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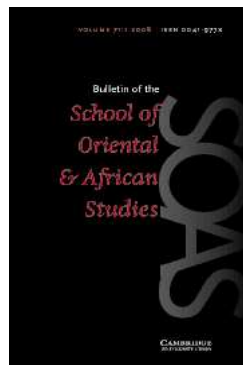
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Daniel Prior: *The Semetey of Kenje Kara: A Kirghiz Epic Performance on Phonograph.* (Turcologica.) xviii, 155 pp., CD. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006. €68. ISBN 3 447 05138 8.

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notion (at whatever point they may have acquired it) that the world and the Mongol Empire were essentially the same thing, behaved towards other powers. He shows how “they also proved adept at using both personnel and tactics which were calculated to lull potential enemies into making concessions”. DeWeese considers some fascinating Sufi attitudes towards the Mongol conquests, showing how some Sufis not only saw those conquests as just punishment for the sins of the Muslim people, but in some cases were held even to have facilitated or led them. İsenbike Togan gives a useful account of the Qongrat or Qonggirat, “the consort tribe of Chinggis Khan’s *Altan Urugh*, the Golden Lineage”. Her late father contributes, in a translation by Gary Leiser, material on Anatolia from the Letters of Rashīd al-Dīn. Leiser’s many translations of the work of Turkish historians have been immensely valuable, but this one arguably less so than some (though Togan is always worth reading) in that Togan, inevitably, could not have known of A. H. Morton’s recent persuasive demonstration that the Letters are spurious and, in all probability, were written much later than Rashīd al-Dīn’s lifetime. Leiser himself, however, is fully aware of this, as his useful annotation of Togan’s text shows. By contrast, Abolala Soudavar, in an otherwise interesting case study in what are now seen, rightly, as the immensely important processes of cultural transmission which occurred across the Mongol Empire, proves unable to resist the temptation to denounce Morton – as before, ungraciously; and as before, in vain. Melville provides a very convenient description and analysis of the three main Anatolian Persian histories of the period. Judith Pfeiffer uses a previously rather neglected letter to put Mamluk–Mongol relations in the time of Aḥmad Tegüder, the first Muslim İlkhān, into a convincing context.

This, of course, is very far from exhausting the abundance of material offered here. Specialists in later periods in Persia and Central Asia, and in Mamluk history, will also find much information and food for thought. A notable feature of the contributions is the number of tributes that are paid to John Woods’s Chicago seminars: his influence is very far from being confined to what he has published, important though that is and will continue to be. The late Sir Geoffrey Elton, a rigorous historian if ever there was one, was proud of having been the recipient of five *Festschriften*. Even he, I suspect, would have been pleased to be presented with one of this quality.

D. O. Morgan

DANIEL PRIOR:

The Semetey of Kenje Kara: A Kirghiz Epic Performance on Phonograph.

(Turcologica.) xviii, 155 pp., CD. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006. €68. ISBN 3 447 05138 8.

When I mentioned I was reviewing this significant volume based on six wax cylinders from the end of 1903 or beginning of 1904 that preserve perhaps the earliest recording of Kirghiz storytelling, a Kirghiz friend reacted fiercely: “When are they going to give the cylinders back to us, the people who they rightly belong to?” The cylinders were recorded by Russian travellers in the party of Aleksandr G. Belinskii in what was then Russian Turkistan, and are

now housed in the Phonogram Archive of the Institute of Russian Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences. They record a bard named Kenje Kara, and in total last less than 18 minutes, including just 240 verse lines of the Kirghiz oral epic. The episode and its telling was judiciously chosen by the bard to provide what Prior regards as “a remarkably well-rounded early document of an oral performance” (p. xv).

Here, the wax cylinders are reproduced on an appended audio CD; the quality is such that we immediately recognize the mammoth task that Prior set himself in deciphering, interpreting and providing a music notation to the episodes. Indeed, the quality is sufficiently poor that one doubts the usefulness of the CD, but we cannot deny the detective skills that Prior has brought to his account. Nor can we object to Prior’s careful annotations, or the oft-stated observation that his comments must be considered provisional. This is high-level scholarship sitting at the juncture of oral literature, folklore and ethnomusicology.

Much has been written on the Kirghiz epic cycle, most in Russian but a smattering in English (notably by Arthur T. Hatto, formerly of the University of London). The names of Karl Reichl, Viktor Zirmunskii and Ainek Zainakova are particularly noteworthy. Any number of contemporary recordings are available in Bishkek today and a few mid twentieth-century recordings have had fairly broad distribution. A couple of translations of larger parts of the epic cycle are available on the internet. The cycle functions as a kind of national Kirghiz trope, as a historical and identity marker, and remains embedded in countless bedtime stories. It is widely considered that the cycle, the story of Manas and his son Semetey, is the most extensive oral epic to have survived into modern times.

The bard, Kenje Kara, chose an episode about the marriage of Semetey the son of Manas and Ay-čürök. It involves an oath sworn by their parents, an interloper who demands the bride’s hand, the loss of Semetey’s falcon to Ay-čürök who has taken the form of a swan, and an arduous journey ending with a crossing of the Great Ürgönč River. Ay-čürök conforms to the Northern Asian swan-battle-maiden type, devising a plan to woo her suitor, arguing and setting terms for marriage. There is tumult, tension, and understatement, with prosody matching short stichic phrases to episodic long lines. There are dreams and depictions of military technology, all set in a known landscape.

This, though, is not intended as a volume to illustrate the richness of the epic cycle; Hatto’s many publications, and some of those more contemporary recordings arguably serve such a purpose better. Almost half the volume, some 67 pages, comprises a music notation and transcription of the cylinders, but the focus lies elsewhere. Prior pieces together the story of how this, as perhaps the earliest recording of the cycle, was made. He wants to create awareness and scholarly comprehension of what he calls the “Twilight Age” of the Kirghiz epic tradition, “both for its transitional nature (leading into the classical period of folklorization under Soviet rule) and because the relevant textual records are few and insufficiently studied” (p. 6). He wants to deepen appreciation of how narrative materials are combined with compositional techniques to create original performance, and to do so while avoiding the heavy-handedness of much Soviet-era scholarship, and while also avoiding recordings influenced by written-down versions of archetypal texts. Because of this, his most significant contributions come beyond the notation and transcription: an extensive commentary, comprising discussions on tradition, prose and music (form, metre, rhythm, mode, melody, tempo, texture), and the three dimensions of

narration, music and poetry, a reconstruction of how the recordings were made, and exhaustive notes to the recordings.

None of this makes for easy reading. It is scholarship in a time-honoured vein, always thoroughly informed and painstakingly researched. Kenje Kara is discussed through a near contemporary account of the recording (translated in Appendix 2), he is identified in one 1980s text, and during Prior's fieldwork he was remembered by an elderly resident of the village of Bes-küngöy who when young had heard him perform. Three copies of the original wax cylinders have been made and are here compared, though the author has a second-generation copy of one of these and a first-generation copy of another. Much time is spent discussing the metrical parameters of Turkic verse, tied in to what happens in the recorded retelling here, and to Kirghiz verse types, two of which are named after the gaits of horses. Prior identifies repetition and correction in the recordings, and changes to the story made as cylinders were changed. All in all, technical complexities are managed with aplomb to leave us with a document that brilliantly brings to life a moment more than a century ago, captured, however faintly, on those six wax cylinders.

Keith Howard

BRYAN J. CUEVAS and KURTIS T. SCHAEFFER (eds):

Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003, vol. 3.

vi, 215 pp. (Brill's Tibetan Studies Library.) Leiden: Brill, 2006. €69. ISBN 9004153519.

Aside from a series of classic foundational studies by the Italian scholar Luciano Petech, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were, until recently, a neglected period in Tibetan studies. An earlier volume in this series under the editorship of François Pommaret (*Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century*) was an important step in developing our knowledge of that period, and this volume, under the editorship of American scholars Bryan J. Cuevas and Kurtis T. Schaeffer continues that development. Indeed the contributions represented here suggest the period is now attracting a growing number of scholars. They find a fertile field of enquiry. This was a period in which the Qing dynasty was at its height in China, the "Great Fifth" Dalai Lama (1617–82) and his regent were reshaping the Tibetan world, and the first Christian missionaries were beginning to penetrate into the Tibetan plateau. All of these issues, along with the literary corpus of the beguiling Sixth Dalai Lama, are explored here.

The volume comprises twelve articles, and derives from a panel organized by the editors at the Oxford conference of the International Association for Tibetan Studies in 2003. [The reviewer is an editor of the series in which this volume appears, but was not otherwise associated with it.] The articles included are: Benjamin Bogin, "Royal blood and political power: contrasting allegiances in the memoirs of Yol mo Bstan 'dzin nor bu (1598–1644)"; Marina Illich, "Imperial stooge or emissary to the Dge lugs throne? Rethinking the biographies of Chankya Rolpé Dorjé"; R. Trent Pomplun, "Ippolito Desideri, S.J. on Padmasambhava's prophecies and the persecution of the