

On a “Golden” Khara-Khoto Manuscript Preserved in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS*

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It is well-known that the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, possesses a collection of Tibetan texts brought by Pyotr Kozlov from the dead city of Khara-Khoto (presently, Inner Mongolia, PRC). Its contents, however, still remain largely unknown for the academia due to the lack of its catalogue. While such a catalogue is being prepared by A. A. Sizova, A. A. Turanskaya and myself, some texts of the collection can be already presented. In this paper I would like to introduce a manuscript on blue paper with golden writings — the only sample of such a kind of texts among those found by Kozlov in Khara-Khoto. It was rediscovered among the Tangut texts by K. M. Bogdanov, the curator of the Tangut collection kept at the IOM RAS, in 2017. Having been passed to the collection of Tibetan texts from Khara-Khoto, it received an access number XT-180. The manuscript was almost immediately demonstrated to the wide audience at the exhibition *Brush and Qalam* dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the foundation of the Asiatic Museum held at the State Hermitage (November 2018 to March 2019). Its brief description and fragmentary facsimile edition was included in the catalogue of the exhibition (Zorin 2018, 236).¹ However, this manuscript deserves a fuller presentation since it has some significance in regard of both its form as a book and the text it contains.

It consists of three folios of more or less rectangular shape, two of them have Chinese foliation on the recto side: 12 and 36,² while the third one misses the edge where the number must have been found. Nevertheless, a textual analysis shows that, without doubt, it had to bear number 38. We do not know of how many folios the entire man-

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¹ In this catalogue a wrong access number, Kh. Tib. 89, was published.

² A cursive shape of the Chinese numeral 6 is used.

uscript consisted initially but I suspect the end of the text could not stand far from f. [38]. Each folio is made of two layers. In some damaged zones on f. [38]v small parts of the second layer of paper are missing and tiny fragments of some Tangut characters³ can be seen printed on the first layer. It is a clear sign that this manuscript was made of reused paper. The area for the text is marked with one or two vertical bars on the right and left sides (f. [38]r seems to miss them but it is not clear if they disappeared over time or were just never drawn). Both recto and verso sides of f. 12 as well as the recto side of f. 36 arrange the text in nine lines, while the verso side of f. 36 in eight lines and both sides of f. [38] in six lines. The size of the folios is as follows: f. 12 — 7,7/8,1×7,9/8,1; f. 36 — 8,0×7,6; f. [38] — 8,0×7,5/7,6. But all three folios lack some fragments which were torn away somehow and, in addition to that, the last one has a few holes, possibly made by some insect(s). The fact that the first of the three folios is a little wider may indicate that the other two belonged to the final part of the manuscript, especially since they break the presumably standard number of lines, i.e. nine. This assumption corresponds very well with actual contents of the manuscript.

The text is inserted into a soft paper envelope with an inscription in Russian which is likely to be P. K. Kozlov's autograph: *Found / separately / (a cover⁴) / in another house* — and below: *A little golden book / (Buddh. leaves) / Khara-Khoto.*⁵ This inscription corresponds very well with Kozlov's diary record dated May 23, 1909, the first day of the excavations: "a small square Tibetan book with excellent golden writings was found" (Kozlov 2015: 319). It means that the manuscript did not belong to the biggest stock of texts found in the famous *suburgan* (Kychanov 1998: 5) and, therefore, can relate to the later period than them, perhaps, to the 14th century.

The text was easily identified by means of the BDRC search tool as a fragment of *rdzogs chen* instructions preserved in the *Snying thig ya bzhi* Collection compiled by the eminent figure of the Rnying ma sect of Tibetan Buddhism Klong chen rab 'byams Dri med 'od zer (1308–1364).⁶ All fragments belong to one particular text inside the *Snying thig ya bzhi* Collection, namely *Bstan pa bu gcig gi rgyud gser gyi snying po nyi ma rab tu snang byed* which is found at the beginning of the first

³ None of them is seen completely but their visible elements allow us to think they are Tangut, not Chinese. I thank my colleague Alla Sizova for this remark.

⁴ It is not quite clear what this word in the inscription means. Some covers of books found in Khara-Khoto were made of reused folios glued together but it does not seem to be the case here.

⁵ The Russian text uses pre-revolutionary orthography so it must have been written either during Kozlov's expedition or shortly after his return to St. Petersburg.

⁶ About him see Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje 1991, 575–596.

part of the collection known as *Bi ma snying thig* — the “Heart Essence of Vimalamitra”.⁷ Thus, it is connected directly with the great 8th century Indian teacher who is said to have brought a number of *rdzogs chen* teachings to Tibet and concealed them at Gedong in Chimpu (Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje 1991, 555). According to the legendary history of the Rnying ma, the tradition of Vimalamitra was passed on from one master to another and the teachings were revealed and concealed again several times (*ibid.*, 555–574). What is certain is that the manuscript with the text of the *Bstan pa bu gcig gi rgyud gser gyi snying po nyi ma rab tu snang byed* was necessarily produced sometime after the middle of the 12th century, i.e., after the discovery of the *Bi ma snying thig* by Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje (1097–1167). Since the Khara-Khoto manuscript can belong to the 14th century it could have been produced in consequence of the intense diffusion of these teachings by masters such as Ku ma ra dza (1266–1343), Klong chen pa, and others.⁸

This manuscript is definitely an important evidence of the presence of at least some followers of the *rdzogs chen* teachings in Khara-Khoto either when it belonged to the Xi Xia Kingdom or during the first century or so of the Mongol dominance. The elaborate way the manuscript was produced (blue paper, golden ink) shows that the person who made or ordered it revered the text it contained. Its rectangular shape is very rare for the Tibetan pothi books and probably refers, as well as the use of Chinese characters for foliation, to the local Tangut tradition of making books.⁹ However, this relation can hardly help us to date the manuscript more precisely. The old Tibetan orthography of the manuscript cannot help, either, since it was still in use in the 14th century.

Apart from the use of *ya btags* in *me-*, *mi-* syllables (*myin*, *myed*, *myig*) and irregular use of the inverted *gi gu* sign (*zhI*, *kyI*, etc.), three other orthographic features can be mentioned:

- one word, *bzhi*, is written with a *chung* as an affix (*bzhi'*) but other syllables that end with open vowels are written without it (except for *mtha'* which is normally written this way),
- the *tsheg* sign is often put after the final syllable of the fragment that ends with the *shad* sign (*mgon· | |*, etc.), this feature is attested already in some Dunhuang texts;

⁷ The contents of *Snying thig ya bzhi* are characterized briefly in Buswell, Lopez 2013, 833.

⁸ I would like to thank Jean-Luc Achard for his remarks concerning this subject.

⁹ The peculiar shape of the manuscript reminds me of the famous Tibetan block print Kh. Tib. 67 produced by the Tanguts in the middle of the 12th century that is also preserved in the IOM RAS; see Helman-Ważny 2014, 67–69.

— the *spr*-ligature has a specific shape:



Below I provide a complete transliteration of the text that was prepared with use of the modern edition of *Snying thig ya bzhi* as a part of Klong chen rab 'byams' *Gsung 'bum* published in Beijing in 2009. In fact, it would have been very difficult to render the text without such an assistance because in many places the ink is very pale and hardly legible; some syllables cannot be seen on the pictures, one has to check the folios from different angles to recognize them.¹⁰ The essential discrepancies between the Khara-Khoto manuscript and the modern edition are presented in the following way: the relevant syllables are underlined in the transliteration of the manuscript in the left column and alternative readings of the modern edition are placed opposite in the right column. The lacunae of the text caused with losses, blurs, etc., are reconstructed, such fragments being italicized and placed in between angle brackets.¹¹

Special Tibetan signs used for rendering of Sanskrit words and syllables are transliterated with use of diacritics – ʈ, ɱ, ā, etc. The reverse *gi gu* sign is marked with a capital I. The *tsheg* sign is rendered with the · sign which is available in the standard fonts. Note that I use the plus sign to render an omitted *tsheg* sign, hence I prefer to write *ka+rma* instead of *kar+ma*, etc. I use signs < and > if the *gigu* sign (both normal and inverted) is written to the left or to the right of the root letter to which it is assigned. If a syllable is written in an abridged form I mark it with a hyphen, e.g. *mgo-n*, or two hyphens when the *a chung* letter is subscribed (if only not to mean a long vowel), e.g. *pa-'a-i*. I do not know exactly what the *a chung* letter means when subscribed under the diphthong *ai*. Perhaps, it expresses somehow the idea of a long vowel which is rather strange because *ai* is already long, therefore I tentatively render the syllable as *ai-'a*. Empty spaces found inside the area for the text are rendered with underscores.

I believe this text, even though it is just a small fragment of rather a small manuscript, adds some important details to our understanding of the history of Buddhism in Xi Xia and that of Tibetan book culture.

¹⁰ I would like to thank my friend Mikhail Iokhvin for making the digital copies that are included in this paper more legible; however, some syllables remain very hard to be recognized so the reader has to trust me that the reading was checked as carefully as possible.

¹¹ Sometimes, we cannot be sure that the manuscript had the same syllables as those borrowed from the modern edition.

The Edition of the Text Supplied with the Digital Images

F. 12, recto [cf. Klong chen rab 'byams 2009, 53, lines 5 to 10]
[marg.] 十二

| | |
|---|------------|
| [1] <bon>rab·bsgrags·<pas bskal·pa·tsha>ngs·pa·'a-i | |
| [2] dbyangs·ca·<n·la 'bur·rdul·bdun·gyi>s·nges_ | |
| [3] par·bzung rang·bzhIn·drag·po·sde·' dzin·mgo·ni: | ting |
| [4] phyag·rgya·'khor·lo·bden·spros·ste skal·_ | te: bskal |
| [5] pa·smra·<bl?>·gzhi·dag·la phyal·phyol·dgu·'i· | yis |
| [6] dam·par·bzung gsang·ba·phyag·rgya·lha·myIn·_ | |
| [7] mgon yang·gsang·'khor·lo·rnams·_ | rnam |
| [8] spros·ste skal·pa·'bum·pa·reg·ldan· | te — bskal |
| [9] la yal·yol·drug·bcu·'i·snying·po·'o | cu'i |

F. 12, verso [cf. Klong chen rab 'byams 2009, 53, lines 10 to 15]

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| [1] rIm·pa·lnga·pa·<gtsug>·phud·mgon bla·myed·snyIng | |
| [2] po·yong·s·<p>ro·<s·pas> ¹² ·skal·<pa>·yang·gsang·_ | bskal — gsal |
| [3] rab·'byam·sa khrag·khr·I·g·bye·ba·dgu·brgya·_ | 'byams·la |
| [4] yIs bla·na·myed·pa·'I·gsang·ba·'o 'jig·_ | |
| [5] rten·thog·ma·shes·rab·mgon· bde·chen·_ | |
| [6] snyIng·po·yang·spros· skal·pa·bkod·pa·chen·_ | yongs·spros·te: bskal |
| [7] po·la 'bum·phrag·drug·bcu·rtsa·bzhI'·_ | cu |
| [8] yIs lha·'I·lhar·ni·'di·nyId·do 'chang·ba·_ | lha·yi — 'chad·pa |
| [9] rnams·kyI·thog·ma·mgon nges·pa·'I·bras ¹³ | kyis |

¹² Rather a big fragment is missing, it seems to be bigger than necessary for this pair of syllables.

¹³ The final letter *sa* is written above the first vertical line of the frame while the *tshag* sign between it and the second vertical line.



F. 36, recto [cf. Klong chen rab 'byams 2009, 65, lines 1 to 7] [marg.]
三十六

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| [1] <@#> 'di'i·thabs·ni·sna·tshogs·pas gzhan·gyl· | 'di·yi |
| [2] 'dod·zhen·mtha'·dgag·phyIr rab·tu·gsang·bar· | |
| [3] ngang·'byung·ba'o· khams·la·bslab·pa'I·thabs· | [no <i>ngang</i>] byung |
| [4] yod·pas dran·"?" ¹⁴ ·tshor·phyag·rgya·ngang·du·sbyor· dbang· | rdzogs — rgya'i |
| [5] po'i·zhen·pa·bzlog·pa'i·phyir kar·ma·rag· | ka+rmā ra+ |
| [6] sha·kI·hang·ti· ¹⁵ phung·po'i·zhen·pa·bzlog·pa<'a>·I· | kṣa·ghi·haṃ — zlog |
| [7] phyIr bhe·ga·ra·nI·sod·gad·gling g·yu<l·kun·zhen> | na·so — yul |
| [8] pa·bzlog·pa'I·phyIr bu·ga·ri·la·<bha·dhu·tri> | pu·kā |

F. 36, verso [cf. Klong chen rab 'byams 2009, 65, lines 7 to 11]

| | |
|--|------------------------------|
| [1] sems·kyI·dngos·por·sprul·pa'I·phyIr· | po·spur |
| [2] ram·pa·ka·la·sa·ml·khe gyur·tshor·gnas·su· | ram — sa·la — khye: byung |

¹⁴ It seems that the scribe started to write *dra* but realized it was a typo and changed it to the sign that resembles rather the Tibetan numeral for *three*; the sign is marked with dots above (rendered here with "'") that signify it as a typo.

¹⁵ The first *shad* sign resembles the letter *da*.

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| [3] gcaḍ·pa'I·phyIr na·tang·pha· phar·re·mi·ta· _ | ma — pher·ra+smi·ti |
| [4] 'dus·tshogs·snang·ba·ngos·bzung·phyIr· _ | gzung |
| [5] kha·ta·re·ka·sa·myI·g· klu rig·pa· brtson· _ | ṭa — rlung — btson |
| [6] rar·gzhug·pa'I·phyir e·khe·ra·ni·bheg· _ | a·ke — na·bhe |
| [7] tsag·tsa+she ¹⁶ 'khrul· bar·rang·rgyud·khungs·gcaḍ · ¹⁷ | tsak·sha — pa'i |
| [8] <phyir ya·>ri·mu· ti·sa·ku·li rIs·drug· | ḍa — ghu — rigs |
| [9] <rim·gyis·b>sg<r>al·pa'I·phyIr ya·sIng· dha·hu· _ | ra·rlung |



F. [38], recto [cf. Klong chen rab 'byams 2009, 65, lines 17 to 19]

| | |
|--|------------------|
| [1] <@> ghe·ba·su·g<h>ar·rna·ma·ye yid·spyod· | pa — yai — dpyod |
| [2] lta·ba·khu<ngs·g>caḍ· pa'i·phyi <r >d<h>a· mi· | [no pa'i] — rmā |
| [3] pa·ti·se·gu·li sku·gsum·lam·du· | sa·ghu·lī |
| [4] slang·pa'i·phyir ras·rmi·sa·ma·khar· | mā·kha· |
| [5] rgad· rtser snang·ba·dngos·su·bslang·pa'i· | tshe — blang |

¹⁶ The text is not seen very well here but it has definitely two letters which are not separated with the *tshag* sign but cannot be read as one syllable; I believe the letter *tsa* is just a typo (probably caused with the preceding *tsag*) because there must be nine syllables in the line and this syllable is not needed here.

¹⁷ The final letter *da* and the *tshag* sign are written between the two vertical lines of the frame.

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| [6] phyir ru·pa·sa·mi·ta·lam·_pa·__ __ | mi·mi — [no pa] |
|--|-----------------|

F. [38], verso [cf. Klong chen rab 'byams 2009, 65, line 20 to p. 66, line 2]

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| [1] sgra<·yi·zhen·pa>·mtha'·<gcad>·phyi<r>· nga·tig· | |
| [2] pa·yang<·ka>·li·sa bsam·gtan·chen· | sā |
| [3] p<o>'i·sa·non·phyir· ga·tsha·pa·lam ¹⁸ ·<?>pa· ¹⁹ i·_ | la·sa |
| [4] ṭa<m > 'phrin·mthar·du·'byung·ba'i·_ | 'phrin·las·mtha'·ru·dbyung |
| [5] phyir kar·ma·ai·'a·a·nu·sa ²⁰ sangs· | ka+rma·e·ka·ma·nu·sā: |
| [6] rgyas·zhen·sngon·bzlog·pa'i·phyir<· >_ | mngon·zhen |



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¹⁸ The syllable is blurred and I am not sure the reading is correct.

¹⁹ This place is not easily legible, either; I think there was some letter written first, then erased, and the letter *sa* in *dbu med* script along with the *tsheg* sign were subscribed.

²⁰ Perhaps, *sā* — there is a hole right under the letter *sa* in the folio.

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