

## FOREWORD

**T**his special issue of RET comprises papers authored by participants of the research project “Exploring the origins of Tibetology: a Russian-French collaborative study of the first Tibetan manuscripts in Europe”,<sup>1</sup> as well as a number of colleagues who joined us at the conference “Tibet and the Oirats: Oirat Cultural Legacy and the Earliest History of Tibetan and Mongolian Studies” held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (November 13–15, 2022).<sup>2</sup>

The Oirats, also known as Western Mongols and some – those who live in Russia – as Kalmyks, exercised significant influence from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Various Oirat groups spread across a vast territory, extending from modern Xinjiang in the East to the Volga region and the Caspian Sea in the West. They established three Khanates: the Dzungar in Central Asia, the Khoshut on the Tibetan Plateau, and the Kalmyk in the southern borders of Russia. Their conversion to Buddhism made territories controlled by the Dzungars and Kalmyks a hub for Buddhist monasteries, housing libraries with Tibetan and Mongolian books, along with other religious and cultural artifacts. However, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Oirats gradually lost their power. The Dzungar and Khoshut Khanates were defeated by Qing China, while the Kalmyk Khanate lost its autonomy to the Russian Empire. This eventually led to a large-scale exodus of the Kalmyks from Russia to Dzungaria under a Qing protectorate. Despite their relatively short period of political prominence, the Oirats left an enduring legacy in the history of the region, including Tibet, and in the earliest history of Tibetan studies.

Three centuries ago, in 1722, the Leipzig academic journal *Acta Eruditorum* published, for the first time in Europe, a folio of a Tibetan Buddhist text. This folio had been brought from one of the two abandoned Oirat monasteries discovered by Russians along the Irtysh River (located in present-day Kazakhstan) during the years 1717–1721. Shortly thereafter, on the personal orders of Peter the Great, the original folio was sent to the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris, where it was translated by two eminent Orientalists, the brothers

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<sup>1</sup> The project was supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research and the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), project number 21-512-15001.

<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to our colleagues Ian MacCormack, Eviatar Shulman, and Michal Biran for their help in organizing this event.

Étienne and Michel Fourmont. Although their work resulted in a bizarre Latin text, this event may be considered a significant milestone in the history of Tibetan studies. A substantial number of other folios from the two monasteries, Darqan čorji-yin keyed (widely known as Sem Palat) and Ablai-kit, were also brought to Saint Petersburg and further to the West. These folios formed the foundation for the collection of Tibetan and Mongolian books in Europe.

*The first part* of this issue of RET consists of five papers on the Sem Palat and Ablai-kit studies. The first paper, authored by **Alla Sizova, Emanuela Garatti, and Nathalie Monnet**, introduces archival documents from the Bibliothèque nationale de France that make it possible to reconstruct in more details the earliest contacts between Saint Petersburg and Paris concerning the Tibetan manuscript brought from Siberia and its translation by the brothers Fourmont. The following three papers focus on presenting some of the folios from the two monasteries that are held in various institutions.

**Alexander Zorin and Charles Ramble** discuss ten folios from Ablai-kit that contain texts typically localized in the Tengyur. A closer analysis, however, reveals that this was not the case with these folios, dismantling the initial hypothesis that this part of the Tibetan Buddhist canon might have been kept along with the Kangyur in the Oirat monastery. Nevertheless, the analysis does add further support to the argument that Ablai-kit possessed a unique version of the Kangyur that has no parallels with any other known versions. The appendix to the article contain the full list of 250 folios of the Ablai-kit Kangyur so far identified in twelve Russian and Western European collections.

**Zorin, Anna Turanskaya, and Agnieszka Helman-Ważny** offer a comprehensive analysis of a bundle containing one Tibetan and six Mongolian folios, preserved at the Hunterian Library of the University of Glasgow. These folios were originally part of the private library of Th. S. Bayer, the first Orientalist at the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences. Additionally, one of the appendices to the article includes the second part of the catalogue of Tibetan folios on blue paper, believed to have originated from the Sem Palat library.

Furthermore, **Zorin, Turanskaya, and Vadim Borodaev** present one Tibetan and two Mongolian folios that have been held at the Linköping City Library, most probably since the 1720s. One of these folios is closely associated with the famous Swedish writer August Strindberg, who somewhat misleadingly referred to it as 'Codex Renatus Linkopensis'. An intriguing Russian inscription found on this folio, dated July 1720, is given close attention, revealing that the folio could not have been brought to Sweden by Johan Renat, a captive Carolean

who spent many years at the court of the Dzungar rulers. The authors suggest Johan von Strahlenberg as a more plausible source of the folios.

This part concludes with a review of Dmitry Ivanov's significant study of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist collections of the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences, now preserved at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, RAS. The review, authored by **Zorin**, provides some insights into non-textual artefacts originating from Sem Palat and Ablai-kit. In the appendix, the icon of Acala (kept in the Glasgow University Library) that is supposed to have been brought from Sem Palat is published.

*The second part* of the issue consists of four papers on historical connections between the Oirats and Tibet. They are arranged according to the chronological order of events analyzed by the authors. **Vladimir Uspensky** introduces translations of official documents written in Mongolian relating to the Fifth Dalai Lama's visit to Beijing in 1652–1653. They include letters by the Emperor Shunzhi, the Fifth Dalai Lama, the Khoshut chieftain Gushi Khan and other high-ranking dignitaries. These written sources substantially complement the available knowledge about this visit and also provide a new viewpoint concerning the intentions of the parties and a new interpretation of the titles given by the Emperor to the Fifth Dalai Lama and Gushi Khan.

**Irina Garri, Yumzhana Zhabon, and Hortsang Jigme** provide their analysis of "The History of Kokonor", a work composed by the renowned Oirat Tibetan author Sumpa Khenpo Eshe Peljor. This relatively concise text sheds light on the Tibetan-Mongolian antagonism that arose after the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Sumpa Khenpo disregards his role in Tibet's history and, on the contrary, praises the virtues of Gushi Khan. While highlighting the extreme cruelty of the Manchus towards the Kokonor Mongols, he also extols the long-term peace in the region brought about by Qing policy.

**Baatr Kitinov's** paper focuses on the role played by Tibetan and Kalmyk Buddhist masters in preparing for the exodus of the main body of Kalmyks from Russia to Dzungaria in 1771. The study delves into various factors, including the 'calling letters' from Tibetan hierarchs urging the Kalmyks to return to their native lands, the significance of Dzungaria as the homeland of all Oirats, measures taken by Qing emperors and officials, and the missionary activities of the Russian Orthodox Church supported by the Tsarist administration. These factors are discussed on the basis of a wide range of historical documents.

**Bembya Mitruiev** introduces an unsigned letter written in the Oirat script, which is kept at Labrang monastery in Gansu province, China. The letter was addressed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> reincarnation of Jamyang Shepa and, as argued by the author, was composed by Ubashi Khan, the

leader of the Kalmyks who departed from Russia for Dzungaria in 1771. This document, along with a passage about the embassy of the Kalmyk Torguts found in the biography of the Panchen Lama, supports the assumption that the concern for the preservation of their traditional faith among the Kalmyks was one of the primary reasons for their exodus. A banquet that the Qianlong Emperor hosted for Ubashi Khan is the subject of a painting, by the Czech Jesuit Ignaz Sichelbarth (1708–1780), that is held in the Palace Museum in Beijing. Regrettably, permission to reproduce the image was declined on the grounds that the Palace Museum does not authorize the use of its holdings in publications related to Tibetan religion, and on p. 318 we have instead used a copy of the painting to illustrate the composition.

*The third part* of the issue is dedicated to the Kyivan collections of Kalmyk Buddhist books and icons, largely unknown to the international scholarly community and currently endangered due to the ongoing military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. **Olena Ogneva**, a leading expert in the history of Ukrainian collections of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism, presents a survey of the objects preserved in Kyiv. In the first part of her paper, she focuses on the figures of several highly educated Christian priests from the Kyiv-Mohyla Theological Academy who served the Orthodox Church among the Kalmyks during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The second part of the paper offers extensive details about the Kalmyk icons and texts housed in the two major Kyivan collections: the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts and the Institute of Manuscripts of the V. I. Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. The author introduces several valuable items, including a series of *thangkas* created by the Kalmyk artist Belene Shobol (19<sup>th</sup> century), and an Oirat manuscript of the Tibetan translation of the Vajracchedikā obtained by Count Jan Potocki, likely from the Polish descendants of the Kalmyk Khan Amursana at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt congratulations to Olena Ogneva as she celebrates her 80th jubilee. She was born in Gulripshi, Abkhazia, on July 24, 1944. In 1966, she graduated from the Faculty of Oriental Studies of Leningrad State University, where she studied Tibetan philology with Bronislav Kuznetsov and simultaneously studied Tibetan iconography with Boris Pankratov at the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, the USSR Academy of Sciences (now the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences). From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, she took part in the cataloguing of the Tibetan collection kept at this Institute. In 1980, she defended her Ph. D. dissertation on the topic “A Tibetan medieval treatise on the theory of fine arts” at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, supervised by Prof.

G. Bongard-Levin. In the first half of the 1980s, she worked with the manuscript collection of the Tajikistan Academy of Sciences in Dushanbe, and afterwards moved to Ukraine. There she has worked in various institutions such as the Lesia Ukrainka East European National University (Lutsk), and the A. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (Kyiv). She has published about 150 works in Ukrainian and Russian on various topics related to Buddhist arts, Tibetan culture, and Buddhist collections in Ukraine. In 2013, she was awarded the A. Krymskyi Prize of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine for a series of works entitled "Philosophical, religious and scientific traditions of the East in European culture". We wish her a long and healthy life and are delighted to present one of her works to the international academic community.

To conclude, we hope that this collection of papers will draw more attention of scholars to the historical and cultural legacy of the Oirats in their relation to Tibet and the history of Tibetan studies.

*Alexander Zorin*  
*Charles Ramble*





