

TIBETAN EIGHTH-CENTURY DOCUMENTS ON WOOD FROM MIRAN

To reconstruct the history of East Turkestan in the eighth—ninth centuries it is necessary to take into account not only Chinese literary sources — official chronicles and documents, reports, memoirs of Chinese pilgrims, etc., but also documents written in the languages of the natives of the land, the aboriginal population of East Turkestan. Only in this way we can gain insight into political, social and economic relations of that time.

A considerable number of written sources of this kind have been introduced into circulation during the last years. The eighth-century Tibetan documents on wood considered in this article belong exactly to this group of written sources. Their introduction is important in many respects. First of all, these documents provide direct evidence on the lives of Tibetan garrisons in occupied territories, on all difficulties and problems they had to encounter. This material cannot be replaced by any chronicle. Second, these documents provide valuable information on the administration of the occupied territories, its bureaucratic institutions, on the system of accounts and management. The analysis of person and place names gives some idea on the ethnic composition of the Tibetan army as well as on the confessional association of its soldiers. The documents give the actual location of Tibetan garrisons on the territory of East Turkestan, the directions in which goods, mainly provisions, were transported; by the time required for their delivery one can estimate the distance between different garrisons and the practicability of the roads. Finally, these documents are the only and the earliest monuments of the Tibetan language of the seventh—ninth centuries. This language was close to the one spoken in daily life, not yet affected by the influence of other languages, like Sanskrit and Chinese, from which Tibetan pandits were beginning at that time to translate Buddhist scriptures.

The collection of Tibetan documents on wood (call number TD — Tibetan documents, TD-1—58) considered here is preserved in the Manuscript fund of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences [1]. This collection actually includes 57 documents on wood, of which 53 are written in Tibetan cursive *dbu-can* script, two documents (TD-31a and TD-31b) — in North Turkestan Brāhmī script in Tocharian B (Kuchine) language, one is a piece for gambling or divination with dots — from one to six — drawn on its sides in China ink; two wooden plaques (TD-56a and TD-56b) are blank.

The collection was acquired from the natives by S. E. Malov during his second expedition to East Turkestan (1913—1915) when he was commissioned by the Russian Committee for the Study of Central and East Asia to collect materials on the Turkic tribes. The exact date of the acquisition is known — June 15, 1915. It took place in the settlement of Miran near the Lobnor lake. Initially the collection was preserved in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg—Leningrad. On 20 March 1925 it was transferred to the Asiatic Museum (in 1930 transformed into the Institute of Oriental Studies).

The site of Miran, when N. M. Przhevalsky first surveyed and mapped it in 1878 (under the name “Ruins of an Old City”) [2], presented ruins of a Tibetan fortress built at the time of the Tibetan domination in East Turkestan. Twice, in 1907 and in 1913—1914, it was investigated by the second and the third British expedition directed by A. Stein who undertook excavations there and discovered about 1,500 similar Tibetan documents written on wooden plaques.

Our wooden plaques, acquired by S. E. Malov, were most probably found by the natives at the same site. Judging by their appearance and by the person and place names mentioned in the texts, they should belong to one of the archives (Tib. *yid-dkar-chag* “register of letters”) of the Tibetan military garrisons on the territory of Miran, to the south of the Lobnor Lake. Among the geographical names mentioned in the documents are the following: Minor Nob, identified with Miran (see below), Greater Nob — the modern Charhlyk, Shing-Shang or Shong-Shang, the medieval name of the fortress where the headquarters of the Tibetan army were located, not far from the present-day Mazar-Tagh (in Khotan).

The first description of the collection was published in 1953 by V. S. Vorobyov-Desyatovsky [3]. In the same year he also published four documents of the collection — TD-23 [4], TD-24, TD-15, and TD-18 [5]. Hungarian scholar G. Uray, who wrote a review of this publication [6], estimated it very highly, marking that it was actually the first scholarly publication including all necessary components: facsimile of the documents, their description, transliteration of the Tibetan text, its translation into Russian, and commentaries. V. S. Vorobyov-Desyatovsky intended to continue his work on the documents, but his untimely death interrupted it. From that time there was no one in the Academy to undertake this difficult work. Besides the difficul-