twice, in 1907 and in 1913—1914, it was investigated by the second and the third British expedition directed by A. Stein who undertook excavations there and discovered about 1,500 similar Tibetan documents written on wooden plaques.

Our wooden plaques, acquired by S. E. Malov, were most probably found by the natives at the same site. Judging by their appearance and by the person and place names mentioned in the texts, they should belong to one of the archives (Tib. *yid-dkar-chag* “register of letters”) of the Tibetan military garrisons on the territory of Miran, to the south of the Lobnor Lake. Among the geographical names mentioned in the documents are the following: Minor Nob, identified with Miran (see below), Greater Nob — the modern Charhlyk, Shing-Shang or Shong-Shang, the medieval name of the fortress where the headquarters of the Tibetan army were located, not far from the present-day Mazar-Tagh (in Khotan).

The first description of the collection was published in 1953 by V. S. Vorobyov-Desyatovsky [3]. In the same year he also published four documents of the collection — TD-23 [4], TD-24, TD-15, and TD-18 [5]. Hungarian scholar G. Uray, who wrote a review of this publication [6], estimated it very highly, marking that it was actually the first scholarly publication including all necessary components: facsimile of the documents, their description, transliteration of the Tibetan text, its translation into Russian, and commentaries. V. S. Vorobyov-Desyatovsky intended to continue his work on the documents, but his untimely death interrupted it. From that time there was no one in the Academy to undertake this difficult work. Besides the difficul-

ties of deciphering archaic Tibetan script and language, of which there are no special dictionaries, the interpretation of the contents also presents a number of problems. The toponymics of the Lobnor area, as well as that of the whole East Turkestan, is still far from being properly studied. The reading and interpretation of the documents from Malov's collection is possible only within the context of contemporary documents of the same contents written in other languages of East Turkestan: Chinese, Kroraini, Khotanese Saka, Tocharian, and Old Uighur.

Our attempt to resume the study of the Tibetan documents from Malov's collection does not pretend to solve all these problems. This article opens a series of publications of separate documents we are able to explicate. The publication of the whole collection will be undertaken jointly with Prof. Tsuguhito Takeuchi and will take several years.

What is the place of the documents from Malov's collection among Tibetan written sources of the same group? At present we know two prominent collections of the eighth–ninth century Tibetan documents, the collection of A. Stein and the collection of P. Pelliot. The documents and manuscripts brought by A. Stein from East Turkestan are written on paper as well as on wood. They come from Miran, Mazar-Tagh, Dunhuang, and from other places. Their description, along with precise location of the finds, was made by A. Stein himself [7]. Stein had published a number of photographs of the manuscripts as illustrations to his books, which, for a long time, remained the only facsimile reproductions of Tibetan documents from East Turkestan. But the first study of these documents was published by A. Francke even before the appearance of Stein's publications, in 1914. Later he also commented on Stein's Tibetan finds in the volume of "Serindia" [8]. The translation of about 400 documents into English and their study, first of all of the historical evidence they contain, was made by F. W. Thomas. He started the publication of his work in 1927 in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* and accomplished it in 1934, producing in all 6 issues [9]. Neither Francke nor Thomas were reproducing the documents' facsimile. Thomas gave only their Latin transliteration, translation into English and commentaries. Documents on wood in his publication were not separated from documents on paper. Later his work on the documents was reprinted as a separate volume [10].

Only in 1986 Chinese scholars Wang Yao and Chen Jian published their monograph dedicated exclusively to documents on wood [11]. In their publication 464 documents are presented in modern Tibetan lettering and in Latin transliteration. The documents translated into Chinese are supplied with commentaries. Modern equivalents are suggested for some archaic words and terms. The weak point of the publication is the absence of a good facsimile — the scholars managed to provide only 16 plates with photographs of 116 documents earlier reproduced by Stein and Thomas. The quality of the plates is rather low, so the documents are practically illegible. The volume has no indices. As far as we know, the publication does not cover all documents from Stein's collection. Many still remain unpublished. Prof. Takeuchi is working now on the catalogue of Tibetan documents in the British Library where the collection of A. Stein is preserved. The documents published by Wang Yao and Chen Jian deal mainly with the system of land use in East Turkestan at the time of the Tibetan domination. We could not find a single docu-

ment there similar to those in our collection. It looks like most of our documents contain official and private correspondence and reports, their language is quite different being closer to the everyday colloquial language.

As for the collection of P. Pelliot, there is no mention in publications of any documents on wood there. Prof. Takeuchi told us that he had seen wooden plaques in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. As for other Tibetan manuscripts of this collection, including business documents on paper, those have been published in facsimile in two volumes in 1978–1979 by Ariane Macdonald (Spanien) and Yoshiro Imaeda [12]. This publication includes 65 Tibetan documents classified by their contents into the following groups: i) administrative (8); ii) business—commerce, deals, financial documents (14); iii) legal (12); iv) other (1). In 1995 came out the volume on Tibetan business documents on paper published by Prof. Takeuchi [13]. This publication covers 58 documents from the collections of A. Stein, P. Pelliot and Sven Hedin in the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm [14].

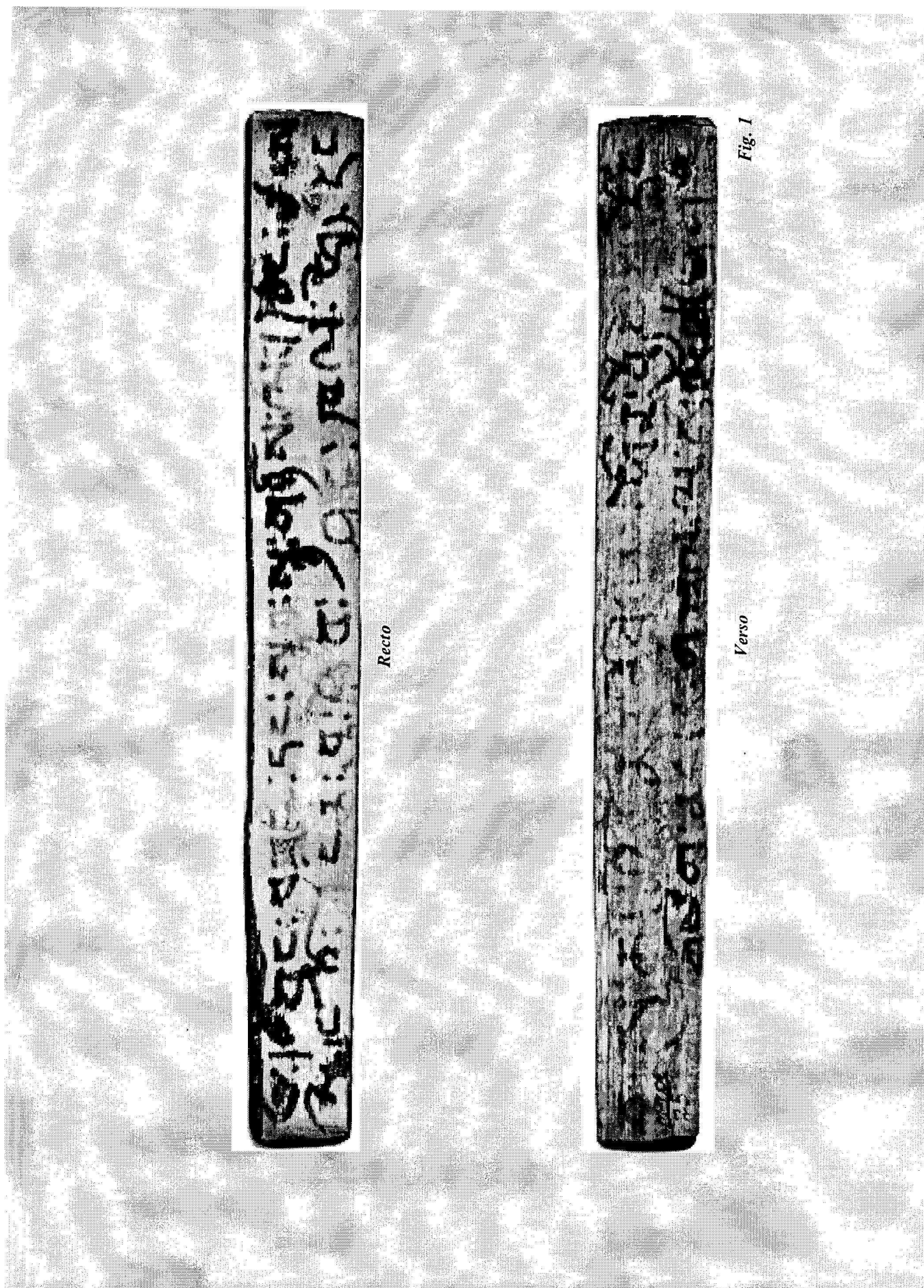
The study of the documents from Malov's collection demonstrates that by their appearance, script, and language they could be compared with the documents on wood from the region of Miran already published in the editions enumerated above. By their contents they do not, however, overlap the former, but make an important supplement to the information they contain. The same can be said about the shape of the wooden plaques. Our plaques allow not only to describe the outward appearance of Tibetan documents, but also the ways they functioned.

The plaques differ in size depending on their contents. The principle two sizes are: ca. 9.0 × 1.5 cm and ca. 20.0 × 3.0 cm. In length the texts vary from one word or name to three lines. Texts could continue on the sides or on the reverse. Most plaques have a round hole on the right, which might explain the way they were kept: they were possibly put on a string. Some plaques do not have a hole, but have grooves on the left side — pairs of plaques were most probably tied together with a cord. Some of the plaques evidently served a cover for such a pair; they bear an address: to whom, where and from whom the letter was sent. These plaques also have a cavity with traces of clay — to seal a pair of plaques.

Most documents are rectangular plaques with a hole for a cord in the right side. By their contents they can be divided into two groups: short tablets up to 11 cm long bearing one or several words. These are possibly coupons or identity cards which could also be used to receive provisions (TD 1, 4, 5, 6–12, 19, 22). Other plaques, up to 26 cm, bear texts of several lines, often on both sides (TD 13, 14, 16, 17, 23–29, 32, 36, 50, 52, 53, etc.).

The upper covers of double documents are not numerous, only 3 pieces (TD 2, 18, 15). It is possible to suggest that some of the plaques were making a pair: TD 37, 49. As for TD 56a, a plaque with incisions but with no text, it could be a cover, but there is no address on it. Only one document (TD 44) is different from the others by its shape. It is a small tablet, neatly cut, with rounded corners and a straight projection along the upper edge. It could be someone's letter since it contains a request written in extremely polite style.

There are different opinions concerning the origin of the shape of Tibetan documents on wood. V. S. Vorobyov-Desyatovsky, like many of European scholars, saw the



prototype of Tibetan plaques in Chinese documents on wood and bamboo, which became widespread in East Turkestan beginning from the Han period. However, considering documents on wood written in other languages, we may find closer parallels. The archives of the State of Kroraina (the mid-third—mid-fourth century A.D.) contains a great number of double documents consisting of the main plaques with texts of letters or orders written on them and of wooden covers bearing addresses. The documents were tied with a cord and sealed with a clay sealing set in a cavity made in the cover. A. Stein was the first to take notice of the specific shape of documents on wood from Kroraina. He published a reconstruction of such a pair of plaques bound together (a drawing, not a photograph). A similar pair of plaques is exhibited in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. Among the Chinese documents on wood of the same period and coming from the same territory no plaques of this shape have been found so far. It makes us think that this specific form of documents was invented in Kroraina. When, however, one begins to consider the history of this short-lived small State, it becomes clear that it inherited someone's well-developed tradition. Two peoples could claim the honour of being its inventors: Indians, who made up the majority of the population of Kroraina, and Iranians. The State of Kroraina came into being as a splinter of the disintegrated Kushan empire. It could inherit the traditions of its chancellery as well as the very shape of documents. The Kharoshthī script and the North-West Gandhāri Prakrit, which had served as official language in the Kushan empire, were also borrowed from there. The Kushans, in their turn, were the successors of the Achaemenid empire in the field of their bureaucratic traditions and practices. It makes us suggest that the peoples of East Turkestan, who at the beginning of A.D. stayed in close contact with the Kushan empire and were politically dependent on it, borrowed their chancellery traditions from the Achaemenids. This very shape of documents was later accepted from Kroraina by the Tibetan conquerors.

The tradition of making documents on wooden plaques continued in East Turkestan till the time when wood had finally been replaced by paper. At the time of the Tibetan occupation of East Turkestan paper was already widely used in China, but in East Turkestan it was imported and therefore expensive. It should be taken into account also that the Tibetans closed the routes for Chinese trade caravans, and the import of paper was cut off. For this reason between the middle of the eighth and the middle of the ninth century paper was used only in Buddhist monasteries for copying sacred texts, and there its use was strictly accounted.

In this connection we may suggest a solution of one more question, put once by V. S. Vorobyov-Desyatovsky, which deals with the status of the Tibetan documents. The scholar suggested that these were draft documents to be later copied on paper and delivered correspondingly. We think now that he was mistaken. First, the contents of these documents is of local character. Besides, their shape, especially the presence of a hole for a cord, allows to think that they functioned for a long period of time. Evidently, we deal not with drafts, but with original documents. Similar Khotanese Saka and Tocharian documents on wood functioned in the same way as documents on paper, the only difference was that their texts were briefer.

The text of Tibetan documents was arranged in a certain order. The message started after the marks ཨ|| or ཨ|| in the upper left corner. Colons :, dots in the upper part of the line (like in Modern Tibetan between syllables), the sign of *shad* | and double *shad* || were used as punctuation marks. No special rules of their use were followed, everything was determined by the contents of the text.

The documents are written in different handwritings: neat and calligraphic or crude and unskilled. The same concerns the orthography. Taking into account the complicated phonetic system of the Tibetan language and, possibly, different dialects and different level of education of those who wrote the documents, these particular features of the language of the documents appear quite natural. One should not forget that Tibet developed literacy only in the middle of the seventh century.

Those documents which we consider to be identity cards or food coupons are usually written in a more accurate way. These were probably written by a garrison scribe. Letters and reports look as if they were written by their authors themselves.

The orthographic features of the Tibetan language in the mid-eighth century, which make it possible to date manuscripts and documents with high precision, have been sufficiently described in works on Tibetan grammar. The principal ones are the presence of the so-called *da drag* and of subscript *y* in syllables with formatting consonant *m*. Other documents, however, reveal some extra orthographic features (of which it would be expedient to say in commentaries to distinct documents) like the writing of *y*- and *nga*- as one syllable (see, for example, document TD 18 published by V. S. Vorobyov-Desyatovsky).

Below we publish one of the documents from Malov's collection (TD 25). It is the first publication of this document. Document TD 25 represents a rectangular plaque: 14.0 × 1.5 cm. There is a hole in the right side of it. Text on both sides is partly worn out (see *fig. 1*).

Transliteration

Recto

1. ཨ|| bring: bzang:¹ dang: stag: snya:² gnyis: la: | khong: tsas³
2. springo': | ngan. bu: shong: shang:⁴ khal:⁵ phye. dang

Verso

1. gsum:⁶ 'ong nang. nob.chen⁷ phor. byong. gu: dang
2. gcig.nang:⁸ dang: gcil.la:⁹ sa.la[s] gsheg¹⁰

Translation

To *Bring-bzang* and *Stag-snya*, both. *Khong-tsa* is writing. We came (to) *Shong-Shang* with two and a half *khal*. [Then we] arrived at *Great Nob* and gave ten [*khal*](and) left this place and went away from there.

Commentaries

¹ *bring-bzang* — “one who is well tolerable”. It is evidently one of Tibetan names, but in Modern Tibetan we have a different form: *'bring-bzang*. The name does not occur anywhere else.

² *stag-snya* — “the tiger's ear”. It is a typically Tibetan name of the pre-Buddhist period, cf. Takeuchi, *Old Tibetan Contracts*, Table 11, p. 128 (see below — Notes).

³ *khong-tsa*. This man has both a Chinese family name and given name. About *khong* cf. Takeuchi, *op. cit.*, Table 13; see also document No. 35, *ibid.*, p. 263, commentary, 4.

⁴ *shong-shang* — “a high place, a chain of hills, ridge”. It seems that the document gives a good etymology of the name *Shing-Shang*, which is well represented in the Tibetan documents. There is the Khotanese Saka name *Gira* (*Gāra*) in Khotanese documents, its etymology completely corresponding to the Tibetan name — “Hill”. *Shing-Shang* is known as the name of the headquarters of the Tibetan occupation army in East Turkestan.

⁵ *khal* — “cart”, a measure of weight. Cf. Takeuchi, *op. cit.*

⁶ *khal phyé dang gsum* — “two and a half *khal*”. Cf. Takeuchi, *op. cit.*, document No. 32A, pp. 253—4.

⁷ *nob-chen-phor* (*Loc.*) — “at *Nob-chen-po*” alias “at *Great Nob*”. P. Pelliot and A. Stein identified this name with the *Carhlyk* oasis, see P. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, p. 770 and A. Stein, *Serindia*, p. 469 (see below — Notes).

⁸ *gu dang gcig nang* — “gave ten [*khal*]”, i. e. “nine and one”.

⁹ *gcil-la = bcil-la* (?) — “abandoning”.

¹⁰ *sa la gsheg = sa-las gshegs* (?) — “went away from [this] place”.

Notes

1. M. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, “The S. E. Malov collection of manuscripts in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies”, *Manuscripta Orientalia*, 1/2 (1995), p. 30.

2. N. M. Przheval'skiĭ, “Ot Kul'dzhi za Tian'-Shan' i na Lob-Nor” (“From Kulja beyond Tien Shan and to Lobnor”), *Izvestiia Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva*, XIII (1878), map to p. 32.

3. V. S. Vorob'ëv-Desiatovskii, “Kolleksiia tibetskikh dokumentov na dereve sobrannaia S. E. Malovym” (“A collection of Tibetan documents on wood assembled by S. E. Malov”), *Uchenye zapiski Instituta vostokovedeniia AN SSSR*, VI (1953), pp. 167—75.

4. V. S. Vorob'ëv-Desiatovskii, “Tibetskii dokument na dereve iz raiona ozera Lob-Nor” (“A Tibetan document on wood from the region of the Lobnor Lake”), *Ėpigrafika Vostoka*, fasc. 7 (1953), pp. 70—6.

5. V. S. Vorob'ëv-Desiatovskii, “Tibetskie dokumenty na dereve iz raiona ozera Lob-Nor. II” (“Tibetan documents on wood from the region of the Lobnor Lake. II”), *Ėpigrafika Vostoka*, fasc. 8 (1953), pp. 77—85.

6. See G. Uray's reviews of V. S. Vorobyov-Desyatovsky's “Tibetskii dokument na dereve iz raiona ozera Lob-Nor” (“A Tibetan document on wood from the region of the Lobnor Lake”) and “Tibetskie dokumenty na dereve iz raiona ozera Lob-Nor. II” (“Tibetan documents on wood from the region of the Lobnor Lake”), *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae*, IV/1—3 (1955), pp. 304—7.

7. A. Stein, *Serindia* (Oxford, 1921) — finds from Miran, see pp. 348, 460—2, 468—70; other documents on pp. 162, 1279—80, also Pl. CLXXII); *idem*, *Innermost Asia* (Oxford, 1929) — finds from Miran, see pp. 127, 1055; other documents on pp. 92, 101, 173, 1084—7, also Pl. CXXX).

8. A. H. Francke, “Notes on Sir Aurel Stein's collection of Tibetan documents from Chinese Turkestan”, *JRAS* (1914), pp. 37—59. *Idem*, in *Serindia*, pp. 1460—6.

9. F. W. Thomas, “Tibetan documents concerning Chinese Turkestan”, *JRAS* (1927—1934).

10. F. W. Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan*, Pt. 1 (London, 1935).

11. Wang Yao, Chien Jian, *Tufan jian du zong lu* (Beijing, 1986). The edition represents a summary description of the Tibetan wooden documents.

12. Ariane Spanien and Yoshiro Imaeda, *Choix de documents tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale complété par quelques manuscrits de l'India Office et du British Museum* (Paris, 1978—1979), i—ii.

13. Tsuguhito Takeuchi, *Old Tibetan Contracts from Central Asia* (Tokyo, 1995).

14. See my review of the book by Takeuchi in *Manuscripta Orientalia*, II/1 (1996), pp. 66—7.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Document TD 25 (14.0 × 1.5 cm), recto and verso.