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## Several Letters Regarding Galdan Boshogtu

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## Several Letters Regarding Galdan Boshogtu

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This article discusses several letters relating to the biography of the Oirat Galdan Boshogt that were recently found in the archives of the Russian Federation. The 17<sup>th</sup>-century Oirat Mongols in western Mongolia have been studied mainly using sources in the Manchurian and Mongolian languages; sources in other languages have been studied comparatively infrequently. These letters date from between 1680 and 1690 and provide valuable information regarding communications between Galdan Boshogt and Russia. More research on these documents in the ancient state archives of Russia will reveal many new facts about Russian and Mongolian relations during the period, including details of diplomatic officialdom, territorial issues, mobility, and trade relations. The documents introduced here provide some such facts.

**Key words:** Oirat History, Galdan Boshogt, Russian expansion, Mongol nomads, historical documents, mod script

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### 1. Introduction

One of the most complex periods in the history of the Oirat Mongols was the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During that time, Galdan Boshogtu entered Oirat history. He was attempting to build a solid relationship with the Russian Chagan Khan, sending envoys to propose joint trade and war plans. Meanwhile, Russia was expanding its control eastward, subjugating the Siberian people and establishing their own villages. When they encountered Mongol nomads who

claimed the area as their own, the Russians sent envoys and followed a policy of strengthening internal relations while subjugating the Mongols. The Mongols maintained their control over the area, however, taxing the Siberians and blocking Russian expansion.

Manchu and Mongol sources dominated studies of this period until recently, while Russian sources, as well as Mongol and Tod script sources relating to the early Russian kingdoms, were consulted less frequently. I worked with this archive in November and December of 2009 and in May 2011 and found several letters relating to Galdan Boshogtu. I would like to introduce some that were written by Galdan's envoys and sent to Russia and others in Cyrillic script written by Galdan himself. The letters deal with exchanging envoys with Russia, taking a joint army to Khalkha, and asking for the White Emperor's support. They are important sources of information about both Galdan Boshogtu's life and the history of the Oirat-Russian relationship and appear here for the first time in Mongolian studies.

## 2. Archive References for the Letters

The letters are kept in the Russian Central Archive on Early Kingdoms (RGADA). Boshogtu Khan's letter to Tobol is in the Siberian Fund 214, Fund 3, Unit 544, Page 418; the letter from Boshogtu Khan's envoy to Chagan Khan to inform him of Mongol affairs is in the Siberian fund 214, Fund 3, Unit 544, page 420; a letter from Zokhistu Khashikha, an envoy of Boshogtu Khan, is in the Siberian Fund 214, Fund 3, Unit 544, page 460; Boshogtu Khan's envoy's letter reminding Chagan Khan that Boshogtu Khan and he have strong relations and proposing a joint conquest of the Khazakhs, Galdan shajin barigch Boshogtu Khanyi bichik (Decree of Galdan Patron of Religion), and Galdan shadin tsetsen baryigch Boshogtu khanyi bichik (Decree of Galdan Wise Patron of Religion) are in the Siberian Fund 214, Fund 3, Unit 179 (RGADA 214)<sup>1)</sup>.

## 3. Dates of the Letters

Dates are not recorded clearly on the letters, so I attempted to estimate them by referring to the chronology of historical events. Given the statements in the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter about “dolōn qoşoun mongyoli abuysan uçirān” (how the Mongols of seven banners have been taken), “boşoytu qan-i elçi zokistu qasaya nerçöüdtü irēd” (an envoy of Boshogtu Khan Khashakha visiting Nerchu), and “nige kesey ulusi qasay dayilaji” (taking some Khazakhs), the letters date from the 1680s or 1690s. The phrase “took Mongols of seven banners” describes Galdan's invasion of Khalkha. Galdan sent his envoy Darkhan Zaisan to Erkhui in January of 1690 to deliver a letter to Voyevod Kislyanskyi. This letter appears to reveal that Galdan made a strong effort to build a military alliance with Russia (Zlatkin 1964: 187) and was working on an agreement to join together at the Kherlen river. Kibirov joined the Oirats with his troops, and soon afterward, in early February of 1691, he returned to Erkhui. I. Ya. Zlatkin argues that “the attention to Galdan can be explained by the fact that Siberia had insufficient power” (Zlatkin 1964: 188) гэжээ—power to resist the Manchus, that is.

The letters reflect different periods of Galdan-Russian relations. The first letter relates to the 1670s and 1680s, the period when Russia did not take Galdan Boshogtu seriously. For

instance, his envoys were delayed when continuing their trip from Tobol'sk, and they lacked food supplies. Without the Russian translations of these letters, however, we cannot know exact dates. Other letters relate to the years from 1690 to 1695.

#### 4. Contents of the Letters

The letters are in Tod and Cyrillic. Interestingly, most are written by Galdan's envoys. Most intriguing are the letter to the Russian White Emperor, the letters that Galdan's envoys wrote him in return, and the letters that Galdan wrote himself. These 3 groups of letters illustrate the nature of Galdan's relationship with Chagan Khan, Galdan's position, and the Russian approach to it. I would like to mention some records in the letters. Galdan Boshogtu Khan sent 10 people to deliver a letter with a stamp; 4 of the envoys died on the way, and the other 6 reached the Russian town Tobol. Unfortunately, the town consul treated them disrespectfully and barred them from going further. According to a letter from an envoy to Boshogtu Khan, "the Consul of Tobol agreed to let 4 people enter; however, we had the document saying that 10 people were sent as envoys. We had no food supplies. We think the great white emperor fund is sufficient to provide us with some food." Galdan attempted to cultivate a close relationship with the Russians; however, the Russians were careful with him, preventing him from growing too strong. When Galdan Boshogtu sent a special envoy to inform them that the (Khalkha) Mongols had been taken, he was again delayed. The envoy sent word that "we were sent to report that the Mongols of the 7 banners had been taken, and it has been 3 years since we left our Boshogtu Khan. We were delayed 3 months at Tura, 6 months in Tobol, and a month and a half in Kuznyets. Here, in Moscow, we have spent 2 months and a half. We still haven't met with the White Emperor. Boshogtu Khan told us to have a quick trip. We need to return as soon as possible." According to this letter, the envoy sent by Galdan Boshogtu spent 3 years in Russia. When they arrived in Moscow, the White Emperor made them wait again. I would argue that the White Emperor delayed the envoys because he was then supporting Altan Khan Lubsang over Galdan Boshogtu. Another letter, "An Envoy of Boshogtu Khan, Zokhistu Khashikha," tells how he left his horses and camels in Nerchu and planned to go back through Tobol. He asked for some strong horses from the Emperor's fund in order to take the envoys to China; this happened in around 1695. When Galdan invaded Khalkha, he sent an envoy to Nerchu. At this time, Gendun khuntaij of Khotogoid had lost his position in Nerchu and the Selenge river area. Galdan's envoys exhausted their food supply and purchased more with their own currency. This is mentioned in the following passage: "qoyor mori qudalduji ideji irebe bi. üüni medekü gereči eleksei miyiniyiçi qomotob očiysan ... ögügsen künesün arban tabun ödör dutaji bi öbörön mönggü ideji toboldu irēd dolōn sara bariji bayiba. yurban sara-du künesü ögbö. dörbün sara-du künesü ögügsün ügei. Doorasa (Tura) iregsen kümün medekü. Tobolasa ende meskuo-du irekü dü dörbün kümün biçiγ-tei künesü ideji irelei bi. qoyor nöbür mini künesü ügei irelei. tere beyēren meskuo-du iregsēr basa künesü ögügsün ügei. zuryān kümün ödüriyin qorin qoyor mönggü ideji bayinai bide" (RGADA 214)<sup>2</sup>). We may wonder why the Russians approached the envoys of Galdan Boshogtu in this way. In the letter to the Great Chagan Khan, Galdan Boshogtu reminds him that "Čayān qan boşoytu qan qoyor inay sayıqan bayıday" (the White emperor and Boshogtu

Khan had a good relationship); however, the Russians never approached his envoys carefully. In this letter, Galdan Boshogtu expresses his wish for Russian support in driving away the Khazakhs from his area and cultivating peaceful relations with the Russians in the border region, thus connecting his policy of keeping the area peaceful with the invasion of Khalkha and Manchu territory. The Russians knew this and avoided a clear reply, being careful not to allow Galdan Boshogtu to grow too strong. There are also letters on economic and trade issues. The Oirats attended one of the biggest trading fairs in Siberia, Irbit, but all their goods were taken away and not returned. Descriptions of the event include this one: “irbid geγči qudalduyin ʏajar tu šanggiyin yuuma quduldu geji ilgegseni. tome sekeyin almoud arban tabun torʏu arban tabun dēnʏi abād ese ögbü. Toboliyin almoud ög geji qoyur dakiji iretele ese ögbü.” The Irbit fair was the main trading center for Russians, Siberians, and Central Asian nomads in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Chimitdorzhiev 1987: 119). Herders sold their fur and cattle there, and Russians supplied all other goods except weapons. These letters reveal the issues involved in the relationship between Galdan Boshogtu and the Russians in the 1679–1695 period as well as the roles played by Russian towns, practices of sending and receiving envoys, and various aspects of trade, customs, and border problems.

I would now like to introduce some interesting historical documents, Galdan Boshogtu’s letters in Cyrillic. In the “Decree of Galdan Boshogtu Patron of Religion” letter, he greets the White Emperor and expresses his desire for friendly relations. The document reads as follows: “тан илкчи бичик амани үгэ биликтэ ириксендү, икы баирлабо. Тани илчи өлзэйтү цаган голду ириксинее, наороки ямар бэесе үгйле, болоксайги үзиксэн өбрин тани \\элчи амар келекү, басачи икы цагани хани мэндү мэдэнь икы нургун шаджин тэрэн али бэсе үйлин тусту эне бичикте илгэчи илчиги, болзонду али үтэр болхар ирикүйги сайтур тусалат. басчиги нааши ямар бээсе үлэй кэйрэк болхула кын кыню нургунду тусутай али сайн болхуйги киче.” (Slesarchuk 2000: 331–332). The writer then proposes to take a joint army to Khalkha and run for Jibzundamba Khutuktu: “Джиб Джин Данбакутхту, Очирой-хани бидан зүнджи одоксаги эряджи иреджи баса орос тала даин болхуйги мэдэбү.” This document is quite interesting in the context of the Khalkha-Oirat war of the 1690s. Galdan Boshogtu’s letter clearly reads “монголи танду шидари та дей манду шийдари бида ябуя.” In the headings of the letters, Galdan Boshogtu is named Galdan shadin (“sahjin-religion”), or “patron of religion,” and Galdan Wise Khan is given the same title.

## 5. Conclusion

The letters relating to 17<sup>th</sup>-century Oirat history presented here are being introduced for the first time. They are indisputably interesting to those studying the history of the relationship between Galdan Boshogtu and Russia. The letters were written and sent by Galdan Boshogtu’s envoys and therefore reference the situation in Russia, relations among Russian nobles, and regional trade relations. More detailed research into the letters would benefit those studying the crucial issues in 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Oirat history. Researching the relationship between the Oirat and Russia using only Russian translations of documents is inadequate: such translations, designed for presentation to the top authorities of the time, were carefully

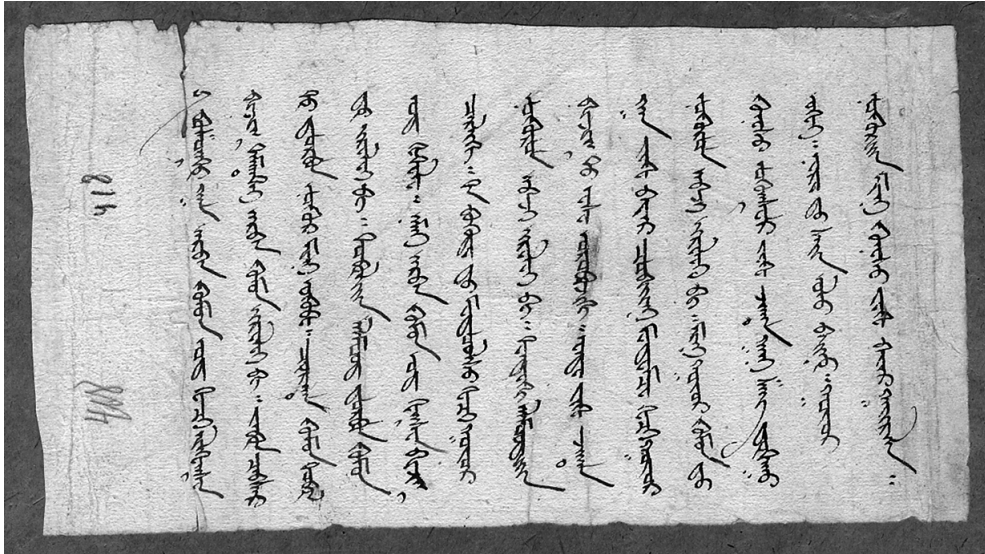


Photo 1 Letter from Boshogtu Khan's envoy to Chagan Khan (214\_3\_544\_418)

revised and edited. Research on the letters is progressing, and they will eventually be published along with their transcriptions, commentaries, and original copies.

### Translation

#### 214\_3\_544\_418 (Photo 1)

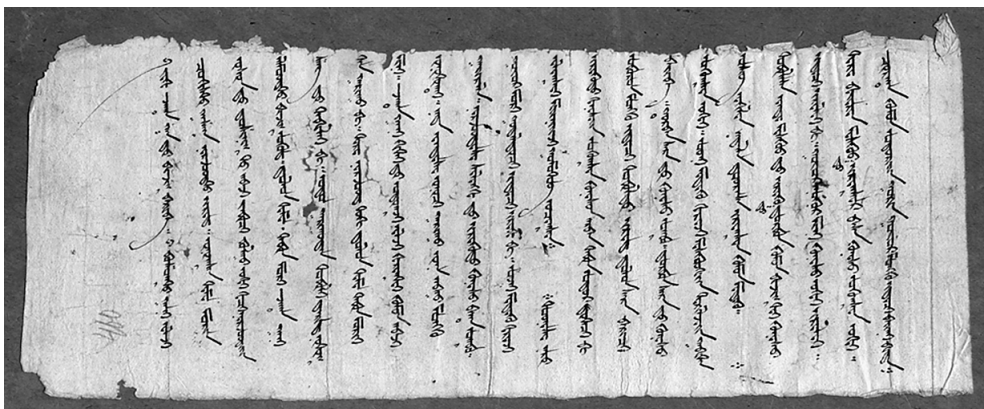
I came with ten people, carrying the sealed letter sent by Boshogt Khan, who sent ten people. On the way, four of my companions died. I arrived at Tobol'sk with six people.

The officials of Tobol'sk would send only four people, but in order to report to you that the order letter [actually] mentioned ten people to be sent, I came together with two companions. Not included in the letter issued by the officials there, and trusting that the great Chagan Khan personally knows [this], I came with my two companions.

I trust that the Great Chagan Khan is not too short of reward to give provisions to my two people. Would it not be good for your reputation? Please grant generous provisions to my two companions.

#### 214\_3\_544\_420

[I have been sent to] send greetings to the Chagan Khan and to report to [his majesty] about the war with the seven hoshuu Mongols. It has been three years since I parted with Boshogt Khan. I have been made to stay in Tura for three months. I have been made to live in Tobol'sk for six months and in Kuznyetsk for half a month. Although I have been here in Moscow for two months and one week, it is surprising that I have not received a single word in response and have not seen the face of the Chagan Khan. Boshogt Khan ordered me to come here and return quickly. Report the reason for the urgency of my case.



**Photo 2** Letter of Zokhistu Khashikha, an envoy of Boshogtu Khan, from the Siberian Fund (214\_3\_544\_460)

### 214\_3\_544\_460 (Photo 2)

I am presenting a letter to the Great Chagan Khan. Boshogt Khan's envoy, Zokistu Hasaga, having arrived at Nerchinsk, since the camels and horses he mounted fared ill in the waters, I wrote to the officials of Nerchinsk, and put my seven camels and five horses in the Khan's herd. Now I will return to my homeland, passing Tobol'sk.

Those seven camels and five horses of mine in Nerchinsk can be given as mounts to the Chagan Khan's envoys sent to China (Kitai). Please give me money so I can buy mounts to return home from here. I was given few provisions for my travel from Nerchinsk to Selenge. I came having sold two horses in order to eat. Aleksei Miyiniyiçi Qomotob, who knew this, departed. For the travel from there to here, the provisions given by Genese were short by fifteen days, and I have spent seven months in Tobol'sk using my own money. I was given provisions for three months.

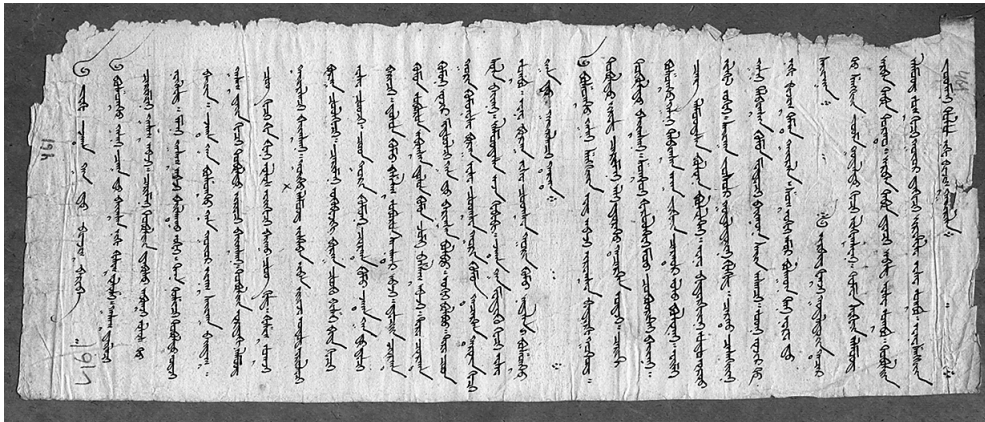
I was not given provisions for seven months. This can be attested to by Terelcheyin Kabitan Üsib from Moscow and people from Tura who came with us.

I came here to Moscow from Tobol'sk with provisions given officially only for four people. Two of my companions came without provisions. Having arrived in Moscow, they remain without provisions. We six people are living with a daily allowance of only twenty-two silver coins.

### 214\_3\_544\_461 (Photo 3)

I am presenting a letter to the Great Chagan Khan. Some people near the border of Boshogt Khan were attacked by the Cossaks; some were taken by the Cossaks, while some joined with salt traders from Tobol'sk, the Cossaks making our life very difficult.

I am on my way to Tobol'sk in order to rely on you. The Chagan Khan and Boshogt Khan are friendly with each other. The Cossaks came to Tobol'sk fighting a war. The former officials of Tobol'sk said it was right, giving them gifts and praising their conduct. The present official, Istaban Ivanovich, sent for them in order that they may carry the willow, but some refused to carry willows, saying that they would rather die. Six people of the one hundred and



**Photo 3** Letter from Boshogtu Khan's envoy to Chagan Khan (214\_3\_544\_461)

twenty offered gifts to the Chagan Khan.

Seven people voluntarily took cheese (with them). The people who gave presents and the six volunteers all took cheese (with them). Have the six people reported their case and presented their gifts to the Khan, or have they not?

Twenty people out of the one hundred and twenty who refused to carry willows were sitting idle waiting to return home. I asked the officials to send them away.

But the officials refused to hand them over, asking whether the Chagan Khan actually knew this. Please send these twenty people who refused to carry willows back to Boshogtu Khan with me.

The Bederge who took things from Boshogtu Khan's shang came to Tobol'sk city, some going where they pleased and some staying in Tobol'sk. They got into ridiculous quarrels. They do not follow the great law passed by Boshogtu Khan. These behaviors are apparently permitted by the officials. It would be tremendously good if these Bederge were made to trade following the customs and if people sent by the Khan knew the legal and government issues. Please give a sealed letter for this purpose.

It would do your reputation good if there were peace without farce. They were sent to a trading place called "Irbit," where the Shang things could be sold. The officials of Tomsk seized fifteen pieces of silk and five denji [tobacco], refusing to return them. They refused to return them, even though officials from Tobol'sk told them to twice. Please grant a letter for the purpose of this Shang issue.

### **5.1 Galdan shajin barigch Boshogtu Khanyi bichik**

I present this letter to two people, the Great Lord Fedor Alekseevich and Leontii Kostyatinovich Kislyanskii; I was very pleased to receive the letter, greetings, and gifts you dispatched. Your envoy has arrived at the river called "Öljiitu Tsagan Gol," having seen whatever he needs to see. Your envoy will carry my greetings to the Great Tsagaan Khan, together with my envoy, who is dispatched along with this letter for the sake of the great cause

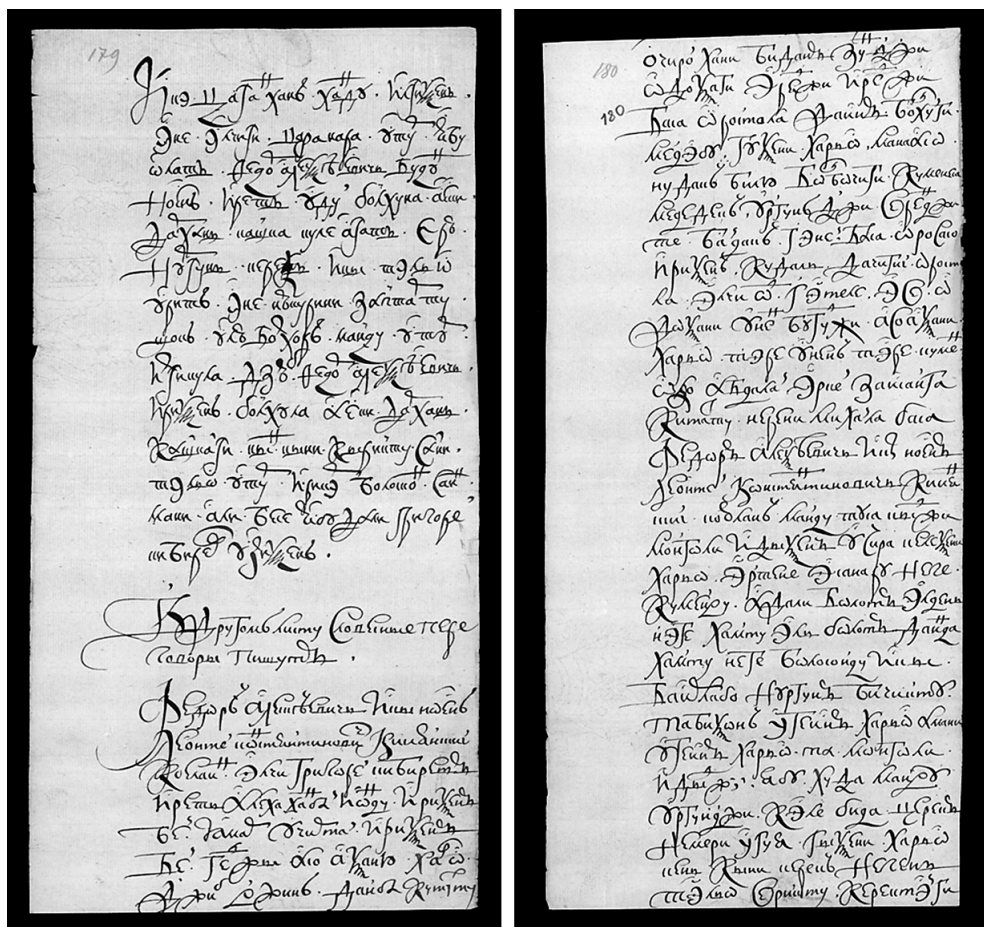


Photo 4 Decree of Galdan, Patron of Religion (214\_3\_544\_179)

of religion and state. Please help them get there quickly by all means.

Furthermore, from now on, we shall endeavor to be of mutual assistance whenever issues arise. In reply to your letter, I wrote a letter to be carried by your envoy, Gregorei Kibirov, and my envoy, Aiyuki Darhan Hashka, on the good day of the auspicious iron horse month.

#### 214\_3\_544\_179 (Photo 4)

##### Letter of Galdan, Patron of Religion

I have speedily sent this envoy to the Great Tsagan Khan, but the big noyan, Fedor Alshksevich, has not yet come, making Ayeki Darkhan Hashka wait. For the sake of this big affair, since there was no misunderstanding between us, it would be good to quickly send the aforementioned chap. Had Fedor Alshksevich come, Ayeki Darkhan Hashka would have come quickly for everyone's sake; Grigorei Kibirev is witness to all of our business. Grigorei Kibirev, the envoy of the Great Noyan Fedor Alshksevich and Lyeontei Konstantinovich

Kislyaskii, arrived, and Алеха Ханбай ионду arrived, giving answers to questions about the purpose for which he came. We followed the Jibtsundamba Khutugtu and Ochir Khan, who went eastward, and asked whether they knew if there would be a war on the Russian side. They answered that, although they are distant from our settlement, they know the people and keep constant vigilance. They also replied in the affirmative when we asked whether it was true that the traders from Russia did not actually send envoys as requested by the Russian side. That person, Abdalai Erkei Zaisang, Mikhaila, together with the great Noyan Fedor Alekseevich and the Leontei Konstantinovich, reply to the report of their having been helpful to us by attacking the Mongols. By the ancient tradition, I am greatly pleased that we have become unified as one, being together as one in the battle. My reply to the important letter and to the oral message is this: keep us informed if you want to attack the Mongols. We are greatly pleased to hear your reply that you'd give your military support; it is correct to inform each other if we have military need of each other. Your reply to our request that no trouble occur on our border is also correct. Please write clearly which people you will appoint to administer which places in all the border regions. I request strongly that no trouble be caused. This soldier fled to Mongolia without making trouble. You may decide what to do about the small troubles. Let us make the Mongols become close to you, and you be close to us. Also, I strongly request that, in response to the request that Tsetsen Noyan's land not pose trouble to Russia, you control his body. Also, Tsetsen Noyan, Uanshik (Vanchik?) Coyet Tuhum Darga, and Erdeni Hongtaiji came to us, and then left us, betraying us. Very correct is the reply concerning what is to be given us, if possible. For our common cause, we will return those who escaped from you, and you will also return those who escaped from us. Also correct is the reply to the request that someone from Mongolia who submits to the Great Tsagan Khan should not make trouble. It is correct that you and we arrive at one place of the Teleken. Also very correct is the reply that it would be good to inform (us) of the arrival at our border town of an envoy sent by the Bogd Khan (Qing emperor) for whatever purpose. It is very correct to tell the Telekun when such a greeting is given to us. Very correct is the reply that it would be good for the Hoton from Elde to go to Ege, and that Selenge to do business should go via Gubi Dabak, Irkorot, and Tunka. It is orally requested that it would be good to continue to do trade. It would be good if you clearly write the envoy dispatched to the Great Tsagaan Khan; I strongly request that our envoy be allowed to come quickly without trouble, in the event that the Bogd Khan sends an army to Nerchinsk to divide up the land. This land is Mongol land, and, in order for us to control the land under Mongol jurisdiction, if all the issues are discussed with us, we will try to do as much good as possible for the land of the great Tsagan Khan. Since the Mongols are at war with both of us, we will chase the Mongols and Burut (Kirigiz) no matter where they go. It would be good if, for our common cause, you would also chase and punish the Soyotu Burut (Kirgiz) people.

## **5.2 Decree of Galdan Wise, Patron of Religion**

For the attention of the Great Noyon: For a long time, we have been in a friendly relationship with the Tsagan Khan, exchanging envoys without interruption. We have clung together in war and peace. By agreement, last year you attacked the Mongols and also sent a letter from Khereleng through Dayan Zaisan about maintaining friendly relations in Telenbu and

Nerchinsk, as before. Then, this month, you also sent an envoy and letter about maintaining good relations in the town, as before. Now that the Mongols are at war with both of us, gathering our great forces, we nobles have marched out in order to put [the Mongols] under your subjection. The Chinese have come endlessly to the assistance of Jabzundamba and Sain Khan, doing you and us great wrong. I have marched out to fight to the death. You also march out with your army, and let's fight at Khereleng to finish this job once and for all. Since the Chinese-Mongol border is close, I write this letter believing that it would be good for both of us. The extra words of arrangement are in the mouth of the envoy. This letter is written at the great central place of the Four Oirats on the auspicious, golden world twenty-fifth day of the snake month.

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### Notes

- 1) RGADA (Russian Central Archive on Early Kingdoms), Siberian fund 214.
- 2) RGADA (Russian Central Archive on Early Kingdoms), Siberian fund 214.3.544.460.