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# Paul Pelliot and Mongolian Studies

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## PAUL PELLIOT AND MONGOLIAN STUDIES<sup>1</sup>

Although Paul Pelliot may be remembered in the world of scholarship principally as a Sinologist, his contributions to Mongolian studies may be, proportionally, the most lasting of legacies. Pelliot approached Mongolian studies primarily as an outgrowth of his Chinese studies and also his commentaries on the medieval travelers such as Marco Polo. Denis Sinor has written that "in the traditional sense of the word, Pelliot had few pupils."<sup>2</sup> Among Mongolists in the narrow sense he could claim only two, Louis Ligeti and Francis Woodman Cleaves. Yet these two, through their own highly prolific scholarship, and their own pupils have extended Pelliot's results and preserved if not a *school*, then at least a distinct approach, to Mongolian philology.

Pelliot's contribution to Mongolian studies may be summarized through the following aspects: 1) His major works and methodology in Mongolian studies; 2) How he learned Mongolian studies himself and his training of pupils and intellectual descendants; and 3) a detailed consideration of his most original, but least recognized, contribution: a reworking of the Altaic question.

### PELLIOT'S MAJOR WORKS AND CONTRIBUTION TO MONGOLIAN STUDIES

If one excludes the 1938 translation of *Marco Polo* done with A.C. Moule (as one probably should since, it is only the *Notes* that could be regarded as a major work of Mongolian studies, properly speaking), Paul Pelliot published only one book-length study in Mongolian studies in his lifetime: *Les Mongols et la papauté* (1923). The rest of his book-length monograph in Mongolian studies works were all published posthumously:

1) His text and translation of the first half of the *Secret History of the Mongols* (1949);

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Colloque Paul Pelliot, October 3, 2008, Paris.

2. D. Sinor, "Remembering Paul Pelliot, 1878-1945", in *Paul Pelliot (1878-1945): His Life and Works—a Bibliography*, H. Walravens éd., 2001, p. xxvi-xxvii.

2) *Notes sur l'histoire de la Horde d'Or* (1950);

3) His text and translation of about one fourth of the *Shengwu qinzheng lu* 聖武親征錄 (1951; co-authored with Louis Hambis);

4) *Notes on Marco Polo* (1959);

5) *Notes critiques d'histoire Kalmouke* (1960).

Depending on one's evaluation of the scholarly relationship with his closest pupil Louis Hambis, one might add *Le chapitre CVII du Yuan che* (1945) to the list of books at least co-authored and published during his life, and *Le chapitre CVIII du Yuan che* (1954) to the posthumous list.<sup>3</sup>

This is not a very long list for so distinguished a scholar. And the incompleteness of text, translation, and notes of the *Secret History of the Mongols* and the *History of the Campaigns of Genghis Khan* when they were published, and the heavy coverage of the earlier letter of the alphabet in the *Notes on Marco Polo* show that none of these works was anywhere close to really complete when he died. These facts could add to Denis Sinor's charge (one reflecting admiration as much critique, I suppose) that Pelliot in using "his fantastic knowledge to clarify matters of no consequence," that in fact, he was merely amusing himself.<sup>4</sup> Such an assessment would not take into account, though, a work like *Notes critiques d'histoire kalmouke* (1960), which was in fact completed shortly after 1920. Although it was not published in his lifetime, it represents a valuable and fully achieved translation of the most important Chinese works on Kalmyk (really Oirat) history with complete commentary, unfortunately rather neglected in the field.<sup>5</sup> As will be described below, his first experience of Mongolian language and culture was with the Torghud Mongols of Xinjiang, and this work was perhaps inspired by that contact.

At a deeper level, however, the incompleteness of most of the rest of his oeuvre was not so much a result of over-ambition or lack of effort, but a result of his methodology. This methodology was fundamentally one of identification and establishing identities: A is B, with the implication, which he would always draw out, that A is most definitely not C, despite superficial appearances. These identifications were of three broad types:

3. Denis Sinor considers that his "role was almost that of a research-assistant" and estimated that "at least three quarters of the text of these books was the work of Pelliot" (*ibid.*, p. xxvii, xxxiii).

4. *Ibid.*, p. xxxiii-xxxiv.

5. The date of its completion comes from the preface by L. Hambis, *Notes critiques d'histoire kalmouke*, 1960, p. v. I remark on the lack of appreciation given this work as much from my own tardy realization of its worth and utility, as well as from the relatively few references to it in the admittedly extremely fragmented field of Oirat studies.

- 1) history: this episode is that episode;
- 2) words: this word is that word;
- 3) and in between them, names: this person or place is that person or place.

At first glance, this may seem somewhat simple, if not simplistic, but the procedures used to establish these identifications will seem simple only to the person for whom such identifications have already been internalized. It is a byproduct of this methodology, however, that despite his famous devotion to textual study, actual texts, at least in Mongolian studies, did not exist for him. His studies of the *Secret History of the Mongols* or the *History of the Campaigns of Genghis Khan* made no attempt to treat the text as a unified whole, written by a particular person with a particular point of view. Instead they atomized the works into a series of words and names, each of which was treated more or less separately. In this sense then, each note, each specific item of commentary was a complete work, and getting to the end of the "text" (that is, a particular collection of word puzzles) was an essentially arbitrary goal.

What made such identifications so difficult was that as a rule they involved identifications across languages and very often across whole traditions of literacy. His mastery of the philology of multiple civilizations was his great advantage in Mongolian studies at the time, one he was quite aware of. As he wrote in his conclusion to "A propos des Comans" (1920), which can be considered, despite the title, his manifesto in Mongolian studies: "I have deliberately enlarged upon the death of Ong-khan and Sängün, because these episodes seem to supply a fine example of the mutual corroboration which the Chinese and Muslim sources can and should give to each other."<sup>6</sup> He began Mongolian studies through his fascination with the medieval travelers Marco Polo, Giovanni dal Piano Carpini, and Guillaume de Rubrouck—all dating from the period of the Mongol empire. It is that period of Mongolian history in particular which can be studied through the corroboration of Chinese and Muslim (primarily Persian) sources. Enlarged, however, to the mutual corroboration of Chinese and Mongolian sources, Turkic and Mongolian sources, of European and Chinese, of Chinese and Uyghur, and so on, this describes the essence of his method, one uniquely suited to the study of Central Eurasia and the Mongol empire. To this day, scholars of Central Eurasia at home in both Persian and Chinese are extremely rare and those that are, such as Thomas Allsen, Kim Hodong, and Michal Biran, have shown by their work how useful such dual competence is.

6. P. Pelliot, "A propos des Comans", *Journal asiatique*, 11<sup>e</sup> série, 15, 1920, p. 185.

## PAUL PELLIOT'S TEACHING LINEAGE: WHERE IT CAME FROM AND WHERE IT WENT

Paul Pelliot's first experience with Mongolian language came during his famous expedition through Turkestan in 1906-1908. Thanks to the recent publication of his travel notebooks we can trace not only how he developed great skill in both "Sart" and "Kirghiz" on this expedition but also how he made his first contact with "Kalmuck" in the Zultus pastures of modern Hejing county in Xinjiang.<sup>7</sup>

By the time he entered Xinjiang, Pelliot was already capable of conversing in Turkic languages. While he was in Tashkent in the summer of 1906, the missionary and Turcologist Nikolai Petrovič Ostroumov had engaged a teacher in "Sart" (what would today be called Uzbek) for him.<sup>8</sup> By August of that same year, he could write that after supper "we chatted in Kirghiz, mixed with a little Russian" with Hassan Beg, a son of the queen of the Alay Kyrgyz.<sup>9</sup> He also was able to note the characteristic differences between Sart and Kirghiz (that is, Uzbek and Kyrgyz), the Kyrgyz initial /dʒ/ and /m/ for Uzbek initial /j/ and /b/.<sup>10</sup>

At this time, however, Pelliot had little interest in what he, following his Turkic interlocutors, called "Kalmuck."<sup>11</sup> Passing by some ruins by the road which his Kyrgyz guides considered as houses of the "Kalmucks" (that is, of the Zünghar principality), he commented that he believed the attribution to be likely true. Still he dismissed their importance by saying, "This is history, but it is the history of yesterday."<sup>12</sup> His real interest was in the Buddhist ruins

7. P. Pelliot, *Carnets de route : 1906-1908*, 2008.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 348; J.J.L. Duyvendak, "Paul Pelliot† (May 28<sup>th</sup> 1878-October 26<sup>th</sup> 1945)", *Asia Major*, n.s., 9, 2, 2001, p. xxi. For the identification of persons, I have relied much on the excellent glossary of names in *Carnets de route*.

9. P. Pelliot, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 28. The background of Hassan Beg is described on p. 26-27.

10. P. Pelliot, *ibid.*, p. 324 (Other early notes by Pelliot on Kyrgyz linguistic features may be found on p. 37, 40, 50, etc.).

11. In his notebooks, Pelliot does remark on some curious aspects of "Sart" views of the non-Muslim peoples to their east. The term Qalmyq was used by Turkestanis not just for Oirat Mongols, but also for Tibetans and even for Han Chinese; the lamas are called Molla Maini, due to a confusion between the Mani of the Buddhist mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* and the Mani of the Manichaean religion (p. 111). These views are also reflected in a fascinating late nineteenth century Tatar description of the east; see Allen J. Frank, "The Mongol-Qalmaq Bayani: An Islamic Ethnography of the Mongols", *Asiatische Studien* 63/2, 2009, p. 323-347.

12. P. Pelliot, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 350. Around the same time he remarked in his notebooks, "Besides I have not come here to uncover the issue of the various Kalmuck tribes (Torgut, etc.) and their chronological relations" (p. 30).

of much greater antiquity. Even among more modern peoples, the Kalmyks were of far less scholarly interest to him at this point than the Turkic peoples. While he sometimes asked for relatively recent manuscripts in Turki or other Islamic languages, he never mentions searching for recent Mongolian or Tibetan books.<sup>13</sup>

His first direct contact with Kalmucks or Mongols came from this interest in the ancient Buddhist past. Starting out north from Kucha, he crossed Qalmaq-Davan ("Kalmuck Pass") into the Yulduz (Zultus in Oirat Mongolian) steppe high in the Tianshan Mountains, looking for the camping place of the Türk khan who met the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang during the Tang dynasty.<sup>14</sup> There he found a Buddhist monastery and the summer camp of the Torghud prince and his mother. Unable to speak Mongolian, he had as interpreter with him, a Sart (i.e. Uyghur) merchant from Artush. But the Torghud Mongols seemed rather less exotic to him than the Sarts and Kirghiz. "The Kalmucks dress in Chinese style, and even I was fooled at first glance."<sup>15</sup> When he met the princess dowager of the banner in her *örgä* (palace tent), he remarked "the conversation was official, insignificant... At the end of five minutes, I withdrew and the futsin saw me off outside the tent."<sup>16</sup> Nor did a second pass through Mongol pastures, around modern Yanqi (Qarashahr), seem to spark any greater curiosity about the Mongol tents he saw camped here and there among the Dungan (Hui) houses.<sup>17</sup>

Despite this relative lack of interest at the time, however, Pelliot was making his usual quick study of the Mongolian language, giving relative close transcriptions in his notebooks of Mongolian vocabulary he heard along with etymological notes, and remarking that the "Kalmucks" of Xinjiang called themselves Mongols, and were unaware of either the Turkic term Qalmyk and the older Mongolian term Oirat.<sup>18</sup> To the end of his trip, however, his transcriptions of Mongolian words showed numerous Turkicisms; characteristically, he defined the initial consonant in Mongolian

13. For his inquiries after books in Turki, see P. Pelliot, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 116, 351.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 405, 152ff.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

18. Notes on Mongolian terms and etymologies begin with that on *zuruqai* ("astrological chart") and *chaghân* ("white") which were borrowed into the Uyghur of Kucha (*op. cit.* [n.7], p. 152), and continued with discussion of geographical terms such as *bayan* (p. 154), *ghol* (p. 155), *tsa'atyn khoshun körä* [*sic* for *kürä*] (p. 156), *kök usu* (p. 158), *khara-khoshun* (p. 185), *shäre-shira* (p. 195), and *khoto-khotum* (p. 207). On the Torghuds of Zultus (the Mongolian form for Yulduz) not calling themselves Kalmucks or Oirats, see p. 153.

ghol /g/, by its relation to the sounds in the Arabic script which he long ago mastered.<sup>19</sup> Even the Mongolian parallel text on the inscription of the fourteenth century Uyghur prince of Xining did not generate any comments at this time on its significance for Mongolian philology.<sup>20</sup>

Thus while Pelliot's famous expedition through Chinese Turkestan fed directly into his researches in pre-Islamic Central Asia, and Turcology, its impact on his Mongolian studies was indirect and delayed. To the end of his career, Pelliot could make references in his scholarly works to spoken Turkic languages. Discussing the words for watermelon in Turkic and Mongolian languages, he could write: "In Turkish, *tarbuz* is the only word which I heard in Sart for 'watermelon' in Russian Turkestan, and it is the only form which would be in common use in the Turkī of Chinese Turkestan."<sup>21</sup> By contrast, I have found only one case where his scholarly works make reference to his brief experience of spoken Mongolian in Xinjiang.<sup>22</sup> Nor did he have any well-known Mongolian teacher when he returned to France; the Mongolist whom he most admired was Berthold Laufer, although he never studied with him.<sup>23</sup>

Thus it was almost entirely through books that Pelliot was able to build on his knowledge of Turkic, whose grammar is so parallel to Mongolian. By 1913, he published his first article on purely Mongolian topics, using dictionaries, grammars, and bilingual texts to correctly identify two Mongolian and one Tungusic word in Chinese texts of the medieval period, corroborating them with European, Arabo-Persian, and other medieval writers.<sup>24</sup> But Pelliot understood his limitations as a Mongolist and as far as I know, never attempted to tackle a Mongolian text for which a translation into some other language was not available. The Mongolian

19. On his discussion of the *gh*- sound, see P. Pelliot, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 155. The frequent use of *-y-* in his transcriptions reflects the Turkic division of *i* and *ī*; in Mongolian there is no separate back *-ī-*. The name of the Torghud prince he writes as Buyinmenku, which is a Turkicized version of Buyanmōngke (p. 153).

20. P. Pelliot, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 425, 325.

21. P. Pelliot, "Les formes avec et sans q- (k-) initial en turc et en mongol", *T'oung Pao* 37, 1944, p. 90. He mentions colloquial pronunciations he heard in Xinjiang in "Les mots à h initiale, aujourd'hui amuie, dans le Mongol des XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles", *Journal asiatique* 206, 1925, p. 213, 215, 225, 229.

22. See P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 21), 1925, p. 219: "I heard *nyetīneñ*, 'last year' in the speech of a Mongol living in the mountains just to the south of Dunhuang." This would be in the area of the current Subei Mongol Autonomous County in Gansu province.

23. D. Sinor, *art. cit.* (n. 2), p. xxix.

24. P. Pelliot, "Sur quelques mots d'Asie centrale attestés dans les textes chinois", *Journal asiatique*, 11<sup>e</sup> série, 1, 1913, p. 451-469.



materials he worked on were always single words, or Mongolian texts for which a Chinese-language original was available.

Pelliot's tradition in Mongolian studies was passed on to three students: Louis Ligeti, Francis W. Cleaves, and (in to a certain degree) Denis Sinor. Louis Ligeti was perhaps the closest to Paul Pelliot in pursuing a range of Mongolian philological questions through Chinese, Turkic, and other sources. Francis Cleaves was likewise a scholar of the Sino-Mongolian textual interface, although with a much more narrowly Sinological focus than either Pelliot or Ligeti. He completed translations of a large number of Sino-Mongolian inscriptions and texts; like Pelliot, he did not tackle works for which some guidance in the form of a Chinese (or other) translation was entirely absent. Denis Sinor, finally, was primarily a Turcologist but with significant interest in the Mongols of the empire period. Although he did philological work, his primary model for scholarship was not Pelliot's commentaries, but René Grousset's *Empire des steppes*.

These three scholars dispersed to the various corners of the world to found Mongolian and Inner Asian studies centers. Ligeti founded the still flourishing Hungarian tradition of Mongolian studies, which for a half-century has been sustained by his principal student Professor György Kara. Francis Cleaves eventually received a position at Harvard University, where he trained Joseph Fletcher and Elizabeth "Tina" West. Denis Sinor eventually founded the Uralic and Altaic Studies Department at Indiana University. In the 1980s, this department recruited Professor Kara to spent half time at Indiana University, thus bringing together two of the "teaching lineages" (to use a Tibetan Buddhist term) founded by Pelliot at Bloomington.

#### PAUL PELLIOT AND THE ALTAIC THEORY

For the rest of this paper, I would like to move away from Pelliot's larger works, whether published in his life or posthumously, and turn to his distinctively "Mongolistic" contribution to Altaic studies, one which we are only now able to evaluate fully. The basic lines of this approach was already evident already in his short 1915 piece on the origin of the Chinese term Tujue, and was fully visible in his 1920 article "A propos des Comans."<sup>25</sup> This approach had two parts, one methodological, the other substantive. The methodology was the rigorous application of Sinological expertise to produce usable historical-linguistic data for Altaic studies. His substantive

25. P. Pelliot, "L'origine de T'ou-kiue, nom chinois des Turcs", *T'oung Pao* 16, 1915, p. 687-689.

conclusion, surprising for someone who learned Mongolian via Turkic was that Mongolian played a much earlier and much larger role in Central Eurasia than had previously been suspected. Let me address the methodological issue first.

Pelliot's most important "trick of the trade" was his mastery of the historical phonology of the Chinese language. From a Mongolist perspective, this mastery was important not just, or even primarily, for Chinese linguistics. Pelliot used it primarily for making sense of the various Chinese transcriptions of foreign words. He had begun this in his studies of Chinese sources on Southeast Asian, such as his study of Zhou Daguan's description of Cambodia.<sup>26</sup> Once he became a Mongolist, he used the same methodology in Mongolian studies. Of course any serious scholar could look up the reconstructed ancient readings in Bernard Karlgren's work that Pelliot used (or today in Edwin Pulleyblank's dictionary).<sup>27</sup> In practice, however, analyzing the Chinese transcription of foreign words was not so simple; readings which were theoretically possible might often be extremely unlikely, while other readings that might superficially seem impossible could actually be part of a regular system of adjustment to a foreign phonology. Thus matching foreign words to Chinese transcriptions was (and is) as much an art as it is a science. This thorough grasp of the ever-changing principles of Chinese phonology and transcription practices were also the foundation for his work on the *Secret History of the Mongols*, rendered into Chinese in a word by word transcription system, and his study of the names of the *History of the Campaigns of Genghis Khan*, transcribed from Mongolian into Chinese, often with a Persian parallel.

Pelliot referenced this methodology explicitly in his main work in Altaic studies, his 1925 article "Les mots à h initiale, aujourd'hui amuie, dans le Mongol des XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles."<sup>28</sup> In this article, he was responding primarily to Gustav Ramstedt's contention that there was an ancient unvoiced labial

26. See P. Pelliot, "Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge", *BEFEO* 2, 1902, p. 123-177.

27. After 1923, Pelliot's main source for ancient phonology was B. Karlgren, *Analytic Dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese*, 1923. He always maintained his independent judgment, however, as well as a practiced eye for the possibility of corrupted characters, something which non-Sinologists have never been able to account for. See for example P. Pelliot, "Les caractères de transcription 鞞 *wo* ou *wa* et 𪛗 *pai*", *T'oung Pao* 37, 1944, p. 125-134. Today, the most convenient source is E.G. Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin*, 1991, but still, a student of Chinese transcriptions of foreign words cannot rely on it mechanically.

28. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 21), 1925, p. 193-263. Cf. *supra* p. 450.

stop (\**p*) in the Altaic languages which early on became silent in Turkic and Mongolian, but was reflected in the initial *p*- of the Manchu-Tungusic languages Goldi (today called Nanai in Russia and Hejen in China) and Olča (Ulcha), and initial *f*- in Manchu. Pelliot affirmed this argument in general but insisted that Ramstedt had used largely erroneous information to support it, due to his lack of competence in Chinese in particular. By contrast, Pelliot touted his better methodology: "My principal aim in drawing up the current article, is to emphasize a method by which we may identify in great part the Mongolian words which could possibly have had originally an initial unvoiced labial, which had been a plosive or a spirant."<sup>29</sup> This method was to look at the transcriptions of Mongolian words in Chinese, Persian, Arab, Armenian, and other transcriptions and vocabularies (Pelliot lists eleven categories, all but one of which he used), as well as the more archaic contemporary Mongolic dialects.<sup>30</sup> In these sources he found an initial *h*- which corresponded exactly to the *p*- of Nanai/Hejen and Ulcha and the *f*- of Manchu.

This initial *h*- had gone unnoticed because the traditional orthography of "Written Mongolian" (the Uyghur-Mongolian script) did not mark it and it had disappeared in the well-known Mongolian dialects: Khalkha, Buriat, Kalmyk, and so on. Ramstedt had attempted to discern reflexes of the ancient unvoiced labial in "gradual glottid" found occasionally in an initial position in these major Mongolian languages but Pelliot pointed out that the cases of this phenomenon did not match the distribution in the Manchu-Tungusic languages and were in any case entirely secondary.<sup>31</sup> In place of Ramstedt's illusory data, based on his thorough knowledge of modern Mongolian and Kalmyk-Oirat phonetics, Pelliot demonstrated that is was another body of evidence altogether—"limited, but certain"—which was the most reliable in this question: "We can only therefore attach a greater value to the Chinese and Arabo-Persian transcriptions, along with the 'Phags-pa inscriptions, since they are almost the only ones to provide us with an essential element for any future comparison between the Mongolian and Tungusic languages, and probably as well between these languages and the Turkish languages."<sup>32</sup> Ramstedt inability to exploit these sources

29. P. Pelliot, *ibid.*, p. 197.

30. See the list in P. Pelliot, *ibid.*, p. 198-199. The then unedited Mongolian transcriptions in Korean-Mongolian vocabularies were the only one which he confessed to not having used.

31. P. Pelliot, *ibid.*, p. 200, 248.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 248. Pelliot also added to this the sparse data on Monguor (Tu), Yogur, and other Gansu-Qinghai Mongolic languages. The study of these languages has indeed been a

due to the limitations of his philological training was clearly implied, but left politely unstated.

It is difficult to realize today how desperately needed this sort of approach was needed at the time. The Chinese histories had an enormous body of information about the non-Chinese world. Yet the contemporary Mandarin pronunciations of the Chinese terms obscured real connections and created false ones. It is not obvious without this knowledge that, for example, Huluwu 胡祿屋 is actually a very close transcription of Turkic Ulugh-Oq "Great Arrow," yet that Tiele 鐵勒 cannot possibly have anything to do with another Turkic word, Tölös (a mistake unfortunately foisted upon the scholarly world by one of Pelliot's mentors, Édouard Chavannes). Specialists in Altaic languages tended to see all Chinese transcriptions as pertaining to the Altaic language they had personally mastered.<sup>33</sup> Pelliot's task was thus to clear away a vast number of false equivalences, set up by the over-enthusiasm of his predecessors, and replace them with scientifically defensible ones. Ramstedt again was a target here: "All the other Chinese etymologies invoked [by Ramstedt] are obsolete... I should add that, in a general way, Mr. Ramstedt speaks too freely of words borrowed from Chinese by Turkish, Mongolian, and Tungusic languages... In conclusion, with a monosyllabic language like Chinese, one often finds seeming phonetic correspondences, but it is very risky to take them as loan words... I regret that a linguist of the authority of Mr. Ramstedt, and often relying on the rather weak and arbitrary data provided by Zakharov's correspondences, should compromise a cause that I believe is good by some over-bold assertions."<sup>34</sup>

The frustration of this task boils over in his review of J. Marquart's *Über das Volkstums der Komanen*, in which he begins by speaking of "old works," and "translations, not always exact" and ends by speaking of "monsters" produced by an "indefensible system" leading to "hindrances, confusions, and when all is said and done, mistakes." He concluded by asking in exasperation with the bogus "ancient readings" of Sinologically incompetent Central Eurasianists such as Marquart: "Yet when the Chinese, with the best contemporary pronunciation of their language, transcribe Berlin as Bolin 柏林, should we then read this name as something like \*Bak-lim in the name

major growth area in Mongolic historical linguistics.

33. Thus Pelliot refers scornfully to the "pan-Mongolists" such as Schmidt, P. Hyacinthe, Pozdneyev, or Blochet; P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 25), p. 689.

34. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 21), 1925, p. 254-255, 261.

of an 'ancient' pronunciation, partially restored?"<sup>35</sup> (That he never directed similar contempt to Édouard Chavannes's equally absurd errors can be explained, presumably, by his peculiarly bitter rivalry with German scholarship understandable—although not entirely pardonable—in a French scholar who had just lived through World War I and would eventually live through World War II and German occupation as well.) This process of cleaning out bogus equivalences continues today, and is by no means completed. Although there does not seem to be any teacher-pupil lineage linking them to Pelliot, Edward Pulleyblank and Peter Golden are two major scholars pursuing this line of research on steppe languages in Chinese transcription today.

Substantively, Pelliot made a crucial contribution to the Altaic question by opening the possibility of serious, scientifically documented Mongolian terms long before the A.D. 1206 foundation of the Mongol empire. To be sure, this had already been suggested by other scholars, but not in a way that satisfied Pelliot's rigorous methodology. Most European researchers, misled by the Chinese habit of linking all nomadic peoples to the Xiongnu, followed the link of the Xiongnu to the Türk empire, declared the Xiongnu "Turco-Scythians" and then declared all the people descended from the Xiongnu to be Turkic speakers. As he wrote in 1915, "There is a tendency today to admit that we can find forms specifically Mongol only from the time of Genghis Khan."<sup>36</sup> This general tendency was amplified by Turcologists like Louis Bazin (who was a student of Pelliot) and Gerard Clauson who tended to link everything to Turkic. Not having any favored Altaic candidate, Pelliot approached vocabulary items he found in the Chinese histories in a much more objective fashion, detecting Turkic and Mongolic forms, in a constant interaction.

In this way, Pelliot was led by his use of Chinese sources to a whole new way of looking at the Altaic question. Scholars like Gustav Ramstedt and Nicholas Poppe, who did not know Chinese and therefore had to work solely from modern dialects and the mostly late body of Altaic written material followed the model of Indo-European studies by deducing a common proto-Altaic at the root of Turkic, Mongolic, and Manchu-Tungusic languages. Pelliot, however, pioneered the direct comparative study of

35. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 6), p. 130, 152, 157.

36. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 25), p. 689. At the same time, he wrote that at least the name "Turk" cannot be found in Chinese before the sixth century A.D.: "The earlier references to the name of the Turks which have been believed to have been discovered in China's classical literature seem to me to be disastrous"; see *art. cit.* (n. 25), p. 688 n. 4.

words as they appeared in transcriptions, long before the earliest attested texts, yet long after any possible divergence of "common Turco-Mongol."<sup>37</sup> What he found was Mongolian and Turkic constantly borrowing words from each other at different levels.

His picture of the linguistic situation was already set forth in his 1915 article. Both the Avars, that is the Rouran, and the Xianbei were Mongolic-speaking.<sup>38</sup> Most of the titles of the Türk empire of the sixth century on were actually borrowed from the Mongolic Avar and/or Xianbei speakers, complete with Mongolian plurals. The titles themselves were, however, mostly "wander-words" many of which can eventually be traced to entirely non-Altaiic peoples such as the Yuezhi. Finally, there remained at the base of this picture, the Xiongnu, the first steppe empire of Mongolia. About their language, in which many had claimed to find Turkic, Mongolic, or Manchu-Tungusic words, he remained completely non-committal.

The following years were only to round out this basic picture. In his study of the Cumans/Qïpchaq, he followed Marquart in identifying the early Qïpchaqs with people who were "primitively Mongols, closely akin to the Qidan and to the Xi."<sup>39</sup> Mongolic vocabulary was also traced among the Tuyuhun, a people living in Kôkenuur, but branched off of the Xianbei.<sup>40</sup> The Kitans themselves he described as speaking "a language closely akin to Mongol, even though it is strongly palatalized."<sup>41</sup> Finally, from the Xianbei branched off the Shiwei, a branch of which were the first Mongols.<sup>42</sup> In his 1929 article, "Neuf notes sur des questions d'Asie centrale," Pelliot admitted that up to then "the ancient Chinese texts still have not provided us words which one may affirm are specifically Mongol and not Turk," but in that article he presented evidence that the purely Mongolian word *ghuchin* "thirty" was found already in the Tang, as a word in the Xianbei language.<sup>43</sup>

37. See for example, the comments on chronology in P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 21), 1925, p. 254-255, 259.

38. At one point in *art. cit.* (n. 6), p. 137 n., he even suggested that the form of Qïrqiž found in Sima Qian's *Shi ji* might be "a form of Mongol type." This is, however, incorrect; as Pulleyblank has demonstrated it is simply the earlier, rhotacist, form, Qïrqiř.

39. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 6), p. 149.

40. P. Pelliot, "Notes sur les T'ou-yu-houen et les Sou-p'i", *T'oung Pao* 20, 1921, p. 325-330.

41. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 6), p. 146-147. György Kara, the Western world's leading specialist on Kitan language, has described this to me as a brilliant intuitive summation of the main phonological feature of Kitan. Pelliot has further comments on Kitan in his article "Tängrim > tärîm", *T'oung Pao* 37, 1944, p. 171-172 n. 2.

42. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 40), p. 326.

43. P. Pelliot, "Neuf notes sur des questions d'Asie centrale", *T'oung Pao* 26, 1929,

Further subsequent etymologies of Xianbei words appear here and there, always with a Mongol connection, attesting to his continued confidence in the Mongolic identification of the Xianbei language.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, while a superficial look at Pelliot's works in this area seem to be merely a series of isolated word studies, the whole builds up to a strikingly different of Mongolic-Turkic relations from the Altaic school dominant in the German- and Russian-language literature with which Pelliot was familiar. Take for example, his study of the word *tängri* ("heaven, god, sky"). It is attested in Turkic and Mongolic languages, in forms that seem to have a common origin, yet with certain peculiarities. However it is found in Chinese transcriptions dating back to the Latter Han dynasty, almost 2000 years ago, and 600 years before its first attested use in Turkic inscriptions. As Pelliot says, "The name of 'Heaven' is the most ancient word attested in the Altaic languages, as it is already known in Xiongnu around the time of the Christian era; it is at the same time the only Xiongnu word which may be identified in a definite way until now."<sup>45</sup> What do the forms in Chinese transcription tell us about the word? Well, together with the forms in Turkic and Mongolian, they indicate that the original word violated both Turkic and Mongolian phonological rules, and that we can see the process of adaption to an alien phonology in the various Turco-Mongolian forms of it.<sup>46</sup> Pelliot's suggestion, implied only in the footnotes, is that this word was originally a non-Altaic word, which was borrowed first into Mongolian and then into Turkic.<sup>47</sup> Another example is his identification of Mongolian *absa*

p. 250-251.

44. See P. A. Boodberg, "The Language of the To-pa Wei", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 1, 2, 1936, p. 169. Boodberg, however, argues that the Tabghach dialect of Xianbei was a Turkic language.

45. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 41), 1944, p. 167.

46. As one might expect with Pelliot, however, he first disposes of the Sinologically naive and indefensible versions of the borrowing theory put forward by the Altaists Klapproth, Berezin, and Ramstedt; see P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 41), 1944, p. 168-169.

47. Pelliot's doubts about the "Altaic" nature of *tengri-tenggeri* as a word are expressed in a note on p. 165, where he writes about Yan Shigu's rendering of this term he notes, "If Yan Shigu had wanted—which is not established—to render an Altaic form..." (emphasis added). In a note on p. 169-170, he considers the entire question of a loan: "Finally the possibility is not excluded that, even if *tängri* truly goes back all things considered to a Chinese origin, that it would not have come directly from Chinese into Turkic or Mongolian. There are in Turkic some ancient words of civilization which are certainly borrowed, and for which one may suppose a Tungusic, or else Paleo-Asiatic origin, or intermediary. The word *tängri* would have been able to go through this intermediary. Until now it has not even been proven moreover that the Xiongnu were strictly speaking Turkic or Mongolian."

“coffin” as a cognate of Turkic *hafsi* (al-Kāshgharī) “box”~*qapsa* (Codex Cumanicus) “coffin” (Latin script *capsa*). This might be treated as an example of an early Altaic alteration of forms with and without q-. But Pelliot rather identifies the Mongolian form as a loan from Turkic and the Turkic itself as a loan from Chinese *xiazi* 匣子 (ancient \**ɣap-tsi*) “box.”<sup>48</sup> Even in his “Les mots à *h* initiale,” an article that has been considered his classic study in Altaic studies and which opened with an affirmation of the kinship of the Altaic languages, the details show as much or more borrowing from Chinese into Altaic languages and from Turkic and Mongolian into each other as inheritance from “common Turco-Mongolian.”<sup>49</sup> Whether by Pelliot’s design or else simply by his willingness to follow the facts, this pattern of borrowing appears constantly, and the Altaic-style divergence from a common ancestor appears only rarely.<sup>50</sup>

Putting these researches together, Pelliot supplied much of the original evidence that the similarities of Turkic and Mongolic languages stem not from common origin, but from centuries of borrowing and reborrowing of words. *Tängri* was the only Xiongnu word as found in Chinese transcription with which he thought Turkic and Mongolic forms could be matched, but this word itself was most likely a loan word into those Altaic languages. His inability to find a genuinely Altaic etymology for this, or for any other Xiongnu word, also opened the possibility that the Xiongnu were not Turkic speakers, but speakers of an unknown non-Altaic language. Later his student Ligeti went further in this direction<sup>51</sup>, eventually inspiring Edward

48. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 21), 1944, p. 85-86.

49. “Common Turco-Mongolian” is invoked on p. 253 and implicitly on p. 194. Etymologies that possibly go back to “common Turco-Mongolian” are tentatively advanced on p. 220 (*horči-*), 224 (*hula’an*), 245 (*halughā*), 256 (*dayin*). But loan words back and forth are referenced much more confidently on p. 212, 215, 225, 228, 235-236, 237, 254-255, and 258-259.

50. Pelliot had a long interest in the possibility of the loan of Chinese loan words in Altaic languages. In his travel notebooks on his journey through Turkestan, he discusses the possibility of a connection between Turkish *yil* and Chinese *nian* 年, among others. See Pelliot, *Carnets de route*, p. 32. But he was of course cautious about advancing claims that could not meet his high philological standards. Hence his frustration with writers like Zakharov, Schmidt, and Ramstedt who spoiled this “cause which I believe is a good one” (*art. cit.* [n. 21], 1925, p. 261) with over-ambitious etymologies.

51. See L. Ligeti, “Mots de civilisation de Haute Asie en transcription chinoise”, *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 1,1, 1950, 140-88.



Pulleyblank<sup>52</sup> and Alexander Vovin<sup>53</sup> to elaborate a new, completely non- Altaic, theory of Xiongnu.

Back in 1915, Pelliot affirmed his belief that Mongolic and Turkic were to some extent related: "It would not seem doubtful that there had been a real kinship between the 'Turk' and 'Mongol' languages, even though its degree escapes us."<sup>54</sup> This belief was reaffirmed ten years later: "There would hardly seem to be any doubt of the original kinship of Turkish and Mongolia, and appearances are that one should add the Tungusic languages to them; one may thus have grounds to give the designation 'Altaic languages to this grouping of Turkish, Mongolian, and Tungusic languages."<sup>55</sup> In this article on the proto-Altaic initial *p-*, he described his results not as the kind of sound laws or correspondences that would define a genetic family, but rather a much more general "comparative phonetics of the 'Altaic languages."<sup>56</sup> As he described it, the softening of the initial *p-* to *h-* and then its disappearance could just as easily be seen as an areal feature slowly moving east from Turkic to Mongolic to Manchu-Tungusic as an ancestral feature lost first by one and then by the other languages. Meanwhile, his study of loan words perhaps led him into the habit of distinguishing Turkic loan words in Mongolian from "genuine Mongolian words."<sup>57</sup> This along with his repeated disavowal of any interest in documenting the ultimate relations of the Altaic languages<sup>58</sup> made him operationally, if not theoretically, a skeptic of the Altaic theory.

In 1920 he wrote about the question of a possible common ancestor of the Mongolic and Manchu-Tungusic peoples, "I cannot dream of taking

52. E. Pulleyblank, "Appendix: The Hsiung-nu Language", in his "The Consonantal System of Old Chinese: Part II", *Asia Major*, n.s., 9, 2, 1962, p. 239-265.

53. A. Vovin, "Did the Xiongnu Speak a Yeniseian Language?", *Central Asiatic Journal* 44/1, 2000, p. 87-104. Vovin begins his article by saying "Until the early 1960s it was generally assumed that the Xiongnu were ancestors of either Turks or other Altaic peoples (such as Mongols or Tunguses)" and then cites Ligeti as the first to suggest a Yeniseian affiliation of the Xiongnu. Yet as I have shown Pelliot had already adumbrated much of Ligeti and Pulleyblank's argumentation in the mid-1940s.

54. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 25), p. 689.

55. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 21), 1925, p. 193-194.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 194, 262.

57. See for example, P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 21), 1944, p. 91: "There is precisely in Mongolian, besides *qabirgha*, 'side' (> Turkic *qabirgha*) a genuinely Mongolian form *qabisun* which also means 'side' and of which the plural normally would be *qabit*." This constant appearance of two different terms, with similar meaning, one of which has a Turkic cognate, and one of which does not, has been a key point in the "anti-Altaic" interpretation of the Turco-Mongolian connection, with the form without a Turkic cognate being seen as the genuine Mongolian form.

58. P. Pelliot, *art. cit.* (n. 6), p. 144.

up here, in its totality, such a complex question, and one which touches on the origin itself and the resulting kinship of the main Tungus, Mongol, and Turk peoples." Yet if we accept Denis Sinor's assessment of his teacher that he completely lacked modesty,<sup>59</sup> we can be sure that had Pelliot believed such investigation had the real possibility of producing firm and indubitable identifications, he would not have been daunted by any complexity in this question. One may thus, I think, see Paul Pelliot as not only a great philologist, but also a crafty and subtle linguist who without fanfare laid the explosives deep under the edifice of the Altaic theory that had been so laboriously erected by Altaicists such as Gustav Ramstedt and Nicholaus Poppe. Only now that his pupils (direct and indirect) have actually detonated the charge can we see how skillfully the mines had been laid.

Christopher P. Atwood

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- 1915** « L'origine de T'ou-kiue, nom chinois des Turcs », *T'oung Pao* 16, p. 687-689.
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59. D. Sinor, *art. cit.* (n. 2), p. xxviii.

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