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## NICOLAAS WITSEN, THE TIBETAN SCRIPT AND THE TANGUT LANGUAGES

George van Driem

In 2001, I wrote:

In his two-volume description of Siberia and Central Asia, Nicolaes Witsen provided a Tibetan word list and the earliest specimens ever published in the West of the Tibetan script, which he called 'Tangutsche letteren' (1705 [1692], I: 210-211). Witsen differentiated between 'het Tartarische Ryk Tangut en 't landschap Tebet' ["The Tatar state Tangut and the region Tibet?"]. South of the Tangut area lay 'Tibet, of Tebet, alzoo by d'Indianen, anders Tebei, Tebbut, Tobbot of ook wel Tumet geheeten' ["Tibet or Tebet, as it is called by the Indians, otherwise known as Tebei, Tebbut, Tobbot or even Tumet"]. (van Driem 2001: 448)

This statement requires some tweaking, and I am gratefully seizing the opportunity for the partial rectification of the first of the two sentences quoted above.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst it is true that Nicolaas Witsen provided the earliest specimens ever published in the West of the Tibetan script, his word list presented vocabulary that was manifestly something other than Tibetan. The language in question happens to be Tangut, and this first ever Occidental sample of Tibetan script is unusual in other respects as well. First, we shall address the question as to what precisely is meant by the name Tangut, for the nature of the highly atypical specimen of Tibetan script provided by Witsen cannot be understood without a comprehensive grasp of what the term 'Tangut' means and has meant in Western sources.

In the first edition of *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, Witsen notionally distinguished Tibet from Tangut (1692, II: 136 sq., 145 sq.), and from the details of what he wrote and, more particularly, from the details in his large 1687 map, dedicated *Aen den Alder Doorlugtigste alder Grootmachtigste grote Heer Zaar Groot Vorst Peter Alexewitz*, 'to the most illustrious most powerful great lord czar great ruler Pëtr Alekseevič', it is clear that Witsen had a good idea of where Tangut ended and Tibet began. Both entities appear from his descriptions to occupy roughly the same geographical space, but 'Tibet regn.' lay to the west of 'Tanguth'. In the second edition of *Noord en*

<sup>1</sup> Moreover, contrary to the implication of the notation used, Witsen's first and second editions did not just differ in page numbering. Rather substantial differences in content and the arrangement of the information also exist between the two editions.

Tanguts A.B.C. Pag. 210. No. 1

Het wolk ook gang heeft onder sommige Kalmucken en Mungalen.

ga. ka. ga. da. sa. za. sa. na. la. ta. la. na. ba. pa. ba. ma.  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

sa. za. sa. oca. cha. ca. a. ja. ra. la. cha. ca. gha. a.  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

De letteren aldus sonder eenig teeken boven ofte onder de selve staande, leest men die met de klank a: maar als 'er boven de letteren staat 𐰇 met de klank e, 𐰇 daar boven staande, met i, en 𐰇 daar boven gestelt syn de, met o, en cyndelyk als 'er 𐰇 onder de letteren staat, leestmen u.

Als by voorbeeld ga. pa. gi. go. gu. ka. ke. ki. ko. ku. ga. ge. gi. go. gu.  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

na. ne. ni. no. nu. sa. se. si. so. su. za. ze. zi. zo. zu. sa. se. si. so. su.  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

na. ne. ni. no. nu. da. de. di. do. du. ta. te. ti. to. tu. da. de. di. do. du.  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

na. ne. ni. no. nu. ba. be. bi. bo. bu. pa. pe. pi. po. pu. ba. be. bi. bo. bu.  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

na. ne. ni. no. nu. sa. se. si. so. su. sa. se. si. so. su. oca. oca. oca. oca. oca.  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

cha. che. chi. cho. chu. ca. ce. ci. co. cu. a. e. i. o. u. ja. je. ji. jo. ju.  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

na. re. ri. ro. ru. la. le. li. lo. lu. cha. che. chi. cho. chu. ca. ce. ci. co. cu.  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

• Dit boven de letteren staande, betrekent aan-een-binding der letteren.

Voorbeelden van Tangutische benamingen.

om Soim ancoeglan boltoegai bornicta achi dain kemedoe boltoegai  
 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚. 𐰇𐰏𐰣𐰚.

Geest Godt goede gesonthijt aanden Burgermeester, en dat magh leven in eeuwicheijt.

Hemel tingeri.	Son naran.	Maen staran.	Wolcken oçun.	Aerden gadziar.
Water usun.	Vuur gal.	Lucht kez.	Koning chan chia.	Vorst taschy.
Vrochtin chitun.	Heer nigjen.	Man ere.	Vrouw nichu.	Vader Ada.

Fig. 1: Tanguts ABC page 1. North and East Tartary I (1705) pp. 210-211.

Tangutische benamingen Pag. 211. No. 2

Moder boctay.	Broeder Achay' olt. Akuleg.	Wijf mitte.	Macht okin.	Oogen nudin.
Ooren gichken.	Neus habar.	Longs kelin.	Mondt lman.	Landen Schuidun.
Baert sagal.	Daeg lama.	Schryver bachshi.	Jongh kobaun.	een Kerk kerishi.
Mout modun.	Ex'er tentur.	Inkt bekie.	Pen udsiuj.	Schryf bitzhi.
Lees unfchy.	Pels debel.	Gordel bujie.	Stovels godufun.	een Muur Malachar.
Broeken umudur.	Kousen omifun.	Sandt schgorog.	Taschjen kaga.	Muurlag kite.
Eeten beje.	Mest kutiga.	Tangutische Getallen welcke met die der Calmucken en Mungalen genoegsaem van een nigen.		
1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45
46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55
56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65
66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75
76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85
86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95
96	97	98	99	100

Fig. 2: Tanguts ABC page 2. North and East Tartary I (1705) pp. 210-211.



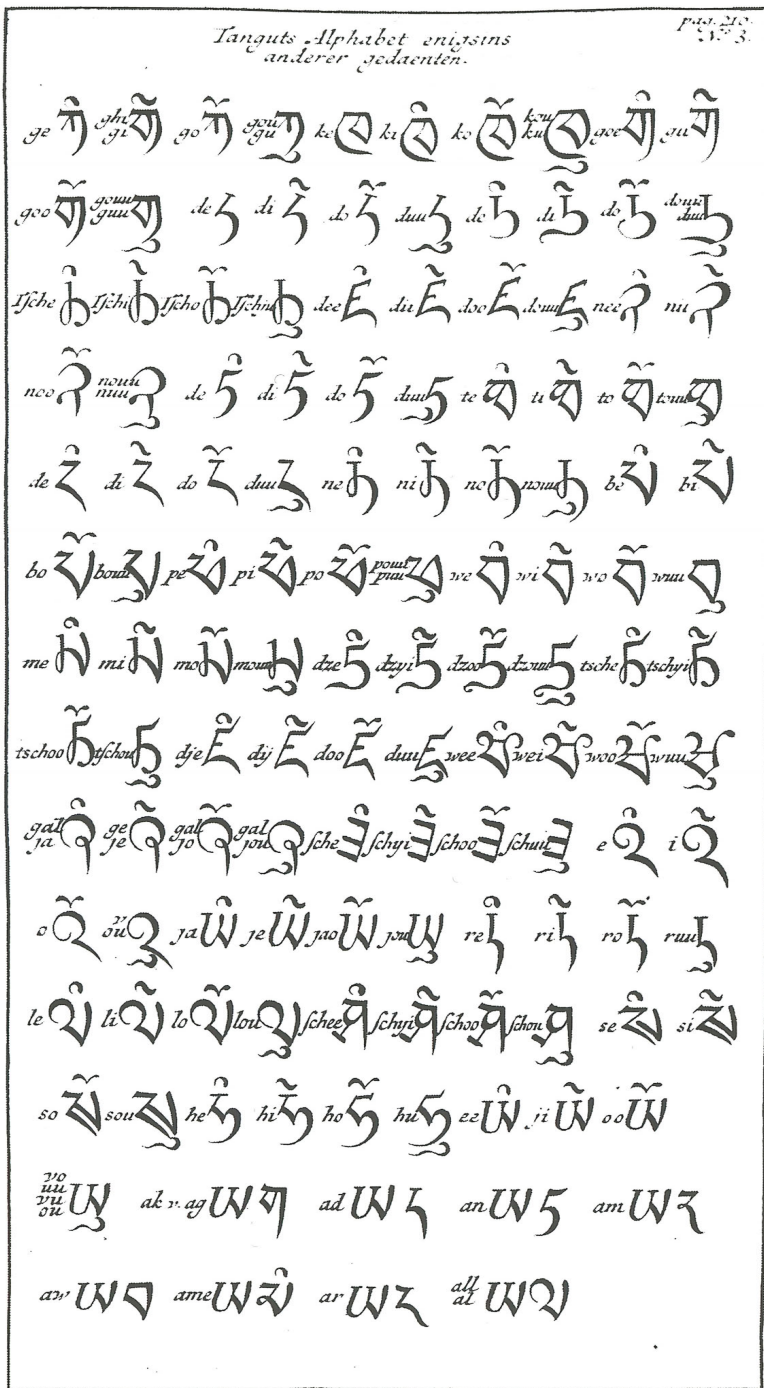


Fig. 3: Tanguts ABC page 3. North and East Tartary I (1705) pp. 210-211.

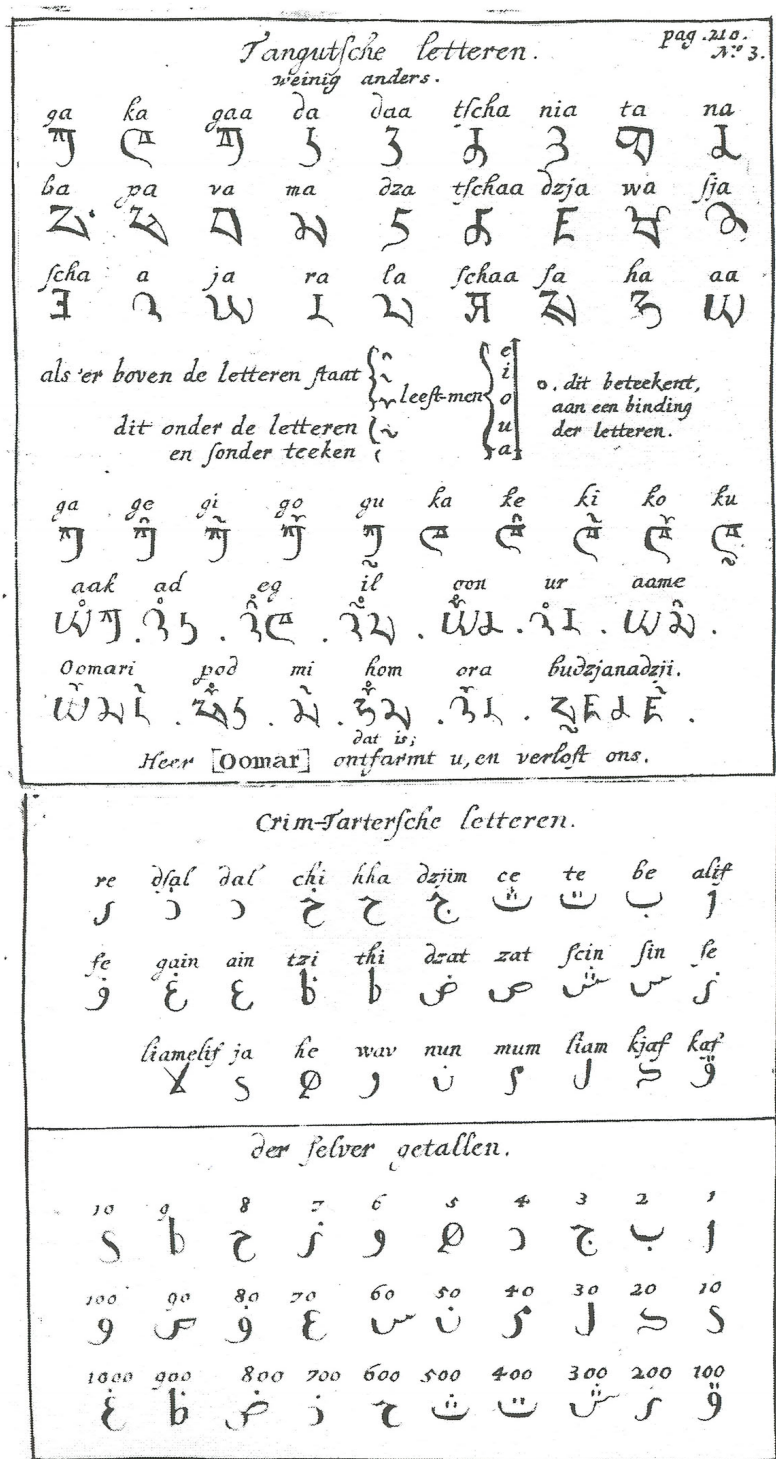


Fig. 4: Tanguts ABC page 4. North and East Tartary I (1705) pp. 210-211.



*Oost Tartarye*, Witsen differentiated between Tangut and Tibet, e.g. ‘In ’t Landfchap *Tebet*, niet wyt van *Tangut...*’ [“in the country of Tibet, not far from Tangut”], whereas in some other contexts Tangut and Tibet appear to be used almost interchangeably, as when Witsen mentioned, for example, ‘den *Dalailama* in *Tangut*’ or stated that ‘den Konink van Tangut’ [“the king of Tangut”] held his court in the city of *Láfa* (1705, I: 335, 225, 503).

Witsen’s knowledge of the Tangut and of Tibet was based not just on his own travels to Moscow and on what he was able to glean in Russia. He drew heavily and collated from earlier sources which he mentioned by name. Witsen’s sporadic mention of Nieuhof is a reference to *Het Gezantschap der Neêrlandtſche Oost-Indiſche Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartariſchen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China* by Johan Nieuhof, published in Amsterdam in 1665. Another major source for Witsen were the reports of the Jesuit Johannes Grueber, contained in Athanasius Kircher’s 1667 compilational work *China Monumentis, qua Sacris quâ Profanis, nec non variis Naturæ & Artis Spectaculis, Aliarumque Rerum Memorabilium Argumentis Illustrata, auspiciis Leopoldi Primi*, a work known more commonly by its frontispiece title *China Illuſtrata*.

Witsen’s repeated mention of the Jesuit ‘Martyn’ as a source is an obvious reference to Martino Martini of Trento, whose Chinese atlas was published in Amsterdam by Joan Blaeu in 1655 under the title *Novus Atlas Sinensis a Martino Martinio S.I. descriptus* in the sixth part of Blaeu’s *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum five Novus Atlas*. Witsen also reproduced two letters on ‘de Niuchische en andere Tartaren’, i.e. the Jürchen and other Tartars, one sent from Tonkin in 1663 by a certain H.K.B., a Dutch member of a mission returning from China, and the other written from Batavia in December 1692 by Johannes Melman (1705, II: 15-25). Witsen was so thorough in citing his sources that he even mentioned the famous Portuguese Jesuit Luís Fróis (1532-1597) under the Teutonic guise of Lodewyk Frojus. Yet the story about the Tangut language and people that Witsen was never able to tell can be told as follows.

The term Tangut is originally a Mongolian form *Tangyut*, bearing the collective plural suffix <-yut> or <-yud> and denoting the southwestern neighbours of the Mongols who were the people of the Tangut empire (Mandarin: 西夏 *Xīxià* 1038-1227). In the West, the Mongolian term ‘Tanggud’ is first used correctly in reference to the lost *Xīxià* empire by Isaac Jacob Schmidt (1829: 101). The ethnonym *Tang* is evidently cognate with the first morpheme in 黨項 *Dǎngxiàng*, the Mandarin name for the ethnic group. In the same year, the term ‘Tangut’ for the Tangut state and its inhabitants was also introduced into Russian by Father Hyacinth, alias Nikita Jakovlevič Bičurin, in his translation of a Chinese history of the reigns of the first four khans of the House of Genghis Khan (ИакиннѠ 1829: xi-xiii).

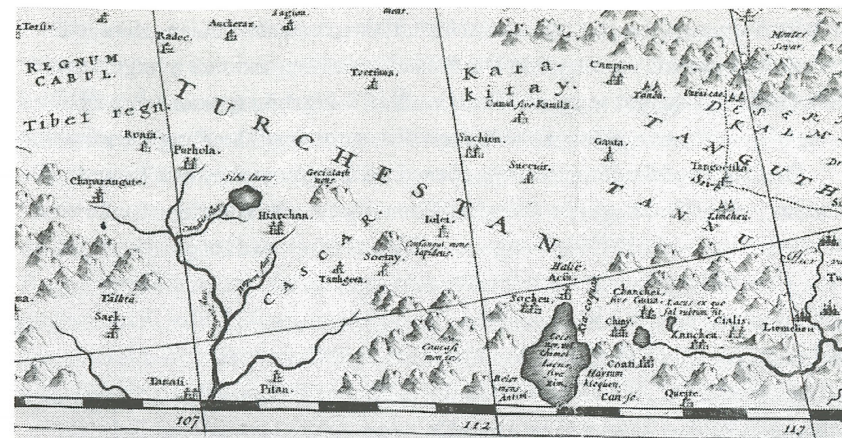


Fig. 5: ‘Tibet’ and ‘Tanguth’ on Witsen’s map of 1687.

The language of the Tangut is an extinct Tibeto-Burman tongue, a member of the Trans-Himalayan language family. The closest living linguistic relative is believed to be the མི་ལྷག་ *Mi-ñag* language (Mandarin: 木雅 *Mùyǎ*) of Sichuān. In the current version of the Fallen Leaves model, which represents an informed yet agnostic phylogenetic picture of the world’s second most populous language family, Tangut is grouped tentatively within Qiāngic (van Driem 2014).

The Tangut empire enjoyed relative peace until the Mongol incursions into Tangut territory around the Edzin Gol in 1205 and into the Ordos in 1207, and in August 1209 an attack was undertaken by the Mongol warlord Temüjin, who in 1206 had consolidated the Mongol and Turkic tribes and assumed the name of Genghis Khan (Class. Mong. *Činggis Qayan*). The Mongols laid siege to the Tangut capital, but their attempts to storm the city walls remained unsuccessful. They built a dam in the Yellow River after it had swollen with autumn rains in an attempt to flood the city, but instead the rising waters caused the Mongols to abandon the siege. The battle ended with no clear victor. The Tangut emperor appeased Genghis Khan with the gift of one of his daughters in matrimony. Afterwards Genghis Khan left to undertake his famous campaigns in Transoxiana, Persia and Russia, leaving his Tangut neighbours in peace for over a decade.

The Tangut emperor refused to comply with Genghis Khan’s requests for troops and hostages, and in preparation for Genghis Khan’s return, the Tangut formed an alliance with the tottering Jürchen or 金 *Jīn* dynasty and undertook to incite rebellion amongst Genghis Khan’s dominions in neighbouring portions of the Mongolian steppe. In 1225, Genghis Khan returned to Mongolia in order to subdue the Tangut in what was to become his last campaign. In 1226, the Mongol army marched into the Tangut empire, laying waste to the large Tangut cities at Khara Khoto (Mong. *Qara Qota* ‘black city’), 肅州 *Sùzhōu* and 甘州 *Gānzhōu*. Genghis Khan subsequently marched along the



northern spurs of the 南山 Nánshān Mountains, took 涼州 Liángzhōu, then crossed the deserts surrounding the Alaša Mountains and met a huge Tangut force near the Tangut royal residence at 靈州 Língzhōu (present-day 靈武 Língwǔ) on the east bank of the Yellow River south of the Tangut capital.

The defeat of the Tangut army opened up an approach to the Tangut capital, and after the winter, Genghis Khan once again laid siege to the city. In the summer of 1227, the Tangut capital was taken and its citizens slain. The surrounding Tangut territories were destroyed and the inhabitants exterminated. Genghis Khan had the Tangut king executed after first changing the name by which the latter was known to the Mongols from *Iluqu Burqan* ‘Exalted Buddha’, which contained the epithet of Mount *Burqan Qaldun*, a mountain held to be sacred by Genghis Khan, to the less exalted *Siduryu* ‘Loyal One’.

Mongol chroniclers remain curiously taciturn about Genghis Khan’s death and the cause of death (cf. Ratchnevsky 1983: 126-129). The reason for this, however, may be that in the eyes of the Mongols, the great khan died an ignoble death not befitting a conqueror of nations. According to the *Secret History of the Mongols* (Haenisch 1948: 135-6), Genghis Khan died after he had had the Tangut emperor executed. Isaac Jacob Schmidt records the legend preserved in an Eastern Mongol chronicle in cloaked terms.

In der folgenden Nacht, da der Herrscher im Schlafe lag, that Kürbeldschin Goa seinem Körper ein Uebel an, wovon er schwach und ohnmächtig wurde, stand sodann auf, ging hinaus und warf sich in den Schara Müren, in welchem sie ertrank (1829: 102-103)

The following night, as the sovereign lay sleeping, Kürbeldschin Goa perpetrated an evil upon his body, from which he became weak and faint, then she stood up forthwith, went outside and threw herself in the Schara Müren, in which she drowned.

This same legend is told in more explicit terms by the Russian explorer Grigorij Nikolaevič Potanin (1893, II: 270), who recorded a local legend of the Ordos Mongols concerning the death of Genghis Khan as recounted by Santan Džimba, a Mongol of the Ordos. According to this Ordos oral tradition, after Genghis Khan had killed the Tangut emperor, which, Potanin recorded, was known to the Ordos Mongols as *Šidurgu-xan*, he abducted the Tangut empress, whom the Mongols remember as *Gurbel’džin’-goa*. The Mongol name of the Tangut empress recorded by Potanin as Гурбельджинь-гоа ‘Gurbel’džin’-goa’ is recorded as *Kürbeljin youa* in the Eastern Mongol chronicle from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which was studied and translated by Schmidt (1829), and as *Körbeljin youa* or *Körbelčün youa* in the Mongol Chronicle of Altan Tobči, composed during the reign of Lindan Qayan between 1604 and 1634 and studied by Bawden (1955).

The epithet *youa* means ‘beautiful’, whereas the proper name *yurbaljin* ‘triangle’, from the root *yurban* ‘three’, is the Mongolian equivalent of Sanskrit *trikona* ‘triangle’, the Tantric term for ‘vagina’. Kepping (1994) pointed out that the Tangut empress bore the Tantric title *phôn* ‘white’, which was a homophone of the Tangut ritual word for the female pudenda.<sup>2</sup> She also contended that the emperor and empress engaged in Tantric rituals which played a pivotal role in Tangut statecraft. The Tantric title of the Tangut emperor *mbin*<sup>2</sup> ‘lofty’ represented the Tangut homophone for *liṅgam* or phallus or, as Kepping used to write, *membrum virile*. Therefore, even the ceremonial term ‘white and lofty’ for the Tangut kingdom itself was pregnant with Tantric significance.

The empress emasculated Genghis Khan as he lay in his yurt, thus avenging the destruction of her kingdom and people. Potanin recorded that the implement used was a 托那古ра *tongura*, evidently Mongolian *tongyuruy* ‘razor’. After avenging her people, the Tangut empress left the yurt of the great khan, went down to the Yellow River under the pretext of going to bathe in order to spruce herself up for the benefit of the great khan and there drowned herself. In this way she escaped death by torture. Genghis Khan died in agony the following day. This undignified demise would explain the conspicuous silence maintained by Mongol historians, who are wont to portray Genghis Khan, the destroyer of many civilisations, in a gloriously virile light.

In Mongolian, the Yellow River was renamed after this incident and became known as *Qatun youl* ‘Queen River’. The Ordos oral tradition recorded by Potanin is corroborated in the geographical treatise འཛམ་གླིང་རྒྱལ་འགྲུབ་ *hDzam-gliñ rGyas-bśad* ‘Broad Description of the World’ written in 1830 by the fourth bTsan-po No-mon-han sPrul-sku, འཛམ་དབུ་ཚལ་གྱི་བསྐྱེད་འཛིན་འཕྲིན་ལས་ *hJam-dpal-chos-kyi bsTan-ḥdzin ḥPhrin-las*, in which the Tibetan equivalent བུའྲན་མོ་ལྷུང་ *bTsun-mo kluñ* ‘Queen River’ is given as a rendering of Mongolian *Qatun youl*, which is described as ‘the river in which a certain queen drowned herself’, the usual Tibetan name for the Yellow River being མོ་ལོ་ལ་ *rMa Chu*. With the Mongol destruction of the Tangut kingdom, both the language and the culture of the Tangut would pass into oblivion.

Alexander Wylie (1871) discovered Tangut writing in the hexaglotal inscription inside the arch of the city gates of 居庸關 Jūyōngguān, about 45 km northwest of Peking, which he erroneously identified as Jürchen miniscule or ‘Neuchih’ (i.e. 女質 Mandarin *Nǚzhí*, *Rǔzhí*, more commonly 女真 *Nǚzhēn*, *Rǔzhēn*), a mistake which the French diplomat Devéria (1882: 184-185) was subsequently able to rectify. Devéria (1898) also discovered Tangut coins, which he traced to 涼州 Liángzhōu, where, in the 大雲 Dàyún

<sup>2</sup> Superscript numbers indicate the two Tangut phonological tones.



or 'Great Cloud' Temple, he discovered a stela engraved in Tangut on the south face and in Chinese on the somewhat exfoliated north face. The stela had been erected by the Tangut emperor in 1094. Bushell provided an excellent synopsis of Tangut dynastic history, whereby he relied on Chinese sources 'for authentic information about the Tangut rulers, as no books in their own script have survived' (Bushell 1899: 144).

Yet this would soon change. First, in 1892 in St. Petersburg, Potanin reported the existence of the ruins of a Tangut city at a site named Khara Khoto, although Potanin had never set eyes on the ruins himself. Attempts to locate the site in the 1890s by Vladimir Afanas'evič Obručev and again in 1899 and 1900 by Aleksandr Nikolaevič Kaznakov proved unsuccessful, reportedly because they were misled by the Torghut, an Oirat Mongolian tribe inhabiting the region who were anxious to guard the secrecy of the ruins.

Yet most of the Tangut manuscripts, xylographs and cultural artefacts known today would soon be discovered by Pětr Kuz'mič Kozlov. As a schoolboy in the village of Duxovščina, some 50 km to the north-northeast of Smolensk, Kozlov had read the two newly published volumes of *Монголия и страна Тангутовъ* 'Mongolia and the Land of the Tanguts' by the famous explorer Nikolaj Mixajlovič Prževal'skij. These books were lent to him by his favourite teacher Vasilij Porfir'evič Vaxterov. Kozlov began then to dream of travels in Asia. After his schooling, however, in 1878, his father Kuz'ma Egorovič, who worked as a *batrak* or hired hand for a cattle farmer, sent his 14-year-old son to the distant town of Sloboda, some 70 km west of Smolensk, to earn a living working in a distillery. Kozlov later recalled that at the age of 16, reading a newspaper by the light of a kerosene lamp, he learnt that the famous traveller Prževal'skij, whom he had come to idolise, had returned to St. Petersburg.

Sheer coincidence would have it that in 1881 Prževal'skij, who was himself a native of the tiny village of Kimborovo, 35 km southeast of Smolensk, had acquired a property for hunting at Sloboda, where there were few inhabitants but was much forest replete with game. That year one summer evening, Prževal'skij espied the 17-year-old Kozlov, struck up a conversation with him and invited the lad to his place. In memoirs kept in the archive of the Russian Geographical Society, Kozlov would recall: 'The star of happiness rose above me. The enchantment which Prževal'skij exerted upon me was so great that I answered him with my soul and my body. For me he was – EVERYTHING'.<sup>3</sup> By the autumn of the following year, Kozlov

3 «Надо мной взорлась звезда счастья. Обаяние Пржевалского было так сильно на меня: я отвечал ему душой и телом. Для меня он был – ВСЁ», in Kozlov's own words as quoted from the archives of the Russian Geographical Society by Kravklis (2006: 24).

had begun to live together with Prževal'skij as his protégé.<sup>4</sup> After the man, whom Kozlov endearingly called 'Pševa' or 'Pševik' died in 1888, Kozlov continued to conduct expeditions to Asia for the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (Kozlov 1923, Kravklis 2006, Kyčanov 1965, Rayfield 1976, Karlinskij 1991).



Fig. 6: P.K. Kozlov during the excavations at Khara Khoto. Engraving by V.K. Fediaevsky.

In 1908, Kozlov led an expedition to Inner Mongolia, and at Khara Khoto he discovered the ruins of a great Tangut city. Hidden inside a stūpa Kozlov discovered an entire library of Tangut books and much Tangut art, which he took back to St. Petersburg. The Tangut manuscripts and wood block prints are kept in the Manuscript Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, and the various objects of Tangut art are kept in the Hermitage Museum in the former Winter Palace of the Russian czars. Sir Aurel Stein led a British expedition to the Khara Khoto ruins in 1914 and salvaged a smaller collection of Tangut manuscripts, now kept at the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library in London.

### Two more Tangut languages

Nothing remained of the Tangut capital to which the Mongols had laid waste, and many of the Tangut people were exterminated. A Chinese chronicler (quoted by Bushell 1899: 147) recounts that the remaining Tangut 'dug holes in the ground and hid in caves to escape the edge of the sword, but only one or two in the hundred saved their lives, and the land became a wilderness strewn with whitening bones'. For those who underwent the wholesale

4 In Kozlov's words: «Осенью 1882 года я уже перешел под кров Николая Михайловича и стал жить одной жизнью с ним», as quoted by Kravklis (2006: 25).



slaughter in and around the Tangut capital, the end was no doubt horrific and absolute, but the genocide reported in the chronicle may not have covered the entire territory of the Tangut state, which was vast. The name Tangut survived, but ultimately the language of the Tangut did not. The people to whom the Mongolian term *Tangyud* would continue to be applied assimilated linguistically to the Oirat Mongols, who had overwhelmed their country, or to the Tibetans, with whom the Tangut shared great cultural affinity.

Yet the Tangut language did not die all at once. Although Tangut civilisation had been annihilated, the fact that Tangut speakers may have lingered on, or at least their memory, is suggested by the fact that Chinese printers sporadically made use of the Tangut script in the centuries following the disappearance of the Tangut kingdom. The latest known such Chinese printing in Tangut script dates from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. During the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, the Frenchmen Morisse and Berteaux discovered six discarded Tangut books at 蘭州 Lánzhōu lying in a heap next to the 白塔 Bái Tǎ pagoda, including a Tangut translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* or Lotus Sūtra, to which Morisse (1904) devoted a study.

Linguistically, the assorted specimens of collected vocabulary from the Tanguts whom Prževal'skij encountered represent lexical material from northeastern Tibetan speech communities (1875: 258-260). The 'Tangut' language recorded by Prževal'skij was, in fact, Amdo Tibetan. The Tibetan dialects, or Tibetic languages as they are more often called today, constitute the Bodish subgroup of the Trans-Himalayan language family. Although the Bodish languages belong to the same language family as the Qiāngic languages, such as Tangut, Bodish and Qiāngic represent two quite distinct and different subgroups within Trans-Himalayan.

The Tibetans living around and to the east of the Blue Lake who were denominated Tangut, and who may very well have been descendants of the erstwhile speakers of Tangut, spoke Amdo Tibetan. In his account of Tibet, Augustinus Antonius Georgius stated that 'Alterum Tibeti nomen Tangut' and 'Tibetanae literæ eadem sunt quæ & Tangutanæ appellantur' (1762: 9), and later Cassiano Beligatti's minor work on the Tibetan script also referred to the script as the 'alphabetum tangutanum sive tibetanum' (1773). In his comparative word list of all known languages, Peter Simon Pallas included forms from the 'Tangut dialects' (Тангутскія нарѣчія), by which he meant Tibetan (1786, 1789).

In addition to those Tangut from whom Prževal'skij had recorded Tibetan vocabulary, he described the 'Black Tangut' (хара-тангуты), who had dark complexions and lived in the Tsaidam basin or མྲི་འདམ་ *Tshwahi ḥdam* 'salt

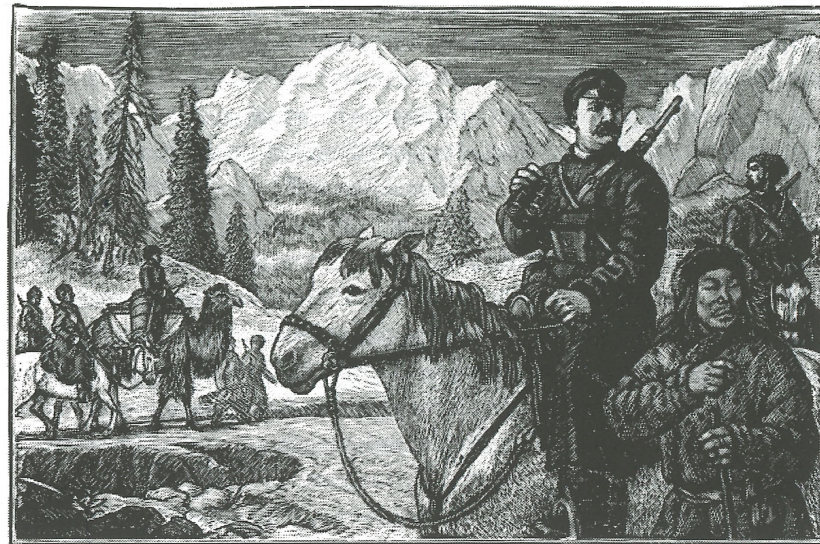


Fig. 7: Prževal'skij on expedition. Engraving by E.O. Burgunker.

marsh' (Цайдамъ) and around the Blue Lake or མཚོ་སྤོང་པོ་ *mTsho sÑon-po*. The Oirat Mongol name *Köke Nur* 'blue lake' (Куку-Норь) and the Chinese name 青海 *Qīnghǎi* 'blue sea' both derive from Tibetan. This inland sea generally used to appear in older Occidental atlases under its Oirat name 'Koko Nor'. These Black Tangut were Oirat (Олюты, Олёты), who practised Mohammedanism but recognised the suzerainty of the Dalai Lama. The local Mongols were Torghut, another subdivision of the Oirat, i.e. Potanin's *Köke Nur* Oirats (кукунорские олёты). Some of the Black Tangut, who Prževal'skij reported were of mixed Oirat and Uighur ancestry, earned their living as highwaymen by robbing pilgrims. Linguistically, however, both the Black Tangut and the local Torghut Mongols were Oirat.

The Oirat are a subgroup of the Mongolic languages. Mongolic together with Turkic, Tungusic, Koreanic and Japonic constitute what has traditionally been called the Altaic language family (Miller 1971). Robbeets (2014) has recently renamed this language family 'Trans-Eurasian', whereby she reserves the traditional name 'Altaic' for the sub-family comprising just Mongolic, Turkic and Tungusic. As a language family, Altaic is entirely separate and distinct from Trans-Himalayan. There are a variety of Oirat dialects. Ironically the best documented Oirat form of speech appears to be Kalmuck (Калмык *Kalmyk*) in Russia, which distinguishes a Torghut dialect in the east and a Dörbet dialect in the west. The ancestors of today's Kalmucks migrated to Russia *en masse* in 1630 and ultimately settled in Kalmykia. During the Soviet period, the Kalmucks suffered famine and the brutality of Stalin's economic experiments, and then from December 1943 many Kalmucks were killed when the entire population was forcibly deported to Siberia, only to return in



1957. Although the Kalmuck language has an official status in the area where it is spoken, today the use of Russian as the official standard language is threatening Kalmuck with extinction.

The other Oirat languages are spoken in the original regions in Mongolia and northern China, whence the Kalmucks first undertook their intrepid migration westward to beyond the Caspian Sea in the first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In Mongolia, the spread of Khalkha Mongolian threatens all other Mongolian languages, including the Oirat dialects, none of which have an official status. In Inner Mongolia in the People's Republic of China, the propagation of Southern Mongolian as a standard is having the same effect on the Oirat languages as is the propagation of Khalkha in Mongolia. Yet over half a dozen Oirat dialects are or were spoken across a vast region in Mongolia and northern China, and all of the Oirat languages are threatened with imminent extinction.

From 1648 the Oirat language was written in the so-called Clear Script (*tod bigg*), developed by the Buddhist monk རྣམ་མཁའི་རྒྱ་མཚོ་ *Nam-khañi rGya-mtsho* of Dzungaria, who is remembered as *Zaja Pandit* (Зая-Пандит 1599-1662), on the basis of an enhancement of the Mongol script, which had previously been sporadically in use amongst the Oirats since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In Russia, an orthography was introduced for Kalmuck in Cyrillic script in 1918, and by 1924 the Clear Script had fallen into disuse. Latin script was used from 1930 until 1938, after which a newly revamped Cyrillic orthography was introduced. In China, Oirat is still written in the Clear Script in some Chinese publications brought out in Ürümçï. Witsen's compendium contains a specimen of this Kalmuck Clear Script, labelled *Calmucks a.b.c. fchryven met de felve van boven neder-waerts*, loosely 'the Kalmuck ABC, which is written vertically from top to bottom' (1692, II: opp. 121, 1705: I, opp. 297). This specimen is clearly distinct from his sample of Manchu script (1692, II: opp. 3, 1705, I: opp. 7) and his specimen of Mongolian script, labelled *Mungaelsch ABC en Lettergrepen* 'Mongol ABC and syllables' (1705, I: opp. 257).

Witsen reported that the Kalmucks have writings, but no printed books ('By hen vind men gefchreven, doch geen gedrukte Boeken'). A possible source of his specimen of Clear Script may have been either of the two Kalmuck emissaries whom Witsen knew. Witsen (1705, I: 277, 286-293) based his report on Kalmykia largely on the oral testimony of one of the two Kalmuck envoys to Moscow, a native Kalmuck, with whom he spoke on several occasions ('...heb ik verfcheide mael gefproken'). Witsen also gained much information from the second Kalmuck envoy, who was not ethnically a Kalmuck, but originally hailed from Bukhara, and once provided Witsen with

an informative letter.<sup>5</sup>

Witsen reported that the Black Kalmucks in the northeast would often wage war against the White Kalmucks, who lived in the southwest around Astrakhan, even though they shared the same religion and language ('of zy fchoon een geloove en een fprake hebben'). In his account he mentioned the Kalmuck words for sun (*Naran*), moon (*Sara*) and stars (*Solbon*), whereby the first two forms correspond to Kalmuck *narn* and *sar* respectively, but the form *Solbon* actually represents the word for Venus. The correct Kalmuck word for stars, which is *odun*, is provided elsewhere, in the Kalmuck word list (1705, I: 297-304), in which Witsen provides translations for over eight hundred Kalmuck words, expressions and utterances, which is much more copious than his original Kalmuck word list, as it appeared in the first edition (1692, II: 118-121). The Kalmucks of Russia to the west of the Caspian Sea are Oirat. Yet they live far removed from their close linguistic brethren, the Oirat of the Blue Lake area, who have sometimes been called Tangut.

The existence of these two additional 'Tangut' languages serves to underscore the fact that references to Tangut in the literature of the past cannot be properly understood unless we keep in mind that the term 'Tangut' could mean one of several things, viz. (1) the Tangut language and Tangut people of the 西夏 *Xīxià* kingdom, (2) the Tibetans and, more particularly, the Tibetans of the Blue Lake area and Amdo region, and (3) some of the Oirat peoples in the same area. The identity of a people, nation or ethnic group is essentially lost once the group loses its own native language, for language is for most peoples and ethnic groups the single overwhelmingly most important component of their identity. The Tangut language was lost, not just because of the genocide perpetrated by the Mongol horde of Genghis Khan, but also through a long process of linguistic assimilation affecting the surviving communities of Tangut speakers. Therefore, it may very well be that the three linguistically disparate groups of people who happen to be denominated as 'Tangut' may to some extent represent the same Tangut community at various slices of time under different and ever changing circumstances.

### Witsen's Tangut

Witsen was in no doubt about the Oirat Mongol identity of the language which he recorded in the Tibetan script, for his diagram points out the similarity between the *Tangutfche Getallen* 'Tangut numerals', *welcke met die der Calmucken en Mugalen genoegsaem van een klank syn*, i.e. which nearly sound the same as the corresponding forms in Kalmuck and

5 'Uit de mond van zeker Kalmaks gezant, afgezonden door Vorft *Contaila*, op 't Jaer 1697 in Moskou, werd my dit bericht toegezonden, in een Brief. ...Deze Gezant is een *Buchaer* van afkomst, zeer beleeft...' (1705, I: 277)



Mongolian. In the first edition of *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, Witsen presented one plate illustrating the *Tangutfche letteren* (1692, II: opp. 144), whilst in the second edition of *Noord en Oost Tartarye* there are four such plates (1705, I: opp. 210). Let us scrutinise the lexical material presented in these four specimens of *Tangutfche letteren*, beginning with the Tangut numerals.

As stated explicitly in the plates themselves, the Tangut language resembles Kalmuck, and for comparison the modern Kalmuck forms of the numerals are juxtaposed to the Tangut forms recorded by Witsen. It is quite clear that Witsen's Tangut is a form of Oirat. In Table 1, the first five columns list: (1) the Dutch forms as given by Witsen, (2) English translations, (3) the phonetic transcription of the Oirat or 'Tangut' forms in Roman script, (4) the rendering of the Tangut forms in Tibetan script and (5) the Tibetological transliteration of what appears to be written in Tibetan script. The next two columns list (6) the corresponding Kalmuck forms in the official Roman orthography in effect from 1930 to 1938 and (7) the same forms in the current Kalmuck orthography in modified Cyrillic script. Unless indicated otherwise, the Kalmuck forms listed in Tables 1 and 3 are all taken from Майоров (1931), Бардаев и Кирюхаев (1993) and two online Kalmuck dictionaries, i.e. Русско-калмыцкий словарь and Мультитран Калмыцко-русский и русско-калмыцкий словарь.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1. Witsen's Tangut numerals

Een	one	<i>niegen</i>	ནི་གེན་	ni-gen	Negn	негн
Twe	two	<i>kojer</i>	ཁ་ཨར་	kha-ar	Xojr	хойр
Drie	three	<i>gurban</i>	ཁར་པན་	khar-pan	Hurvn	хурвн
Vier	four	<i>Diurben</i>	དོར་པེན་	dor-pen	Dœrvn	дөрвн
Vyff	five	<i>Taban</i>	ཐཱ་བུན་	th̥a-pun	Tavn	тавн
Ses	six	<i>dziurgan</i>	ཅུར་གྲན་	cur-ghan	Zurhan	зурхан
Seven	seven	<i>Dolon</i>	དོ་ལོན་	do-lön	Dolan	долан
Acht	eight	<i>naiman</i>	ནཱ་མཱན་	naḥ-m̥han	Nœm̥n	нөөмн
Negen	nine	<i>jesun</i>	ཡེ་སན་	ye-san	Jisn	йисн
Tien	ten	<i>Arban</i>	ཨར་བུན་	ar-p̥han	Arvn	арвн
Twintig	twenty	<i>korin</i>	ཁོ་རིན་	kho-rin	Xœrn	хөрн
Dartich	thirty	<i>gutschin</i>	གུ་ཅོན་	gu-tsan	Hucn	хучн
Veertigh	forty	<i>Dutfchin</i>	དུ་ཅོན་	du-tsan	Dœcn	дөчн
Vyffthigh	fifty	<i>tabun</i>	ཐཱ་བེན་	tha-ben	Tœvn	төвн
Sestich	sixty	<i>dzyran</i>	ཅོར་ན་	tsarn	Zirn	жирн
Seventigh	seventy	<i>dalan</i>	དཱ་ལན་	da-l̥han	Daln	далн

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://dic.kalmyk.info/Russians/> and <https://www.multitrans.ru/c/m.exe?l1=35&l2=2&CL=1&a=0>

Tachtich	eighty	<i>najan</i>	ན་ཡན་	na-yan	Najn	найн
Negentich	ninety	<i>jerem</i>	ཡེ་རེན་	yi-rin	Jirn	йирн
Hondert	hundred	<i>dziun</i>	ཅུན་	çun	Zun	зун
Duyfent	thousand	<i>myngan</i>	མིང་གྲན་	miñ-h̥han	Miñhn	миңһн
Tienduyfent	ten thousand	<i>tumen</i>	ཐུ་མེན་	thu-men	Tymn	түмн
Hondertduyfent	hundred thousand	<i>Bum</i>	བུམ་	bum	Bum	бум
Duyfent	million	<i>Siaja</i>	སཱ་ཇཱ་	say	Saj	сай
Duyfenden						

In compiling Tables 1 and 3, a number of intuitive decisions had to be made. The small triangular dot which separates syllables in Tibetan script, known as a ཚྭ་གྲག་ *tshag*, is used in Witsen's script specimen in an erratic fashion. Sometimes only the phonetic transcription in Latin script enables us to make a tentative conjecture about whether or not to write a *tshag* in the table.

More generally, the Tibetan script itself was poorly reproduced and poorly understood. Table 2 reproduces Witsen's representation of the phonetic values of the Tibetan script, with (1) the Tibetan initials letters in modern typeface, below which (2) Witsen's phonetic values are given, below which (3) the Tibetological transliteration of the initials with the inherent vowel /a/ is provided. Witsen failed to distinguish between the letters འ་ *na* and ཏ་ *da* altogether so that the phonetic value for both is given as *da*. The last letter of the Tibetan alphabet should be ཨ་ *a*, but he provides this letter with a subscripted ཨ་ *h* and so writes ཨ་ཨ་ *ah* instead. The letters ཡ་ *ya* and ཨ་ *a* are drawn in such a way as to be indistinguishable, so that only the phonetic transcription in Roman script allows us to infer which letter was probably intended in any given case. The same applies for the letters ར་ *ra* and འ་ *na*.

Table 2. Witsen's Tibetan initial letters

ག	ཁ	ག	ང	ཅ	ཆ	ཇ	ཉ	ཏ	ཐ	ད	ན	ལ	མ	ཤ	ཧ	མ
ga	ka	gá	da	sa	za	sa	na	da	ta	da	na	ba	pa	ba	ma	
ka	kha	ga	ña	ca	cha	ja	ña	ta	tha	da	na	pa	pha	ba	ma	

འ	ཚ	ལ	མ	ཤ	ཧ	མ	ཡ	ར	ལ	ཤ	ས	ཏ	ཨ
sa	za	sa	oea	cha	ca	a	ja	ra	la	cha	ca	gha	a
tsha	tsha	dza	wa	za	za	ha	ya	ra	la	sa	sa	ha	a

The plates illustrate the combinations of the initials with the four vowel signs. In so doing, the person who drew the plates was evidently quite aware of a distinction between the vowel sign [ འ་ ], which is called འགྲེང་པོ་ *hgreñ-po* denoting the vowel *e*, and the vowel sign [ འི་ ], which is called འི་གྲུ་ *gi-gu* denoting the vowel *i*. Yet the person who prepared the diagrams failed to distinguish graphically between the two, and in the portion of the original







Man	man	ere	ཨ་རེ	a-re	Er	эр
Vrouw	woman	taichu	ཐཱི་ཁུ	thaḥi-hu		
Vader	father	Ada	ཨ་ག	a-ga	Aav	аав
Moeder	mother	byedzy	པི་ཧེ་ཅི	pi-he-ci		
Broeder	brother	Achajj ofte Akadey	ཨ་ཉ་ཏུ	a-ha-dḥu	Ax [elder], Dy [younger]	ax, дy
Wyff	wife, woman	emie	ཡ་མ	ya-ma	Em [vulgar]	эм
Maecht	virgin	okin	ཨོ་ཁིན	o-khin	Okn 'miss, maiden'	окн
Oogen	eyes	nudun	ལུ་དུན	nu-dun	Nydn	нyдн
Ooren	ears	tŋchiken	ཅི་ཁིན	tsi-khen	Cikn	чикн
Neus	nose	chabar	ཧ་པར	ha-par	Xamr	хамр
Tong	tongue	kelien	ཁེ་ལན	khe-lan	Keln	келн
Mondt	mouth	Aman	ཨ་ཤན	a-pḥan	Amn	амн
Tanden	teeth	Schiudun	ཤུ་དུན	śu-dun	Şydn	шyдн
Baert	beard	sagal	ས་ཧྲཱལ	sa-hḥal	Sahl	сахл
Paep	priest	lama	ལཱ་མ	lḥa-ma	Lam	лам
Schryver	writer	bachfchi	པཱ་ཅི	pḥah-si	Bicəc	бичəч
jongh	youth, lad	Kobaun	ཁོ་པུན	kho-phun	Kəvyn	кəвyn
een Kok	cook	keretschi	ཁེ་ཧེ་ཅི	khe-the-tsi	kegəc	кeḥəч
Hout	wood	modum	མོ་དུན	mo-dun	Modn	модн
Eyfer	iron	temur	ཐེ་མར	the-mar	Təmr	тəмп
Inkt	ink	bekie	བི་ཁི	bi-khi	Bek	бек
Pen	pen	udziug	ལུ་ཅུག	u-tsug	Yzg	yзгин
Schryff	writ, write	biŋfchi	བི་ཅོ	pits	Bicx	бичx
Lees	read	unfchy	ལུ་ཤི	uñ-si	Umşx	умшx
Pels	fur	debel	དེ་པེལ	de-pel	Devl 'fur coat'	дeвл
Gordel	belt	bufie	བུ་སི	bu-si	Bys	бyс
Stewels	boots	godufun	ག་དོ་སུན	ga-do-sun	Hosn	һосн
een Mutz	cap	Malachay	མ་ལ་ཁཱི	ma-la-haḥi		
Broeken Hoofen	trousers	umudun	ལུ་མུ་དུན	u-mu-dun		
Koufen	socks	oimufun	ཨོ་པི་པོ་སུན	oḥi-po-sun	Өəmsn	өəмсн
Sandt	sand	Schgiroy	ཤོ་རོ་ཁི	śo-roḥi	Şora 'soil'	шора
Talchjen	bag	utaga	ལུ་ཐ་ག	u-tha-ga	Uut 'leather bag'	yут
Vuerflag	fire striker	kefe	ཁ་ཐ	kha-tha	Ket	кeт
Eeten	eat	beje	པེ་ཡེ	pe-ye	Bij	бий
Meft	manure	kutuga	ལུ་ཐུ་ག	khu-thḥu- ga	Xutxa 'mixture'	xутxa

This brings us to the final question as to the provenance as well as the precise nature of Witsen's specimen of the Tangut language in Tibetan script. As we already observed in connection with the *mantra* to protect the health and longevity of the burgomaster of Amsterdam, the specimen must have been prepared at Witsen's behest after the first edition of 1692 and before the 1705 edition, which includes the three additional plates of diagrams, including the *mantra*. The four plates of 'Tangut letters' therefore clearly comprise two sets, the one plate included in the 1692 edition and the three post-1692 plates contained in the 1705 edition. The hand which drew the Tibetan script does not appear to be the same for all of the specimens. The fact that the Tibetan script was actually drawn and manifestly not written by someone who mastered the script also raises the matter of the authenticity of the specimens as a whole.

To address all of these questions, let us first turn to the lexical items listed in Table 3 for which no modern Kalmuck forms are found in any of the cited lexicographical resources. As already mentioned, the Tangut words for *mother* and *woman* recorded by Witsen do not appear to correspond to modern Kalmuck counterparts. However, the word *taifchy* ཐཱི་ཁུ *thaḥi-si* is quite obviously a Kalmuck word of the period and, for that matter, also happens to be a word that occurred more generally in other Mongolic languages. In his text, Witsen consistently referred to the Kalmuck rulers by this very same widespread Mongol term, which he writes either as *Tayfi* or as *Taifi*, glossed by Blechsteiner and Heissig (1941: 89) as *taiji* 'mongolischer Adliger, Abkomme eines Fürsten'. The widespread Mongolic loan derives from the Mandarin imperial title 太子 *tàizi* 'great son'.

Witsen's Tangut form for cap matches the Kalmuck form 'Mutze, *Malachay*' in his own Kalmuck word list (1705, I: 297-304). Moreover, this very Kalmuck term is also recorded both as *malagai* and as *maxalai* in the manuscript of a Kalmuck-Swedish dictionary written by the missionary Cornelius Rahmn of Gothenburg between 1819 and 1823 and kept in the Uppsala library and only recently edited and translated by Svantesson (2012: 106). All of these matches might raise the suspicion that the word list itself comes from Kalmykia or, as Witsen called the Kalmuck country, *Kalmakkia* or *Kalmakken-landt* (1692, II: 110). One passage in *Noord en Oost Tartarye* suggests a possible source for Witsen's Tangut letters.

In addition to the two afore-mentioned Kalmuck envoys whom Witsen knew, he had an audience with a Kalmuck prince named 'Jalba Dois' in Moscow of whom he painted a rather picaresque portrait. The relevant parts of this passage in question are as follows:

Zeker Kalmaks Prins, dien ik zelfs in *Moskou* gefproken heb, was genaemt *Tayfi Jalba Dois*: het eerste woord is zoo veel als *Prins* of Vorft gezegt... Hy toonde my schrift van zijn Land, 't geen bestond in een



lankwerpig Gebe-boekje, en toonde noch een ander schrift, in Kalmakken Land gebruikelijk, dat hy *Tongoski* noemde, 't welk een heel ander aenzien, als het eerste hadde, en ook anders wierd gelezen. De Tolk, dien hy by hem hadde, en ons alles te verstaen gaf, verstond echter zijn schrift niet, schoon hy 't hoorde lezen. Hy bewond zijn Gebede-boekje in een doek, en bebond dat met lind, kruiswys, vaft. (1705, I: 294)

A certain Kalmuck prince, with whom I spoke in Moscow myself, was named *Taysi Jalba Dois*, the first word meaning as much as *prince* or *ruler*... He showed me writings from his country, which consisted of an oblong prayer booklet, and also showed another script that was in use in Kalmuck country, which he called *Tongoski*, which had a very different appearance from the first and was also read differently. The dragoman whom he had with him and who interpreted for all of us, however, did not understand his script, even when he heard it read out loud. He wrapped his prayer booklet in a cloth and then tied it with a ribbon crosswise.

Here the prince showed Witsen 'another script' that was current in his country, which the prince called *Tongoski*. The Kalmuck interpreter in the service of the Kalmuck prince was, however, reportedly unable to read this script. Moreover, the description of an oblong book with loose leaves between two hard covers, all of this then wrapped in a cloth and tied with a ribbon, appears unmistakably to describe a typical traditional Tibetan book of the type that is still ubiquitously in use today. In this context, the name *Tongoski* at once evokes to mind the Russian word Тангутский *tangutskij*. In fact, it is difficult to think of what else the term which Witsen heard here could otherwise have been. Prayer books and Buddhist scriptures in Classical Tibetan were just as popular amongst the Kalmucks as they were amongst their Oirat brethren in Inner Mongolia and the area of the Blue Lake.

Although it seems possible that this prince might have been the source of the Tangut letters, this issue would in principle be independent of the question as to the actual variety of Oirat recorded in Tibetan script. The text specimens may, alternatively, have been sent to Witsen by the second well-travelled Kalmuck envoy, who was originally from Bukhara.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, there is one lexical item in the Tangut word list which appears to argue against the hypothesis that the language recorded in the Tangut letters might have been nothing more than a variety of Oirat spoken in Kalmykia. The word *umudun* for 'Broeken Hoofen' ['a pair of trousers'] does not match the

<sup>7</sup> In his brilliant piece in this volume entitled 'Nicolaas Witsen's inauspicious place in early modern linguistics', Bruno Naarden has succeeded in identifying the likely source of the script specimen. His fascinating discovery completes the puzzle and provides us with a picture that is more complete in terms of linguistically relevant detail with regard to how events are likely to have transpired.

word 'Broek, *Schalbur*' that is recorded in Witsen's own Kalmuck word list (1705, I: 299). The form which Witsen recorded as *Schalbur* corresponds to the modern Kalmuck form, which today is written шалвр. In fact, the 'Tangut' form *umudun* resembles no modern Kalmuck word contained in any of the cited available lexicographical resources. Rather, the form *umudun* seems to represent an Oirat word from that Tangut country near the Blue Lake that appears to be etymologically related to the Khalkha Mongolian form Өмд 'trousers'.

Witsen's 'Tangut' script specimen may very well be the oldest sample of Tibetan script in a published Western source, yet the reproduction and understanding of the script was neither yet complete nor fully accurate in every detail. Moreover, the script was not written by a practised hand but clearly drawn. Here we must hasten to point out that the very same observation can be made for most of the exotic script specimens in *Noord en Oost Tartarye* and, for that matter, in most other Western sources of the period. The language of the vocabulary items recorded in the Tibetan script was neither Tibetan nor Tangut in the sense of the extinct language of the lost 西夏 *Xixia* state, nor does the recorded vocabulary represent any other language of the Trans-Himalayan language family. The language of Witsen's *Tangutische letteren* was Oirat Mongol, and, despite its obvious proximity to Kalmuck Oirat, with which it is nearly identical, it appears more likely that the source language may very well have been a form of Oirat spoken in the Tangut country.

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## VII. OTHER LANGUAGES AND SCRIPTS

### INTRODUCTION

#### Bruno Naarden

The languages and scripts described in this last chapter have no affinity with any of the five language groups treated in the preceding pages, nor are they in any way thematically related to one another.

The Yukagir are probably the oldest ethnic group still living in Siberia and Witsen was the first scholar ever to include a specimen of their unique language in any book. In the first essay in this chapter, this short text, a translation of the Lord's Prayer, is analyzed by Cecilia Odé and Irina Nikolaeva. Unfortunately, we do not know how Witsen obtained this Yukagir Our Father, although we may assume that, as on so many other occasions, he was helped by his relative and friend Andrei Winus in Moscow.

We are very well informed, in contrast, about the provenance of the ancient Chinese mirror in Witsen's famous collection of curiosities in his house in Amsterdam. It was one of the many precious artefacts dug up by Russian robbers raiding the prehistoric burial mounds of Western Siberia in the seventeenth century. Witsen showed a scholarly interest in these antiquities and avidly collected them. He included two pictures of the mirror in *North and East Tartary*, and he went to great lengths to discover the meaning of the inscription on the bronze disk. He also corresponded about this question with Gisbert Cuper, the learned mayor of Deventer, an city in the east of the Netherlands. There has been a good deal of scholarly interest in these mirrors in recent times. Willemijn van Noort's essay, for the first time, gives a comprehensive survey of the historical and linguistic details relating to this topic.

Like Henryk Jankowski's article on Crimean Tatar in chapter V, Myongsuk Chi's contribution revisits earlier research, in this case Frits Vos' 1975 study on the list of 142 Korean words in Witsen's book. The reader will find Vos' original publication on the website of our publishing house Pegasus.

The engraving showing two sets of cuneiform glyphs, and the accompanying text on pp. 563-564 of *North and East Tartary* have confused and misled many scholars over the past centuries. As a result the Amsterdam mayor has even been accused of fraud and deception. By solving the puzzles relating to this mysterious passage, Janine Jager restores Witsen's reputation as a conscientious collector and an honest scholar.