

Resources on the History of Oirat Migration Maintained by the National Library of Mongolia

journal or publication title	Senri Ethnological Studies
volume	86
page range	55-60
year	2014-02-24
URL	http://doi.org/10.15021/00002402

Resources on the History of Oirat Migration Maintained by the National Library of Mongolia

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Although there are relatively few historical resources on the Oirat migration of the 17th and 18th centuries, other documents and accounts of the migration can be used as reliable sources. For example, the clear script documents are considered the main resources for studies on the history of the Oirat migration to the Volga River.

Key words: Migration, manuscript, Oirat, Volga River, Kalmyk

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1. Introduction

The Oirat migration to the Volga River was more than just one Torguut migration. Given the historical facts, the great migration toward the Volga should be called not the “Torguut migration” but the “Oirat migration.” It is true that Torguut General Ho began and led the Oirats’ Great migration, but it was a unique event that included many Oirat aimags.

Although there are relatively few historical resources on the Oirat migration of the 17th and 18th centuries, other documents and accounts of the migration can be used as reliable sources. For example, the clear script documents are considered the main resources for studies on the history of the Oirat migration to the Volga River.

2. Historical resources on the Oirat migration

The migration of the Torguut, Hoshuut, and Dorvod tribes led by General Ho is described at length in *The Story of General Ho*¹⁾ and *The Epic of the Torguut Kings*.²⁾ The latter is an

anonymous work written around 1775. Two manuscripts entitled *A Concise Epic of the Kalmyk Kings* have been found; one is kept in the library of the University of Saint Petersburg, and the other is in the manuscript library of the Eastern Studies Institute. Two other manuscripts have been found in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. Badai, Erdene, and Altanorgil, scholars from Inner Mongolia, have concluded that the study of the “Torguut migration within Mongolia relies heavily on the resources in the ‘Chronicles of the princes and lords ordained by decree’ and the ‘Crucial remarks regarding aimags outside of the dynasty’ by Qi Yunshi... and no other work published in our country from the time of the Qin Dynasty to the present describes a story like the epic of the Torguut kings.”³⁾ This valuable scientific work describes the migration led by General Ho and other small migrations; it also describes the return migration of Ubashi.

Another clear script text regarding the history of the Kalmyks of the Volga is *The Story of General Ho*, found in Xian, China, by Shi. Norov. It was published in Mongolian script in the third volume of the *Khan Tenger* (Khatantenger) *Journal* in 1983 in the Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia. This work mostly portrays the functions of General Ho and King Ayukh and is considered one of the main resources on the 17th- and 18th-century Oirat migrations. It has appeared in several publications: for example, Drs. Badai, Erdene, and Altan-Orgil included a version in Mongol script in their work *The Historical Resources of Oirat*, and Dr. Sukhbaatar included a concise Cyrillic version in his *Resources Regarding the History of the Oirat Mongols*.

*The Four Oirat History*⁴⁾ by Dr. Gavaan Sharav, which narrates the origin and history of the Oirats, was found in 1965 in the Mongol materials collection at the Academy of Science in China’s Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia. Another manuscript of this work, found in Mongolia, is considered richer in content than that translated by Inner Mongolian scholars into Mongolian. The manuscript describes the origin of major tribes—such as the Oold, Hoit, Batud, Barga, Buriat, Dorvot, and Torguut—and is therefore a valuable resource for historians of the Four Oirats.

*The Four Oirats History*⁵⁾ by Ubashi Khan is an equally useful tool. This work dates from 1819 or 1820, and its manuscripts, found among the Kalmyks and Xinjiang, have circulated widely among scholars.

The Origin of Bogd Chingis and the Four Oirats and the Genealogy of Hoshuut is another famous resource. Dr. Sukhbaatar dates it to around 1850 and argues, “its content suggests that the origin of the Torguut Hoshuut is linked to the Togoön Taish. It also explains the meaning of the name ‘Hoit aimag’ and provides the genealogy of the major aristocratic leaders of the Tsoras, Torguut, Hoit, Dorvot, and Hoshuut; in this matter, the writer followed the mother’s side of the famous aristocrats. It has valuable information that can shed new light on the reasons for the division among the aristocrats.”

We now have three manuscript versions of the *Epic of the History of the Four Oirats*, which was written around 1751. These are on reserve at Mongolia’s National Central Library and at the Science Academy’s Institute of Linguistics.

The Epic of Ravjimba ZayBandida, written in 1681, is another clear script document belonging to this era of history. ZayBandida was adopted by Baibagasbaatar, the firstborn of Khongor Khan and the assembly leader of the Four Oirats, who initiated the process of

his becoming Ikh Hutagt. The full name of the work is *The Epic of Moonlight by Ravjimba ZayBandida*, and it contains the migration history.

The *History of the Origin of the Mongols* was found in Xinjiang, China under the name *Bogd Chingisiin turiig bariad khan ooroo tetgesen tuuj*. Altan-Orgil, a historian of Inner Mongolia, first published in 1983, in the inaugural volume of the *Khantenger* journal. It appeared again in the *Historical Resources of Oirat* by Badai, Erdene, and Altan-Orgil in 1985, and Dr. Sukhbaatar printed it in Cyrillic in 2001.

In the second volume of 1927's *Kalmyks of the Volga River*, Perenlei writes about the migration of the Oirats, the reasons for it, the deeds of Shuher and Ayukh, and the relations between the Russians and Kalmyks. This is an immense work, and the author uses Chinese historical resources extensively.

The *Chronicles of the Princes and Lords Ordained by Decree*, a 79-volume work kept in the manuscript department of the National Library, provides a comprehensive history of the Dorvod kings and aristocrats.

The *Documents of the Lineage of the Truly Devout Ancient Torguut and Sincerely Devout New Torguut Kings* is a great example of a manuscript and bar print (press print) work relating to Oirat history. It is kept at the National Library of Mongolia and illustrates, in chart form, the genealogy of the Torguut kings and aristocrats and their descendants.

Qi Yunshi (1751–1815), a scholar and clerk who studied the Oirat migration, wrote the *Chronicles of the Aristocrats of Khoton Aimag in Outer Mongolia*, copies of which exist in both China and Mongolia. With 120 volumes covering all the aimags this work follows the autobiographical form of famous Chinese works such as the *True Law Documents* and the *Chronicle Note* and is an important source of information on the Oirats' return migration and lineage. Volumes 101 to 105 contain a detailed history of the Oirat migration. Qi Yunshi also authored the *Crucial Remarks Regarding Aimags Outside of the Dynasty* (Tsi Yuanshi 1834: 231)

Moreover, in volumes 9 to 14 entitled *Crucial remarks regarding Oold*, he writes extensively on the history of the Torguut beginning with their migration westward. This 18-volume text correlates with the previously mentioned work. His third work is the *Crucial Remarks on the West Region*; in its fourth volume, the author provides a genealogy of Torguut aristocrats and writes of both the migration westward and the return eastward.

3. Foreign language resources

In the 18th century, a number of scholars traveled throughout the Volga River region and created works that are very helpful to the study of Oirat history, culture, social structure, and arts. The documents kept in Astrakhan and the factual documents relating to the Kalmyks, all housed at the Institute of Eastern Studies in Saint Petersburg, are key to forming a clear understanding of the migration.

The study of the Kalmyks holds a special place in Russian ethnographical studies. German scholar G. F. Miller (1705–1783) was the first author to compile and print documents relating to Kalmyk history. He worked as an assistant teacher of history, geography, and Latin when the University of Russia was founded in 1725 and later became a member of the Science

Academy of Russia. He lived in Siberia for ten years while collecting and compiling a number of manuscripts on Mongolian history; during this time, he wrote *Notes on Siberia—the Kingdom of Siberia and her Internal Issues*. The Science Academy of the USSR compiled and re-printed this work under the title *History of Siberia* (Миллер Г.Ф. "История Сибири" Академий Наук СССР; Moscow, Leningrad 1937, 1941). This text contains documents regarding relations between the Volga Oirats and Russia.

I. E. Fisher (1691–1771) also did extensive research on historical data while living in Siberia. He wrote *The History of Siberia* based on Miller's work and printed it in Saint Petersburg in 1774 (Фишеромъ Иоганномъ Еберггардомъ. Сибирская исторія съ самаго открытія Сибири до завоеванія сей земли російскимъ оружіемъ, сочинения на Немецкомъ языке; Sankt-Petrburg, 1774). A copy of a Russian translation of Fisher's work is kept at the National Library of Mongolia and considered a valuable resource for the study of Oirat history. The text divides the history of Siberian ethnic groups into five segments and elaborates on issues such as the Oirat migration to the Volga River and the people's origin and genealogy in addition to their neighbors, the Tatar and Kazakh peoples of Siberia, and their relations with Russia.

The Anthology of Historical Material on Mongolia was written in German by Pallas, who compiled the contemporary history and laws of the Volga Oirat (Pallas, *Sambung historichen Nachrichten uber die Mongolischen ulkerschaften*; Sankt-Petrburg, 1976).

Bantysh-Kamensky (1737–1814), an expert in the study of ancient Russian manuscripts who graduated from the University of Moscow in 1762, wrote a book called the *Anthology of Documents on the Foreign Relations between Russia and China (1619–1792)* (Bantiskamenskii 1882: 145), which contains important information regarding the Volga Oirat and the convoys of Mandai.

Russian scholars N. K. Roskyn and A. Leontiev studied and translated the *Remarks on Foreign Countries* by Qi Yunshi into Russian. Roskyn (1707–1761) was a Russian Orthodox missionary to Beijing from 1729 to 1735. During this time, he excelled in the Chinese and Manchu languages and translated many works into Russian. One of these is the *Remarks on Foreign Countries*, which he translated in 1734.

The *Ancient Oirat and Kalmyk History* (Leontiev 1879: 89) by M. F. Leontiev (Odessa, 1879) and the *Collection of Documents Relating to Russian and Oirat Relations in the 17th-18th Centuries* (Kotvich 1919: 101) by Vladislav Kotvich (1872–1944) are other resources relating to the Oirat migration.

The *Mongol-Oirat Laws of 1640* were legislated in the Volga region by the aristocrats of Torguut. Russian scholars have studied the clear script versions of these laws, and J. F. Golstunskii is one such scholar who has researched and translated these laws into Russian. He revised and printed the *Mongol-Oirat Laws of 1640*, the *Decree Letter of Prince Galdan* and the *Compensation to the Kalmyks during the Reign of Prince Donrovdash of the Kalmyks* (Golustunskii 1880: 106).

The compilation of documents on Mongolia-Russia relations is very valuable to the study of this area. Among such works are the following: *Materials on the History of Russia-Mongolia Relations (1607–1636)* (Moscow, 1959), *Materials Concerning Mongols, Kalmyks, and Buriats in the Archive of Leningrad* (Moscow, 1966), *Russia-Mongolia Relations (1654–*

1685) (Moscow, 1996). The “Materials on the History of the Kalmyks in the First Half of the 17th Century” in the *Historical Manuscripts* (Moscow, 1939) by S. V. Bogayavlenski and the *Materials on the History of Russia-Mongolia Relations (1607–1636)* (Moscow, 1959) by L. M. Gataullina are also major resources on the topic.

4. Conclusion

A significant number of resources on the 17th-century Oirat migration are kept at the National Library of Mongolia. The clear script texts are considered the foremost resources for the study of the Oirat migration to the Volga River. It was the author’s intention to show how our knowledge of that migration is enhanced by the story of General Ho, the epic of the kings of Torguut and Ubashi Khan, *The Four Oirats* by Gabansharav, and *The Moonlight* by ZayBandida. The works of Fisher, Miller, and Palmov, who traveled throughout Siberia to collect and archive historical data, are also relevant and valuable resources that are kept at the National Library of Mongolia.

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Notes

- 1) “The Story of General Ho” *Historical resources of Oirat*, Vol. 2, Ulaanbaatar, 2001.
- 2) Historical Resources of the Oirats, printed by Badai, Erdene, and Altan-Orgil, Inner Mongolia, 1985.
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