

# NEWS OF THE PROFESSION

## Historical Science in the Mongolian People's Republic

Contributed by Sh. Bira  
Ulan Bator, Mongolia

It was after the conquest of political power in 1921 that a broad path was opened for the development of modern culture and science in Mongolia. One of the well-developed branches of science in the Mongolian People's Republic is history.

Knowledge of history in Mongolia goes back to the most ancient times. It is well known that the Mongolian people had entered the historical arena in early times. From antiquity there had been created powerful tribal units and great state systems which played an active part in the history of all Central Asia. As early as the beginning of the thirteenth century, there was founded the united Mongolian state headed by Genghis Khan, who later on created the empire of the Mongols (in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries).

These events aroused a certain interest in history among the Mongols. The ancient Mongols, like other peoples, had possessed a considerable rich oral historical tradition which served as a main source for written history. We know about this old historical tradition and about the comparatively early origin of Mongolian national historiography from Rashid-ad-din, the great Persian historiographer of the beginning of the fourteenth century, who wrote his famous *Collection of Chronicles* at the command of the Mongol ruler of Persia, Gazan Khan (1295-1304).

Concerning the ancient Mongolian tribes Rashid-ad-din wrote: "All these tribes had their own clear and distinct genealogical tree (*shadjare*) because the custom of the Mongols is that they preserve the genealogy of their ancestors and teach and emphasize genealogy to every child that is born. . . . For this reason there is

not a single man who . . . [does] not know his own tribe (*qabile*) and descent."<sup>1</sup> On the basis of this ancient tradition there was created the Mongolian historiography, which achieved in the Middle Ages a comparatively high degree of development. Rashid-ad-din tells us that for his *Collection of Chronicles* he consulted materials which "are given in Mongolian annals and chronicles"<sup>2</sup> and histories "written in Mongol and . . . [with] Mongolian letters, but not collected and put in order."<sup>3</sup> Among these sources he named the chronicle, *Golden Scroll* (*Altan daftar*),<sup>4</sup> i.e., *Official Book*, always preserved in the treasury of the Khan in the hands of the oldest emirs.<sup>5</sup> But, unfortunately, all these sources consulted by the Persian historian did not survive. Nevertheless these ancient sources, as well as much information given by members of the Mongolian nobility—mainly the accounts given by Bolad Chinsang, the plenipotentiary of the Mongol khan at the court of the Mongol rulers in Persia, and information given by Ghazan Khan—provided the chief material which enabled Rashid-ad-din "to give in remarkable detail a picture of the nomadic life of the Mongol tribes. . . ."<sup>6</sup> In this connection it is necessary to stress that there were many other books and chronicles in

<sup>1</sup> Rashid-ad-din, *Syornik letopisei* [*Collection of Chronicles*] (Moscow-Leningrad, 1932) Vol. 1, Bk. 2, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, Bk. 2, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, Bk. 1, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, Bk. 2, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> V. V. Barthold, *Turkistan v espokhu mongol'skovo nashe*, Part II (St. Petersburg, 1900) 45. (Page 44 of the English translation, *Turkistan down to the Mongol Invasion*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb [London, 1928]).

<sup>6</sup> B. Y. Vladimirstov, *Obshchestvennyi stroi mongolov* [*The Social Structure of the Mongolian People*] (Leningrad, 1934), p. 6. (Page 7 of the French translation, by Michel Carson, *Le régime social des Mongols*, Paris, 1948.)

The *Journal* is indebted to Mr. Owen Lattimore for forwarding Mr. Bira's report.

Mongolian historiography, now lost, which served as important sources for famous historical works, such as Rashid-ad-din's *Collection of Chronicles*, and others.

One of the most ancient Mongolian historical monuments handed down to us is the well-known *Secret History* written in 1240 on the banks of the river Kerulen. The famous Mongologist, Academician Vladimirtsov, wrote of it: "The *Secret History* tells us about the kin from which descended Genghis Khan and depicts loosely and freely the picture of the steppe life, supplying us with the richest material for assessing the different aspects of Mongol life in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. . . . If we may say that no other nation in medieval times attracted greater attention among the historians than the Mongols, then we are also justified in saying that no other nomadic people have left behind them such a monument as the *Secret History* in which real life has been so vividly and minutely portrayed."<sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt that the *Secret History* is not a unique historical monument handed down to our days from the thirteenth century—the period of the greatest events in the life of Mongols. In the period of the Mongol Empire (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), on the initiative of the Mongol khans, a large-scale scientific work was carried on not only in the field of Mongolian history, but in the history of other countries.

At the Imperial court of Qubilai Khan there was an Academy of History, headed by a Mongol historian, which was engaged in writing history and translating Chinese chronicles into

Mongol. Large-scale research work on the history of the Mongol khans and their conquests was carried out also in Persia. On the orders of the Mongol khans, Persian historians used to compile works on Mongolian history. It is enough to mention, in addition to Rashid-ad-din, *The History of the World-Conqueror* by Juvaini,<sup>8</sup> one of the enlightened secretaries of the Mongol khan Hulagu, who collected his information about Mongols and Turks at the court of the Mongol khans themselves during his travels throughout the Mongol Empire and Mongolia. It is worth mentioning that the *History of the World-Conqueror* was begun in the capital of the Mongol Empire, Kharkhorin (Karakorum), in 1252 or 1253.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the historical monuments created during the period of the Mongol Empire have not been preserved. From the fourteenth century we have only one small historical and juridical work, *Chagan Tuhe (White History)*.<sup>10</sup> The fourteenth and sixteenth centuries are characterized by the fall of the Mongol Empire, feudal splintering, and countless civil wars among princes. This period was naturally unpropitious not only for creating new historical works, but for preserving old literary monuments, and many of them had been lost forever at this time.

In the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, Mongolian historiography gained considerable successes in its development. There are a number of chronicles belonging to this period. For instance, the anonymous chronicle, *Altan Tobči (Golden Annals)*, written in 1604,<sup>11</sup> *Altan Tobči (Golden Annals)* by Lubsan-Danzan (1634),<sup>12</sup> *Erdenin Tobči (Precious Annals)* by

<sup>7</sup> Vladimirtsov, pp. 7–8. There is a large literature on *The Secret History*: P. Kafarov, *Starinnoe mongol'skoe skazanie o Chingis-khane* [*Ancient Mongolian Tales about Ghenghis Khan*], Trudy chlenov Pekinskoi dukhovnoi misii [Works of the Members of the Peking Ecclesiastical Mission], IV (St. Petersburg, 1866), 268. C. A. Kozin, *Sokrovennoe skazanie. Mongol'skaya khronika 1240 goda* [*Secret History. Mongolian Chronicle of 1240*] (Moscow-Leningrad, 1941). Erich Haenisch, *Monghol un Niuca Tobči'an (Yüan-ch'ao pi-shi)* [*Die Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen, aus der chinesischen Transkription (Ausgabe Ye Teh-hui) in mongolischen Wortlaut wiederhergestellt*] (Leipzig, 1937; 2nd. rev. ed., 1948), P. Pelliot, *Histoire, secrète des Mongols, restitution du texte mongol et traduction française des chapitres I à VI* (Paris, 1949). Ts. Damdinsuren, *Mongol-un niguca tobčiyan* [*The Secret History*] (Ulan Bator, 1947).

<sup>8</sup> Ata-Malik Juvaini's work has been translated from the Persian by John Andrew Boyle, *The History of the World-Conqueror* (Manchester University Press, 1958) 2 vols.

<sup>9</sup> Juvaini, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, I, 25.

<sup>10</sup> For the *White History*, see Sh. Natsogdorzh, *Tsagaan Tüükheen tukhoe* (Ulan Bator, 1958).

<sup>11</sup> The *Altan Tobči* is translated into Russian, English, and Japanese. Llhana Galcan Gomboev, tr., *Altan tobch. Mongol'skaia letopis' v podlinnom tekste i perevode* (St. Petersburg, 1858), C. R. Bawden, *The Mongol Chronicle Altan Tobči* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1955).

<sup>12</sup> The *Altan Tobči* by Lubsan-Danzan was published in 1937 by the Committee of Sciences of the MPR, and reproduced as *Altan Tobči. A Brief History*

Sagan Sečen (1662),<sup>13</sup> and *Shara tuji* (*Yellow History*) written in the seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Mongol historians used to write not only in the mother tongue, but in other Eastern languages—Chinese, Manchurian, and especially Tibetan. Historical works by Mongol authors in Tibetan can be called a Mongolian Tibetan-language historical literature which occupies a particular place in Mongol historiography. These works are dedicated not only to Mongolian history, but to the history of other Asian countries (India, China, for instance). Mention should be made of such works as *History of Buddhism in India, Tibet, China and Mongolia* by Sumpa-Hamba Esh-Baljir (written in 1748), *History of Buddhism in China* by Gun Gombojab (written about 1736), *History of Buddhism in Mongolia* by Darmadala (written in 1889), and *Golden Book* by Zava Damdin (written in 1931).

The post-revolutionary period marks a turning point in the development of historical thought in Mongolia. It was after the victory of the People's Revolution in 1921 resulted in gaining national independence that really scientific research work began in the field of history of the Mongolian people. The achievements of historical science in the Mongolian People's Republic are inseparable from the development of the country in all branches of its economy, culture, and science.

At present, national culture is vigorously flourishing in Mongolia. Specialists in history are trained at the history faculty of the Ulan-Bator State University. Research work in historical science is concentrated in the Institute of History and Language of the Committee of Science and Higher Education of the Mongolian People's Republic and at the higher edu-

ational establishments of the country, with a great many historians working in all branches of historical science. The National Association of Historians of the Mongolian People's Republic, founded in 1955 and having many branches in the provincial centres (*aimak*) of the country, maintains active relations with foreign academic centres, including the International Committee of Historical Sciences. In the years of existence of the MPR, historical thought which had developed during many centuries has evolved into comparatively advanced historical science.

Immediately after the triumph of the People's Revolution, large-scale research work on Mongolian history began. In connection with this work we had at first to collect ancient literary monuments, archive documents, manuscripts, local lore material, and literary texts. The Committee of Science, founded in 1921, was entrusted with this task, and by its collecting activities has made a great contribution in preserving the historical heritage of the Mongolian people and in creating a documentary base for historical science. The foundation of the State Archives at the Committee of Science in 1927 served as the beginning of archival activities of the country. Since then, notable achievements have been made in research in archives. At present, Mongolia has an expanded network of central, provincial, municipal, and departmental archives, preserving the richest materials of great importance for the study of Mongolian history. The State Archives in Ulan Bator are one of the academic centres of the MPR and the fundamental documentary base of national historical science.

One of the considerable achievements of historical science in Mongolia is archaeology. Archaeological studies of Mongolia began in 1922, and, since this time, historical monuments have constantly been collected and registered, and excavations have been carried on in different parts of the country well known to be very rich in historical relics.

In 1924–26 Mongolian and Soviet archaeologists, headed by the well-known traveller, P. K. Kozlov, made excavations in the Noin Ula mountains (near Ulan Bator) which succeeded in unearthing valuable items dated back as far as the period of the ancient empire of the

---

of the Mongols by bLo-bZan bsTanjin. Critical introduction by A. Mostaert; editor's foreword by F. W. Cleaves (Harvard University Press, 1952).

<sup>13</sup> *Erdenin Tobči* was translated and published in German by L. G. Schmidt (St. Petersburg, 1829), and republished as *Erdeni-yin Tobči. Mongolian Chronicle by Sagan Secen*. Critical introduction by A. Mostaert and editor's foreword by F. W. Cleaves (Cambridge: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1956).

<sup>14</sup> *Shara Tuji* has been translated and published in Russian by N. P. Shastina, *Mongol'skaia letopis' XVII v Svozdnyi Tekst, perevod, vvedenie i primechaniya* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1957).

Huns.<sup>15</sup> The discovery of the Noin Ula Hun tombs played an important part in the history of archaeological research in Mongolia. It was one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century, and marked the beginning of detailed and thorough study of the ancient history of the peoples inhabiting the territory of Mongolia.

In recent years large archaeological expeditions and excavations have been carried out in different parts of the country, and a great many materials dating back to the Stone and Bronze Ages have been collected. Numerous Hun and Turk tombs, and ruins of ancient towns and fortresses have been discovered as well, such as the town of Khara Balgasun; the ancient capital of the Mongol Empire, Karakorum; and the town of Bars Khot, etc. The work of studying, registering, systematizing, and describing all these archaeological materials and findings has begun. Archaeologist Kh. Perle has made a card index of antiquities of the MPR based on the materials of archaeological excavations carried out from 1921 to 1949. By the efforts of Mongol archaeologists and scientists of the Committee of Science and Higher Education rich archaeological collections have been organized at the Central State Museum in Ulan Bator. These collections show that our country is rich in historical and archaeological relics and has provided material for numerous articles, scientific reports, and monographs.

The wealth of archaeological materials which Mongol historians now have at their disposal makes it possible to arrive at new conclusions on many important questions of Mongolian history. For example, archaeological excavations in some provinces of the country have discovered tools dating from the Middle Palaeolithic period, revealing the activity of primitive man in Mongolia.<sup>16</sup> Mongol archaeologists, excavating and studying the ruins of towns, fortresses,

and settlements have concluded that towns and settled life were of no small importance in the formation of feudalism in Mongolia.

Significant work has been done in the specialized field of historical sources. During the years of the people's power a great many original sources—ancient manuscripts and books on the history of Mongolia and other countries of the East—have been collected for preservation in the Mongolian National Public Library in Ulan Bator, the richest repository of ancient books and manuscripts in different Eastern languages. The most valuable sources are being systematically published as monographs or translations from Chinese, Manchu, and Tibetan. These works are of the greatest importance not only for the study of Mongolian history, but for the history of other nations, particularly China and India. In 1947, Professor Ts. Damdinsuren published the *Secret History*, translated from Old Mongolian into modern language. The *Altan Tobči* (*Golden Annals*) by Lubsan-Danzan, mentioned above, was reprinted in 1957 in the new Mongolian script. Other chronicles such as the *Erdenin Tobči* (*Precious Annals*) by Sagan Sečen, and the *Erdenin Erhe* (*Precious Beads*) by Galdan and others will soon be published.

In the translation of historical monuments from Chinese, Manchu, and European languages, the well-known Mongolian sinologist, Danda, a member of the Committee of Science, translated in 1924 the Chinese *Yuan Shih* (*History of the Yuan Dynasty*), the most valuable source on the history of the Yuan or Mongol empire of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. He translated many other Chinese chronicles as well. A number of other important Chinese chronicles have also been translated from Manchu into Mongol by the well-known Manchuist, Bat-Ochir, a member of the Committee of Science, including sketches from the *T'ung-chien Kang-mu*, the history of the Liao (Khitans), and the history of the Ch'ing (Manchu) dynasty. From European languages Mongol scholars have translated into Mongol a number of important sources such as the records of the great travellers, P. Carpini, Wilhelm Rubruk, and Marco Polo.

A great many collections of archival materials and documents valuable for the study of Mongolian history of more recent times have

<sup>15</sup> On the basis of the Chinese inscription carved on a small lacquer bowl found in one of the Noin Ula tombs, scholars consider that the Hun tombs in the Noin Ula mountains go back to the third century A. D.

<sup>16</sup> Ts. Dorghuren, *BHMA Ulsyn nutag daǰh' chulu-uney zdvsǰiin Ueien sudlalyin baidal* (Ulan Bator: Shinzhlekh Ukhaan Khureelengiiin khevlel, 1957), p. 4. On research work in the MPR on the Stone Age, see N. Ser-Odzhav, *BHMA Ulsad iavuuhsan arkheologiiin azhlyn tukhai* (Shinzhlekh Ukhaan, tekhnik, No. 2, 1958).

also been compiled and published. Among them mention should be made of a number of works by the corresponding member of the Committee of Science, Dendiv, who collected and translated from Manchu into Mongol, numerous archival materials and documents relating to the period of Manchu rule in Mongolia; the collection of documents *Revolutionary Measures of the People's Government (1921–1924)* compiled by the scientist-worker of the Committee of Science and Higher Education, Nasanbaljir, *Some Important Documents Related to the History of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (1920–1924)*, *Important Documents about Sukhe-Bator, Reports and Articles*, by Marshal Choibalsan in four volumes, *The MPR in the Struggle for a Non-Capitalist Way of Development (1925–1940)*, resolutions and decisions of the Great and Small Hural (Parliament), resolutions and decisions of congresses, and conferences and plenums of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party.

These achievements have made available a great many works and monographs on the most important problems of Mongolian history, and not a few among them have already become well-known even abroad.

Among the historians of the older generation, mention can be made of several members of the Committee of Science: Bat-Ochir (1866–1934), Zava-Damdin (1867–1937), L. Dendiv (1895–1957), D. Natsagdorje (1905–1937), and Navan-Namjil (1882–1954). Bat-Ochir, consulting mainly Chinese sources, wrote in 1927 an *Ancient History of Mongolia*. In 1933–36, the founder of contemporary Mongolian literature, the historian D. Natsagdorje, compiled a *Short History of Mongolia* covering the period from ancient times to 1924, making good use of Chinese, Mongolian, and European sources.

In 1927, the historian and significant political figure of Autonomous Mongolia, Maksar-Hurtcha wrote a *New History of Mongolia*. In 1934, there was published a *Short History of Mongolia* by another historian and statesman of Autonomous Mongolia, Dendiv. This book is devoted to the history of Autonomous Mongolia. Dendiv is the author of a number of books on Mongolian history based mainly on Manchu sources and archival documents. To the pen of Navan-Namjil belong a number of

original works on Mongolian history and memoirs (*Autobiography* and *History of Autonomous Mongolia*).

Among more recent works it is worth mentioning the following: *Short History of the Mongolian People's Revolution*<sup>17</sup> by the founder of the Mongolian people's state, the late Marshal H. Choibalsan (1895–1952); *History of Autonomous Mongolia* by Tch. Puntsugnorvo;<sup>18</sup> *People's Revolution in Mongolia and the Foundation of the MPR (1921–1924)* by Professor Shirendiv,<sup>19</sup> *People's Movement in Outer Mongolia*<sup>20</sup> and *Biography of Sukhe-Bator*<sup>21</sup> by Professor Sh. Natsagdorje; *Historical Roots of the Geser Epic* by Professor Ts. Damdinsuren;<sup>22</sup> *Kidans and Their Relations with Mongols, Essay on the Old Mongolian Historiography, Funeral Rites of the Ancient Mongols*<sup>23</sup> (all these works belong to the pen of Kh. Perle); *History of the Northern Huns* by Ts. Dorjsuren; and *History of the Turks* by N. Ser-Odjav.

One of the significant successes of our research work in the field of history is the one-volume history of Mongolia compiled in 1954 by Mongolian and Soviet historians.<sup>24</sup> This *History of Mongolia* is the first outstanding summary of the whole period of Mongol history from ancient times to the present.

<sup>17</sup> This book was published in 1934. It is translated into Russian, Chinese, German, Czechoslovakian, and other languages. Kh. Choibalsan, tr., *Kratkii otchet istorii mongol'skoi narodnoi revoliutsii, perev. s mong.* (Moscow: Publishing House of Foreign Literature, 1952).

<sup>18</sup> T. Puntsugnorvo, *Mongolyn avtonomit Ueijn Tuukh* (Ulan Bator, 1955).

<sup>19</sup> This book is in Russian. B. Shirendiv, *Narodnara revoliutsiia v Mongolii i obrazovanie MNR* (Information of MPR, Moscow, Academy of Science USSR, 1956).

<sup>20</sup> Prof. Natsagdorje, *Ar Mongold garsan ardyn khödölgöön* (Ulan Bator, 1956), and *Uz istorii arat-skogo dvizheniia vo Vneshnei Mongolii* (Moscow, Academy of Sciences USSR, 1958).

<sup>21</sup> This book was translated by Owen Latimore, *Nationalism and Revolution in Mongolia*, with a translation from the Mongol of Sh. Natsagdorje's life of Sukhe-Bator by Owen Latimore and Urgunge Onon (Issued under the auspices of the International Secretariat, I.P.R.; Leiden: E. A. Brill, 1955).

<sup>22</sup> Ts. Damdinsuren, *Istoricheskie korni Geseriady* (Moscow, 1957).

<sup>23</sup> This work was translated into Japanese by Prof. Abematsu and published in 1959 by The Institute of Foreign Languages in Osaka.

<sup>24</sup> This work is in Mongol, Russian, and Chinese.

Mongol historians are continuing to do their best to study the history of their motherland in more detail and on a larger scale. In this interest they devote their main attention to the study and publication of original sources including archival documents, promoting well-planned research work in the field of archaeology, and the study of local lore. As a result, the

documentary and material base of their scientific research will be expanded still further. Mongol historians have already begun the compilation of a three-volume history of Mongolia from ancient times to the present which will be a fundamental summarization. Moreover, a number of monographs on the most important problems of Mongolian history will be written.