

A MONGOLIAN FOLK SONGS COLLECTION IN THE ST. PETERSBURG BRANCH OF THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

Folk songs are extremely popular among the Mongols, representing their best loved musical-poetic genre. They created a vast corpus of songs, with text or without it, which could be sung, whistled, recited, performed by choir and solo in various styles: *homiylöh* (lit., "singing with the throat"), *haylah* (lit., "crying"), *dongildoh* (lit., "ring"). These songs arose on the basis of a much earlier inheritance: calls, exclamations, and sound imitations used to call up animal's young, cheer up hunters or lure animals into traps. Folklore texts took up an important place in Mongolian literature. To cite only one example, one third of the first written text of Mongolian literature, the thirteenth-century *Yuan-Chao-Bi-Shi* ("Sacred Story"), includes numerous folk songs, fables, and legends. *Yuan-Chao-Bi-Shi* contains a fragment which indicates the syncretic nature of the ancient song genre; the song is an integral part of festivities. We read, for example: "They gathered in Horhon Chjubun khan's land, there was marry-making, with feasting and dancing. Having elevated Hutula to the khan's throne, they danced around the branchy tree at Horohonah. They danced so that, as they say, pot-holes formed up to their hips and heaps of dust — up to their knees" [1].

Through centuries songs accompanied all of the Mongols' celebrations, be they related to the calendar rites, religious rituals, or shaman practices. Songs were included in the medieval Mongolian historical chronicles like *Erdeniyin erih* ("Precious Rosary") [2] and *Altan tobch* ("Golden History") [3]. The *arats* wrote them down in collections and kept them as most valuable treasures. At present, we know 18 manuscript folk songs collections held at the Mongolian Institute of Language and Literature [4]. Folklorists, who study Mongolian folk songs, hesitate over saying exactly when the tradition of drawing up song collections began. Our own observations on the manuscript collections of Mongolian songs held at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies lead us to conclude that the tradition arose no earlier than the eighteenth century [5].

Mongolian songs drew special attention only in the mid-nineteenth century when travellers, traders, and other visitors to Mongolia, started collecting them actively. Among those collectors were Buryat, Kalmyk, and Russian intellectuals from Lake Baikal and Volga regions. Their activities were usually directed by the Russian Geographical Society in St. Petersburg and by its Eastern Siberian Branch, created in 1851. The scholarly study of these songs

began much later, at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The names of their first explorers are well-known: they are A. Pozdneev, B. Vladimirtsov, Ts. Zhamtsarano and A. Rudnev. That part of the song texts which was collected by St. Petersburg scholars is today stored in the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (47 songbooks, of which 35 are in the Mongolian language and 12 — in Oyrat) and in the Orientalists Archive at the same Institute (in the collections "Mongolia and Tibet", "Buryats and Kalmyks", "Materials of various individuals", and 12 personal collections). They total 37 items containing over 1,000 songs.

The largest number of songs was collected by Ts. Zhamtsarano [6], an outstanding expert in the culture, folklore, and language of the Mongols and Buryats. During three ethnological-linguistic expeditions which he conducted from 1903—1911 in Buryatia and Mongolia at the behest of the Committee for the Exploration of Middle and Central Asia, he succeeded in collecting a huge folkloric material on nearly all Mongolian dialects. As Rudnev pointed out, "he (Zhamtsarano — I. K.) succeeded in drawing up an amazingly large number of texts, surpassing, it appears, all other collectors of texts from other peoples" [7]. The collection at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies contains 9 songbooks contributed by Zhamtsarano. In his private collection, which is held in the Orientalists Archive (No. 62), we find texts with songs in 10 of the 149 items. Those items contain several hundred songs.

Zhamtsarano transcribed songs either in written Old Mongolian or in Russian phonetic transcription. The latter takes into account the pronunciation of each informant, distinguishing gutturals, palatals, short and long sounds, stress and reduction [8]. The collector frequently provides commentary to the songs text and reports information he obtained from his informants during transcription. Zhamtsarano took interest not only in the text, but also in the language, the singer's rendering the text, his family affiliation, place of dwelling, social position, age, occupation, and even his attitude toward his relatives. Such an approach was typical of the ethno-linguistic approach of Eastern folklore studies which took shape between the end of the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. G. J. Ramstedt is the first to have applied this approach [9].