

Ancient Tangut manuscripts rediscovered

George van Driem

Rijksuniversiteit Leiden

1. Original Tangut manuscripts rediscovered

It is a cause for great joy that, since the appearance of the article by van Driem and Kepping (1991), the original Tangut manuscripts bearing interlinear Tibetan transcriptions, which had been lost for decades, have now been found and returned to the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg. These ancient manuscripts of inestimable scholarly value were returned to the Institute of Oriental Studies in October, 1991, after the unsuccessful coup attempt of August 19-21, 1991, and the subsequent preventive expurgation of KGB files by its own agents.

The St. Petersburg collection of Tangut manuscripts was originally discovered in 1908 by an expedition of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society led by Pëtr Kuz'mič Kozlov concealed inside a *stūpa* (Russian *súburgan* < Mongolian *súburyan* 'sepulchre, tomb pyramid for the relics of deified persons' < Sogdian **zmr̥yān* 'sepulchre, tomb') in the ruins of a Tangut city at Khara Khoto in Inner Mongolia. After this hidden Tangut library had been unearthed, the manuscripts were transported to St. Petersburg and taken to the building of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. Thence they were transferred to the Asiatic Museum. The erstwhile Asiatic Museum and the present-day Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg are one and the same entity.

The manuscript department of the 'Asiatic Museum', as it was called from 1818 to 1929, was housed on the sixth floor¹ of the Library of the Academy of Sciences at Birževaja Linija 1. In 1930 the Asiatic Museum was

¹ Sixth floor is used here in the Russian and American sense. In Britain and on the Continent outside of Russia, we refer to this as the fifth floor.

incorporated into the newly established 'Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR'. In keeping with the Soviet governmental policy of increasing centralisation, it was decided to move the Institute to Moscow in 1950 in order to physically unite it with its sister institute there. The Pacific Institute was simultaneously dissolved and its personnel transferred to the newly unified Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. Because it proved unfeasible to transfer the voluminous collections kept in St. Petersburg to Moscow along with the scholarly personnel, the manuscript department remained in Leningrad, as the city was then called, under the name 'Sector of Oriental Manuscripts of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR'. In the wake of the historic 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956, it was decided to re-establish the Institute in Leningrad in the former palace of Grand Duke Mixail Romanov and Grand Duchess Ol'ga Romanova at Dvorcovaja Naberežnaja 18 near the Czar's former Winter Palace, under the new name 'Leningrad Division (Russian: *Otdelenie*) of the Institute of the Peoples of Asia of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR'. In 1968 the Institute was renamed the 'Leningrad Division of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR', in 1990 as the 'Leningrad Branch (Russian: *Filial*) of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR', and again in 1991 as the 'St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences'.

Previously I recounted that a number of priceless Tangut documents were lost sometime after the eminent Russian Tangut scholar Nikolaj Aleksandrovič Nevskij (born March 3, 1892)² and his wife were tragically taken away and murdered by the communists and before 1956 when the Institute of Oriental Studies moved to its present location (van Driem 1991). It is widely held that, at the time of his abduction, Nevskij held a number of Tangut documents in his care for research purposes and for entry into the catalogue of

² The date of Nevskij's birth is given in the Gregorian calendar currently in use. Until February 14, 1918, however, the Julian calendar was used in Russia, and Nevskij's date of birth was recorded as February 19, 1892.

the manuscript department of the Institute, and that these documents disappeared after his arrest in 1937. Nevskij catalogued a total of 955 items in the register of the Institute's manuscript department (Kyčanov 1972:181), but, as I was told by the Institute's Head of Archives and Manuscripts, Eduard Naumovič Těmkin (personal communication, St. Petersburg, July 6, 1992), Nevskij at the time of his arrest had not yet had occasion to catalogue the now rediscovered documents. On the basis of Nevskij's posthumously published materials (Nevskij 1960) and his own work and research notes kept at the archives of the Institute in St. Petersburg, it can be established, within reasonable doubt, that the Tangut documents in Nevskij's possession at the time of his arrest included the Tangut manuscripts with interlinear Tibetan transcriptions as well as the 宸祥教誨³ ʔi wə² ŋôn² ldi̯ə¹ mbu¹ 'Precious Rimes of the Sea of Ideograms' (Russian: *Dragocennnye Rifmy Morja Načertanij*), mentioned by Nevskij (1960, I:129), and a unique recension of the 龍龍⁴ ʔɛi² lew² 'Homophones', both of which have now been returned to the Institute together with the Tangut fragments with interlinear Tibetan transcriptions. After their return to the Institute in late 1991, the latter two were catalogued as items No. 8364 and No. 8365 in the Institute's manuscript department.

Based on investigations of the journalist Grjaznevič (1992), in the night of October 4, 1937, agents of the NKVD, later to be known as the KGB⁵, came into Nevskij's residence in the Ulica Bloxina in the Petrogradskij Rajon of St. Petersburg, instructed him not to touch any of the materials he was working on, and left only to return two hours later and take him away. Four days later

³ Sofronov's reconstructed pronunciations are given for Tangut forms, using Sofronov's (1968:I, 138-44) original inventory of Roman phonemic symbols. Superscript 1 indicates the level tone. Superscript 2 indicates the rising tone. Sofronov's reconstruction for the first ideogram 宸 is given incorrectly by van Driem and Kepping (1991:123) and by van Driem (1991:521) as ʔwə² and should be ʔi wə², as cited here.

⁴ Sofronov's reconstruction for 龍 appears incorrectly as ʔɛi² in Van Driem (1991:520-1) and should read ʔɛi², as given here.

⁵ The *Narodnyj Komissariat Vnutrennix Del* 'The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs' and the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoj Bezopasnosti* 'Committee for State Security' respectively.

they returned yet a second time to arrest Nevskij's Japanese wife Isoko Mantani. The following is an extensive quote from Grjaznevič's article.

[Nevskij's] daughter began searching for her parents immediately after the war. For a long time her inquiries went unanswered. Afterwards she was told that her father had died of cardiac failure and her mother of kidney disease. Both were said to have died in 1945. She continued her search. Unexpectedly, she was invited to the Big House [i.e. the KGB Headquarters on Litejnyj Prospekt No. 4 in Leningrad] last Spring [i.e. Spring 1991, before the unsuccessful putsch]. In a room specially set aside for this purpose, she read and re-read the thin files on the 'case' of her parents, who had been rehabilitated in the 1950s. There were just the reports of two brief interrogations of her mother and three interrogations of her father, and the sentence of capital punishment.

On the sheets of her father's first interrogation, her father's signature was in lucid handwriting, whereas on the second and third the signature had been reduced to a scribble. Could he not have been the one who signed [these interrogation reports]? Was he in a state in which he could no longer be held accountable for his actions? The files also contained the depositions of the agents of the NKVD to the effect that there was no evidence for Nevskij's involvement in activities of espionage. Nevskij was subjected to 'stojki' [i.e. made to stand at attention until he collapsed of exhaustion only to be beaten into standing upright again] and incessant interrogation. [The interrogators] exceeded their authority.

[Her] mother did not sign one interrogation or admit to anything. Such was the strength of her love! Or was it the peculiarly Japanese steadfastness of this 35-year-old woman that enabled her—as the Japanese proverb goes—to fall down seven times and to rise again eight times?

They were killed on the 24th of November 1937 (on the same day as seven other orientalist were executed by the firing squad). To the last page of the bill of indictment was glued a dark blue envelope in which