MONGOLIAN IN TIBETAN SCRIPT

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In an article entitled »Mongolian in Tibetan Script» published in 1953[1] the late Professor Kaare Grønbech printed two samples of Mongol spelled out in Tibetan letters and added some explanatory notes. One text was that on an enamelled signboard taken from a Chinese carpet-marker's shop; the other was an advertisement printed on wrapping paper emanating from the publishing house of the Sung Chu Szu. The texts occurred in the originals in both scripts, so that it was practicable for Grønbech to establish certain general rules of spelling. He had often seen, he wrote, Mongolian lamas making notes in the Tibetan script but in their own language, and he judged the practice to be common enough for a »tolerably stable norm» of spelling apparently to have evolved. As he himself noted, the two texts he edited reflected »the traditional pronunciation of literary Mongolian with its mixture of literary and colloquial forms.» One may see, for example, from the spellings *ya-ga-ma* (for. Mo. *yaγuma*), *hig-sen* (for *kigsen*) and so on, that the Tibetan spellings certainly did not always give the colloquial Mongol pronunciation or attempt to do so. Modern Khalkha pronunciation, for instance, of these two sample words would be represented in the official spelling by *yum*, *xiĭsen*. Grønbech described his inscriptions as illustrating only »a modest by-way of Mongolian literature, and one which will probably always remain a blind alley» but he hoped that any similar finds would be made public. I have recently had the good fortune to come across a sample of what must have once been a fairly extensive practice of this sort. The technique of rendering Mongol sounds in Tibetan script employed in this sample differs in some respects from the scheme described by Grønbech, and it may be worth while to discuss it, and the writer who used it, quite briefly.

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[1] In *Studia Orientalia*, Helsinki, 1953, XIX: 6.

That the Tibetan language and script served as the common literary vehicle in Mongolian monasteries is well known. At the same time, the Mongol language and script flourished rather in those secular circles from which sprang historical chronicles, novel-translations, books of stories and such-like uncanonical literature. This does not of course mean that Mongol was not a vehicle for religious works. The existence of some hundreds of different Mongol block-prints and large numbers of manuscripts of a religious character is evidence to the contrary. Occasionally both traditions merged, and a manuscript might be begun in one language and script and be continued, after a folio or two, in the other. This is of course quite a different phenomenon from the common practice of explaining Tibetan words incorporated in a Mongol text by means of interlinear glosses in Tibetan. Monastic education led primarily to fluency in the Tibetan script, which would be used by a monk or a former monastery pupil to express himself in either language.[1]

Folk poetry in Mongolia has generally circulated only orally, without being written down. It has long been the task of scholars to make anthologies of such oral literature and recent political re-orientations in Mongolia have in some ways expedited this task. However, some work has achieved such popularity that it has circulated in written form — for instance the popular satirical verses entitled *Güng-ün ǰuu-ying gegen-ü surγal* composed by the Ordos lama-poet Danǰinwangǰil.[2] This work has appeared in print in both Inner Mongolia (Mukden) and the Peoples Republic (Ulan Bator). Another well-known figure of recent popular Mongolian literature, also from a clerical milieu, whose transcription 'code' forms the subject of this paper, was the impromptu poet (*irügelči*) Gelegbalsang.[3]

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[1] In 1958 the senior provost (*yeke gesküi*) of the temple Gandangtegčigling in Ulan Bator, the Reverend Gombodo, was kind enough to write his name at my request, and he gave the autograph in both scripts.

[2] See W. Heissig. *Ein moderner mongolischer Beitrag zur mongolischen Literaturgeschichte*, Central Asiatic Journal II, 1, pp. 51 foll.

[3] Heissig p. 55.

Gelegbalsang was born in 1846 in the former Tushetu Khan Aimak of Outer Mongolia, in the Tushetu Wang Banner, an area now known as Saikhan Obo County in South Gobi Aimak (*Dundgov' aïmag saïxan ovoo sum*). He was the fifth son of a herdsman who was the subject (*qamǰilaγ*) of a princeling named Birozan in the area of the Ongin river (Ongin gol). Though theoretically bound to his prince in the quality almost of a serf, Gelegbalsang's father Bavuu does not seem to have been poor. He is described in the terminology of today as being of the »middle-grade bourgeoisie» (*dund zergiĭn xöröngöteĭ*), nor does Gelegbalsang himself seem to have suffered greatly from the restriction of movement to which he was, according to the Russian historian Zlatkin, legally bound.[1] Gelegbalsang grew up at home until he was ten or so years old, when his parents, seeing that he was a quick and intelligent child, sent him as a pupil (shabi) to the northern temple, *Xotol öglölt süm*, of the three temples of the Ongin river area. Here he studied Tibetan, but found the life uncongenial and ran away from the monastery. He continued to live with his parents, found an interest in Mongol literature, and managed to get himself taught the Mongol script. By the age of twenty he had conceived ambitions to better himself, and hired camels and travelled eastwards to Kalgan and Peking where he earned his living carrying goods for Chinese merchants. In his many journeys he learned Chinese and was also able to acquire Mongol printed books and to improve his knowledge of Mongol literature and his skill in the language. Some ten years later he first began to compose and recite *irügel*, poems of circumstance which were in demand to accompany any of the customary festivals and celebrations of Mongol life. One of his most famous poems seems to have been an *irügel* composed on the occasion of the celebration of the building of the new assembly-hall (*dukang*) at the *Bar' xamba lamyn xüd*. It was to this monastery, where as a pupil at the *Xotol öglölt süm* he had begun his education, that Gelegbalsang returned on the invitation of the abbot, who was impressed by his ability as an impromtu poet. His unique skill in the

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[1] I. J. Zlatkin, *Die Mongolische Volksrepublik*, Berlin 1954, p. 50.

Mongol script and written language brought him to the position of *demči* or intendant, in which capacity he had to travel frequently to and from the headquarters of the local prince. His fame as a poet spread, and his recitations were sought for at princely functions and at popular festivities and ceremonies, at games meetings, banquets and so on. He became celebrated even in the capital, Urga, but it was in his native pastures on the banks of the Ongin river that he died in 1923 at the age of 77.[1] His circumstances were moderate. In the 1922 registers of the Tushetu Wang Lhamosürüng he is described as »Gelegbalsang: age 76: tents 3: family members 5: horses 1: camels 1: oxen 2: sheep 20.» It was Gelegbalsang's practice both to extemporise directly at the time of recitation, and also occasionally to write down his poems. Several examples survive of these written copies, including the text of his celebrated »Plea for Rain» (*Tngrieče boroγa qura γuγuǰu talbiγsan silüglel*) composed and recited during a great drought in the year 1905, and have been printed recently, most of them for the first time, in Professor Ts. Damdinsuren's new anthology of Mongol literature.[1]

Gelegbalsang frequently recorded his poems in the Tibetan script, a practice which must have persisted from his monastic training in spite of his well-known skill in and experience of Mongol letters. Professor Damdinsuren has performed the great service of not only reconstructing the text of Gelegbalsang's poems into correct literary Mongol, but also reprinting a sample of the Tibetan notation used, for the sake of comparison. It is thus practicable to compare the method adopted by Gelegbalsang, which is presumably not arbitrary but typical of those of Mongol clerics in general, with the method employed by Grønbech's merchants, who while less sophisticated, were appealing to lamas versed in the Tibetan script.

Professor Grønbech noted certain conventions of spelling when

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[1] Information in Miss Tsagaan's part of D. Tsagaan and D. Tsend: *Mongolyn Uran Zoxiol*, Ulan Bator 1958, pp. 119—124.

[1] Če. Damdinsürüng, *Mongγol Uran J̌okiyal-un Degeǰi J̌aγun Bilig Orusibai*, Corpus Scriptorum Mongolorum, Tomus XIV, Ulan Bator 1959.

the Tibetan script is to be used for the Mongol language, and some
of these can be observed in our text too, notably the common closure
of a syllable with final -s [1] to indicate a diphthong in -i formed with
the preceding vowel: thus as = ai. But our text clearly represents,
as one would expect from the script of a poem which was to be
publicly recited, a current colloquial pronunciation rather than the
semi-literary language of Grønbech's inscriptions. It is a represen-
tation of speech rather than an approximation to a literary style.
At the same time, as also might be expected, a more complete and
satisfactory attempt has been made to represent the different sounds
of Mongol, particularly the vowels, for which there is not a »one for
one» correspondence in the Tibetan script. In general we may note
the following:

1. Words being written as pronounced rather than as traditionally
spelled, the long vowels of speech, shown in the classical system by
γ or g between two vowels, are shown in one of two ways as extended
vowels. The exact means by which this is done will be mentioned
later.

2. Short vowels outside the first syllable which have lost their
full value as shown in the classical spelling, are written with the vowel
characteristic of the modern Khalkha pronunciation, rather than
with the academically correct one. Thus for *nasu-tai* we have *na-sa-
t'as*.

3. Whereas in Grønbech's texts Mongol *ǰ* was figured by Tibetan
ča, in our text it is written so only when it is a true *ǰ* of speech. Where
ǰ is spoken in modern Khalkha as the affricate *dz*, in general terms,
that is, before a vowel not an original -i, we find the Tibetan letter
tsa. Thus *ha-ral-ts'a-či* for *qaralčaǰi* (classical Mongol *qaralčaǰu*) and
tso-dog for *ǰodoγ*.

Similarly, a true *č* of Mongol speech is written with Tibetan *č'a*,
while *č* spoken in modern Khalkha as the dental affricate *ts* is written
with Tibetan *ts'a*. Thus *ho-lo-č'i* for *qolači* and *ha-ral-ts'a-či* as above.

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[1] The Tibetan transcription used is that of Jäschke's dictionary, but
substituting *ña* for Jäschke's *nya*.

As Grønbech noted, Mongol initial *b* and *t* are written respectively with Tibetan *pa* and *t'a* but contrary to his observation *d* is written with Tibetan *da* and not *ta*.

It is possible to lay out the consonant correspondences between the Tibetan script and the reconstructed Mongol spelling in tabular form. In so doing we must define what is meant by speaking of a consonant in a final position. The varying forms, initial, medial and final, of the native Mongol script, are purely graphic variations. The word, without its suffixes, forms a unit irrespective of its length, and any consonant not actually the first or last letter is written with a so-called medial form. (That this rule is subject to minor variations when, for example, a final vowel is occasionally written as if it were separate from the rest of the graph, is hardly relevant here). But when Gelegbalsang writes Mongol with Tibetan script these purely structural differences of the Mongol script become irrelevant. The script is, like true Tibetan, a syllabic one, each syllable consisting in general of an initial consonant, followed by a vowel which may be extended into a long vowel or a diphthong, and perhaps a final consonant. Thus for our purposes an initial consonant is one beginning such a syllable, and a final consonant is one closing it, even though from the point of view of the appearance in Mongol script of the word it might be »medial». The category »medial» is then superfluous. The functional superiority of the »Tibetan» system lies in the fact that it distinguishes differences of sound while ignoring those purely graphic differences arising from positional relationships which the Mongol script expresses. Thus Gelegbalsang distinguishes clearly between the initial voiced *γ* of Mongol, which he figures by Tibetan *ka*, and the voiceless final *γ* which he figures with Tibetan -*g*.[1]

Gelegbalsang does not carry his system through with complete thoroughness, as far as can be judged from the short passage available, and anomalous transcriptions arise. Thus Mongol *naγadum* (modern *naadam*) is written in full *na-ka-dam* where one might

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[1] See Poppe, *Khalkha Mongolische Grammatik*, Wiesbaden 1951, paragraph 45/5.

expect to find a long vowel figured in the first syllable. I see no linguistic reason for this exception and suggest it may be a metrical emphasis of a significant word. The following particle *ni* is spelled *ni* in the transcription, the only example of initial *n-* before *-i* not being figured with Tibetan *ñà*. Another peculiar exception to the transcription scheme is the spelling *k'ur-t'e-gēd* (for *kürteged*) where *hur-t'ēd* might have been expected. The initial *k'ur* for *hur* is probably an insignificant slip. I suggest that the unusual spelling *t'e-gēd* of the two remaining syllables represents perhaps an original *-tegeged* rather than *-teged* (*kürtegeged* instead of *kürteged*), the error, if so, being in Damdinsuren's reconstruction.

The full scheme of consonant representation is as follows:

Mongol consonant in classical spelling.	Tibetan letter	
	Initial	Final.
n	ñ (before *-i*)	ṅ
	n (elsewhere)	
q	h	—
k	h	—
	k'	
γ	k	g
g	g	g
b	p	b
s	s	s
š	ṡ	—
t	t'	—
d	d	d
l, m	l, m	l, m
č	c̀'	—
	ts'	—
ǰ	c̀	—
	ts	—
y, r	y, r	— r

This scheme appears to be a fairly consistent method of representing the consonants of one language by means of the script of another. It is governed rather by the actual sound of the spoken word than by reference to the classical Mongol spelling, though this was familiar to the writer. Thus we may note that *n*- before -*i* is evidently felt to contain an element of ioticisation and is usually spelled with Tibetan *ñi*. The difference between the initial deep-velar *γ*- in words of the back-vowel series and the post-mediopalatal *g*- was clearly felt by the writer and was represented by the contrasting use of the unaspirated Tibetan *ka* as against *ga*.[1]

A more interesting feature of this text is the manner in which the vowels are represented. The normal Tibetan system which represents only the four vowels *e i o u*, with the vowel *a* inherent in the syllable, is, as Grønbech observed, insufficient for the Mongol language with its series *o ö u ü* and its long vowels. We may notice at once that the vowel modifications which occur in Tibetan in syllables of certain types are not turned to account in Gelegbalsang's system, whith the one exception of the addition of a final -*s* to an open syllable to express the Mongol diphthong *ai*, etc.

For the short vowels of Mongol we find the following equivalents:

a, e, i, and *o.*	represented as in Tibetan.
ö	represented by *wa-zur* with a subscribed *u*-vowel sign, under a consonant or vowel-base.
ü	represented with *u*-vowel sign.
u	See note below.

Note.

There are too few undoubted occurrences of the vowel *u* in this passage for one to be sure how it is normally figured. Generally speaking, the *u* as spelled in the classical alphabet is an unstable vowel which, outside the first syllable, has lost its distinctive value, and it is figured here, for example, as *a*. Our text retains *u* in the following words only:

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[1] Ibid.

urduɣur: here the initial *u* is treated as long *ū*.

ayisui: here *u* is figures as *ö*.

Further, the long *ū* of *ǰasaɣul* (modern *zasuul*) is figured as *ü* (i.e. *sul* in the Tibetan script).

It would be necessary to have a longer extract in order to be able to discuss this point fully, but it might be worth remarking here that uncertainties in the spelling of the rounded vowels occur even within the modern official spelling of the Khalkha language: thus *xušuu* and *xošuu* both occur in texts.

Two methods have been adopted to indicate long vowels, neither of them perhaps original in its conception, but both interesting in application. Either the vowel may be lengthened by the subscription of 'small *a*' (*a-č'un*), with the occasional variation of 'small *a*' written within the syllable instead of beneath it. Or *wa-zur* without a vowel sign may be written below the consonant concerned. In practice this method is limited to the transcription of long *ū*. For the sake of convenience I shall transcribe the two varieties of the former method by a long vowel and by 'small *a*' as a repeated full vowel respectively, and the second method will be indicated by the normal process of adding a -*v*- in the transcription. Thus: *pa-rā* (*baraɣa*); *tsu an* (*züün, ǰegün*); *pa-rvan* (*baraɣun*).

The use of 'small *a*' to lengthen a vowel in a transcribed foreign word is a well-known practice of the Tibetan script. As to the second method, the use of *wa-zur* to indicate a »half-vocalic *o* or *u*» has been explored extensively by B. Laufer[1], and its use to represent the subjoined *v* of Sanskrit words (»now pronounced *ō* by Tibetans») has been noted by Jäschke.[2] I am not competent at all to remark on the use of *wa-zur* in Tibetan, but merely wish to point out, in the light of what these scholars have written that *wa-zur* has been used by the Mongols as a convenient way of figuring a long *ū*.

The individual long vowels are represented as follows:

1. Long *ē* and *ā*, the spoken reality usually of the conventionally

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[1] *Ueber das va-zur*, Vienna Oriental Journal, XII, 1898, p. 307.

[2] *Tibetan Grammar*, Berlin and Leipzig 1929, p. 8.

written *aγa* and *ege*, are figured by the addition of 'small *a*' to the syllable, either subscribed or as a full letter.

Examples: *pa-rā, baraγa.*

        ,*i-de-ge̗eṅ, idege-ben.* (and also ,*i-dē-gēṅ*)

2. The long rounded vowels *ō ǖ*, and sometimes *ū* of Mongol speech are also represented in this way.

Examples: *svuṅ-gvu̗uṅ, söng-iyen* (=modern *söngöön*)

    tsu̗aṅ, jegün (= modern *züün*).[1]

    tsa-sul-lu̗ad, jasaγul-ud. (The plural suffix *-ud* is pro-
                     nounced   long   in   modern
                     Khalkha.)

3. But the long *ū* is generally represented by the use of *wa-zur* beneath the syllable without the addition of any vowel sign. Jäschke's note on the pronunciation *ō* of a *wa-zur* (extended by the addition of 'small *a*') has already been mentioned. Here one may observe that the Mongol *u* sound approximates to the sound in English *door* rather than to the sounds usually associated with this letter in, for example, German and Italian. It would appear that this practice observed by Jäschke has influenced the Mongol usage, the sounds concerned being similar.

Examples: *pa-rvaṅ, baraγun* (= modern *baruun*).

    hos-kvar, qoyiγur (= modern *xoiguur*).

    tso-dog-̗vad, jodoγ-ud. (Cf. the alternative representation
                     of the suffix *-ud* in *tsa-sul-lu̗ad*
                     above.)

Differently classified, our observations are as follows:

Tibetan *a* (inherent), *e, i, o, u*, represent, with a consonant or with 'small *a*' as a vowel base, the Mongol sounds *a, e, i, o, ü*.

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[1] When 'small *a*' is written as a full letter showing vowel length it some-
times bears the sign marked on the syllable, so that a syllable appears to bear
two similar vowel signs, and is sometimes not marked. As far as can be seen in
this short text 'small *a*' is left unmarked in syllables containing a rounded
vowel. I have preserved the phenomenon in the transcription. Thus *tsu̗aṅ*
(*züün*) but ,*i-de-ge̗eṅ.*

Wa-zur used with a consonant or vowel- base represents Mongol *ū*.
Wa-zur used with the *u*-vowel sign represents Mongol *ö*.
'Small *a*' is used:

1. As a vowel- base.
2. To indicate vowel length.

As Grønbech said, this is a by-way of Mongol literature, but it
is interesting as a concrete example of a practice often referred to,
and as a modern descendent of such transcription systems as that
used by the monk Pagwa (aP'ags-pa) to record the Mongol language
in a foreign script.[1] There is secondly the practical value that it
is not impossible that texts in this transcription may yet turn up
in libraries, and an outline of the method used may be helpful for
the purpose of reconstruction.

APPENDIX

The »Tibetan» text as printed by Damdinsuren:
1 pa yar pe leg gi in mag nas da
  pa ril da ha in na ka dam ni
  pa ha t'as sa i han he mel ts'e he de
  pa ka na sa t'as tsa lva č'vad ñi
5 pa ri va dab č'i han tso dog vad da i č'i ñi
  pag t'ā či ya dan vu mvu sel ts'ēd
  pa ri či da kag san tsa sul lu ad ñi
  pa rvan tsu an t'a lā sa ñi
  pa rā pa rā kār ñi t'a pil ts'ād
10 pa č'im t'ur gen de pel ts'ēd

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[1] Methodologically it is also apparently a forerunner of the present cyrillic-
style alphabet, which was introduced into the Peoples Republic in 1941 as the
official script after an attempt to romanise the script had been abandoned
some ten years before. This script has been adapted on the basis of the sound
of spoken Mongol, not on that of the appearance of the old spelling. Various
devices, such as the hard and soft signs of Russian, which are foreign to the
nature of Mongol, have, like the Tibetan *wa-zur*, been incorporated for certain
purposes of representation.

pa ril ts'ag saṅ t'vu dus de da pal ts'ād
pa ̗iṅ ka t'og t'a mal ̗i de ge ̗eṅ k'ur t'e gēd
pa rag t'vu lub gus ts'el de ċi pas ha da
hos kvar ̗var dva ra svuṅ gvu ̗aṅ t'a pi ča
15 ho ñiṅ šu se t'e ̗i dē gēṅ ̗vu ru ċi
ho lo he t'e ̗iṅ pa rā gi ha ral ts'a ċi
ho lo ċ'i mo ri gi ̗a ya laṅ dva la ċi pas t'al
t'eṅ de se ̗eṅ de se dva dal ts'ād
t'er guṅ mo ri ñi ̗as svus he me he de.

Damdinsuren reconstructs this text into written Mongolian as
follows:

1 bayar belge-yin mangnai-du   (beleg-ün manglai-du)
barilduqu-yin naɣadum ni
baqa-tai sayiqan kemelčekü-dü
baɣa nasu-tai ǰalaɣučud ni
5 bariɣu dabčiqan ǰodoɣ-ud-i čini   (dabči)
baɣtaɣaju yadan emüsülčeged   (baɣtaju)
bariju daɣaɣsan ǰasaɣul-ud ni   (emended from *baritu*)
baraɣun ǰegün tala-ača ni
baraɣa baraɣa-bar ni tabilčaɣad   (talbilčaɣad)
10 bačim türgen debelčeged   (debilčeged)
barilčaɣsan tedüi-dü dabalčaɣad
bayangɣu toɣtamal idege-ben kürteged   (bayangɣu-yin)
baruɣ tölüb güičeldüjü bayiqu-du   (tölüb ni)
qoyiɣur urduɣur söng-iyen tabiǰu   (söng-üd-iyen talbiǰu)
15 qonin sigüsü-tü idege-ben örüjü
qola kete-yin baraɣa-yi qaralčaju
qolači mori-yi ayalan daɣulaju bayitala
tende ende-eče daɣudalčaɣad   (daɣudalčaǰu)
terigün mori ni ayisui kemekü-dü.   (morid)

The readings in parentheses are those of the text as presented
by Damdinsuren in the main body of his work, which differs slightly
from the reconstruction he gives parallel to the Tibetan-script text
in his notes. Further, the two following lines have been omitted from

the text of the poem, the first after our line 4, the second after our line 11:

baraγan köke öngge-tei:
basa dakin darulaǰu baγulta-ban abuγad:

(Translation:

»In the forefront of the festival are the wrestling matches. Talking pleasantly together the young men put on their tight, narrow jackets (of dark blue) which they can hardly get into. The seconds who look after them send them out one after another from this side and from that. They move lightly and swiftly and come to grips with each other (and ever again one conquers and accepts submission) and receives the accustomed food. Most of them have had their turn and put down their koumis-bowls in front and behind and set out the festive portions of mutton. Now they are looking into the far distance, and as they chant (the song) 'Far-running horse', on this side and that the chant is taken up and people are saying: 'The first horse is coming in.'»)