

SOURCES TO THE HISTORY OF THE CHINESE MILITARY EXPEDITIONS INTO MONGOLIA*

by V. M. Kasakevich

The wars which took place between the Chinese government and the Northern nomads occurred largely either in the interior of China or in the neighbouring region which bordered on the present provinces of Shansi and Hopei. This region is commonly known by the name of "Inner Mongolia". However, in a few rather rare instances, before the whole of Mongolia was united under the power of the Manchu dynasty, Chinese generals have succeeded in penetrating into the Mongolian steppe as far as the Selengi and Amur basin. To such campaigns belong the military exploits of the Ming dynasty, particularly those of the emperor Yung-lo 永樂 (1403-1425). The Manchus, who had begun the subjugation of Mongolia with the campaigns of Kanghsi 康熙 (1662-1722), completed this penetration.

The routes on which the Chinese troops advanced were naturally of particular interest to the orientalists because the region between the interior of China and North-Mongolia does not favour everywhere the movements of regular troops. Nevertheless, the Chinese armies, which consisted of infantry with a huge baggage-train and also artillery, must have found out the most favourable route through the Gobi desert. But unfortunately this could not be ascertained until quite recently; only now has it become possible to shed some light on a few of them. This information is limited to details concerning the campaigns of Yung-lo in 1410, the advance of the main body of the Manchu army under the immediate command of Kanghsi in 1696, and the route of the auxiliary army of the same Kanghsi, which covered his left flank against the Oirats in the west.

In the literature pertaining to this subject only until quite recently has the advance route of Kanghsi in 1696 been known to us, due to the

* *Materialy k istorii kitaiskix voennix ekspeditsii v Mongoliiyu.* In: *Zapiski Instituta Vostokovedeniya Akademii Nauk SSSR*, II, 3; Leningrad, 1933; 151-160, with 7 illustrations, not reproduced in the translation.

fact that his travel-companion, the Jesuit Gerbillon, has left us a detailed description of the campaign¹. In addition we possess the *Meng-ku yu-mu chi* 蒙古游牧記², the *Sheng-wu chi* 聖武記³, brief details by E. F. Timkovski⁴, A. J. H. Charignon⁵, and other authors⁶. This campaign is remarkable because of the fact that, apart from contemporary documents, the advance route of the Chinese army is repeatedly indicated in the stone-inscriptions of Kanghsi. Three such monuments exist in the region of the Mongolian People's Republic (Outer Mongolia) for reference. The first is situated next to the battle-field in the neighbourhood of Dzun modo, the second, at the foot of the mountain Tono ula on the northern border of the river Kerulun, and the third, in the neighbourhood of Tšaghan tšulu in the southern part of the former aimak Khan kentei ula. Until 1927 none of them had been discovered.

In the summer of 1927, at the time of my travel in Dariganga⁷, I intended to trace one of the inscriptions, as I gathered from the data of the *Meng-ku yu-mu chi*⁸ and of Gerbillon⁹ that the inscriptions of Kanghsi, i. e., those in Tšaghan tšulu were to be found in Dariganga. That was confirmed by Tserendsab, who was sent there in 1925 as a member of the Scientific Commission of the Mongolian People's Government. He prepared a handwritten but rather inaccurate copy of it, which the sinologues of Ulan batur khoto could not decipher properly. On my arrival in

1) Du Halde, Description ... de l'Empire chinois et de la Tartarie chinoise, La Haye, 1736, t. IV, p. 315.

2) P. S. Popov (transl. from the Chin.), St Petersburg, 1895, pp. 327, 348-351, 372, 385, 387-389, 399, 401.

3) A. M. Pozdneev, Mongolskaja letopisj "Erdeni-yin erike" ("Mongolian Chronicle"), St Petersburg, 1883, pp. 244-251.

4) Puteshestvie v Kitai chrez Mongoliyu ("Travels to China through Mongolia"), St Petersburg, 1824, v. III, pp. 233-234, 239

5) Le livre de Marco Polo, Pékin, 1924, t. I, pp. 194-211.

6) B. A. Vladimirtsov (v Etnologo-lingvisticheskich issledovaniyax 1927 g. — in: Ethnological-linguistic Researches 1927), Sbornik Severnaya Mongoliya ("North-Mongolian Almanac"), AN, no. II, pp. 36-37; V. L. Kotvich, Russkie archivnye dokumenty ("Russian Archival Documents"), IRAN, 1919, p. 804; I. V. Palibin, Prevariteljnyj otchet o poezdke v Vostochnuyu Mongoliyu ("Preliminary Report on Travel into Eastern Mongolia"); Isv. IRGO. T. XXXVI repeats only the above-mentioned sources.

7) Poezdka v Darigangu ("Travel to Dariganga"), Materialy MONK AN SSSR, no. 5.

8) The reference cited here from the I-t'ung-chih 一統志 mentions Tšagha tšulu, whereas the author estimates its length at 200 li (?) from east to west, although actually it is but a small rock (cf. photographs on Pl. I, 2 and II, 1-2).

9) Op. cit., p. 315.

Dariganga I had no particular difficulties in discovering the actual facts concerning the inscription — moreover, not only about one, but about several — in the neighbourhood of Ghurban khulustai and Dzülget shanda¹⁰. The one in Ghurban khulustai is carved on a granite rock about 1½ metres in height, the others in Dzülget shanda on a rock of white quartz, likewise 1½ metres in height; there the inscriptions are distributed on the various sides of the stone.

In the following I quote the texts of these inscriptions together with their translations, which have been kindly furnished by Mr. V. M. Alexeev, member of the Academy of Sciences.

Rubbings of the inscriptions were made by me on Chinese "moto"-paper (毛頭紙). These are kept in the archives of the Oriental Seminary of the Academy of Sciences.

TEXTS

1. 捷勝岡
大明永樂八年四月廿一日
2. 維永樂八年歲次庚寅四月丁酉朔十六日壬子
3. 大明皇帝征討胡寇將六軍過此。
4. 大清皇帝征討厄魯特噶爾丹，將六軍過此，御筆勒銘：維天所覆，皆吾赤子。綏靖邊陲，殄滅蛇豕。山澤効靈，草蕃泉旨。羽衛斯經，貞石用紀。康熙三十五年歲次丙子四月丙戌朔十四日己亥。
5. 御製銘：瀚海爲鐔，天山爲鐔。一掃胡塵，永清沙漠。
6. 靈濟泉
7. 擒胡山

TRANSLATION

- (1) Victory-rock, The Great Ming dynasty, 8th year, 4th month, 21st day of the reign of Yung-lo. [May 24, 1410 A. D.]
- (2) 8th year of Yung-lo (of the cycle with the indication of keng-yin), 4th month (its first day in the cycle with the indication of ting-yu), 16th day (of the cycle with the indication of jen-tzu). [May 19, 1410 A. D.]
- (3) The Emperor of the Great Ming (dynasty) passed here on his march at the head of six imperial armies during the punitive expedition against the barbarian robbers†.

10) Poezdka v Darigangu, pp. 47 and 56. Cf. also map attached to this article; ZIVAN, II.

[† Nos. 2 and 3 must originally have formed one single inscription, reading: "In the 8th year . . . , the Emperor . . ." The two stones fit into one another and moreover the calligraphy is identical.]

- (4) The Emperor of the Great Ch'ing (dynasty) passed here commanding six imperial armies during the punitive expedition against the Elute (Oirat) Ka-erh-tan 噶爾丹 (Galdan). Written down with a brush by the Emperor's own hand and from that engraved on the stone.

You, who wander under the sky,
 Are all Our little children.
 While pacifying the border regions
 We have destroyed — annihilated the vipers and wild boars
 (i. e., good-for-nothings).

The mountains, the lowlands testify of a miracle,
 The grass is dense and the springs are sweet (tasty).
 The term of the protective guard expires,*
 We engrave (the record) of the victorious deed on this stone.

In the 35th year (ping-tzu), in the 4th month (beginning with the day ping-hsü), on the 14th day (in the cycle with the indication chi-hai). [May 14, 1696 A. D.]

- (5) The inscription was drawn up by His Majesty and was engraved on the stone:

Han-hai 瀚海 (the desert) — like a sword-handle,
 T'ien-shan 天山 — like its edge.
 At once I wiped off the ashes of the Hu 胡 (barbarians),
 For ever purifying the desert.

- (6) The spring of the miraculous help.
 (7) The mountain on which I seized the barbarians.

As is evident from the text, the first three inscriptions date from the beginning of the 15th century. The find no. 1 comes from the region of Ghurban khulustai, while nos. 2 and 3 were discovered in the region of Dzülget shanda (Tšaghan tšulu). The inscription no. 4, and apparently likewise no. 5 (judging by its handwriting and literary style), date from the end of the 17th century, and both were found in the region of Dzülget shanda. Nos. 6 and 7 are likewise carved on rocks in the region of Dzülget shanda; it is difficult to determine to what period they belong. I note here

[* 羽衛斯經. Prof. Alexeev reads 期 for 斯, hence this translation. A correct version would be: "Passing by here with Our bodyguard, ..." The text contains several misprints, which are here corrected according to the inscriptions as given in the illustrations.]

that the distance between both regions amounts to 125 kilometres as the crow flies, and that between them passes a broad road that has been built to serve as a link between China and North-Mongolia.

We know of three campaigns that the Chinese government has undertaken against the Mongols on their own territory during the reign of Yung-lo. The Chinese were completely defeated in the first one in 1409 led by Ch'iu Fu 丘福. The Chinese army was destroyed and nearly all the commanders were killed in battle with the Eastern Mongols. This fact provoked the Chinese government to such an extent that it was deemed necessary to re-establish authority by sending a new expedition under the command of the emperor himself in the spring of 1410. The emperor pursued Öldzeitü Temür Khan as far as the river Onon, where the latter was defeated. When the emperor on his return met with the bands of Aруктай, he annihilated them likewise in battle. Finally, Yung-lo undertook his third campaign in 1414; however, not any longer against the Eastern Mongols, but in alliance with them against the Oirats. In a decisive battle he defeated the leader of the latter, Maham, and pursued him as far as the river Tola. The operations undertaken by the Chinese against the Eastern Mongol bands of Aруктай took place towards the end of the reign of Yung-lo (1422-1424). They found their expression in the three campaigns in Inner Mongolia on the territory of the present provinces of Jehol and Chahar. All of these events are sufficiently well known and have been described extensively in the *Ming-shih* 明史 and *Tung-chien kang-mu* 通鑑綱目¹¹.

Until now, however, only Gerbillon has mentioned the inscriptions of Yung-lo in Dariganga which he had seen with his own eyes¹². But these are certainly not identical with the one erected by Yung-lo in 1424 in the region of Ta-lan na-mu-erh 答蘭納木兒 (apparently somewhere near Dolonor), as it is rendered in the *T'ung-chien kang-mu*¹³, and not discovered until now. The accurate indications of the inscriptions 1 and 2 permit us to give the year 1410 as the date which coincides with the 8th year of the reign of Yung-lo.

For two and a half centuries after the campaigns of Yung-lo, the Chinese government made no further attempt to penetrate thus far with its armies into the North-Mongolian steppe; only under the Manchu dynasty

11) Sm. D. Pokotilov, *Istoriya vostochnix mongolov v period dinastii Ming* ("History of the Eastern Mongols at the Time of the Ming Dynasty"), St Petersburg, 1893, pp. 35-38, 41-42; also J. M. de Moyriac de Mailla, *Histoire générale de la Chine*, Paris, 1779, t. X, pp. 167-168, 170-176, 178-183.

12) Du Halde, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

13) Mailla, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

can we observe a new advance of large Chinese armies. The first attack of real significance was the campaign of the emperor Kanghsi against the Oirats under Galdan boshuktu in 1696. The right wing of the Chinese army advanced against the Oirats from Manchuria, the left wing from the west to the river Ongin ghol and from there to the river Tola; but the centre of the army, led by the emperor, moved forward on the same road on which Yung-lo had once advanced. As the 35th year of the reign of Kanghsi coincides with the year 1696 of our era, the inscription discovered by me in Dzülget shanda was doubtlessly made during this campaign.

The contents of all the three above-mentioned inscriptions by Kanghsi in Dzun modo, Tono ula and Tšaghan tšulu were known for a long time from translations quoted by Timkovski and Popov¹⁴. These renderings give, however, only the approximate meaning of the original text. Apart from the quality of the translations, the character of the inscriptions is the same in all three cases. His own pompous praise of his heroic deeds, his boastful contempt for the Mongols, as though they were creatures of the lowest order, are exaggerations of the worst kind, typical of an emperor who introduced into Mongolia the principle of economic and political bondage for the next two centuries. But although the style appears to us only as a reflection of an epoch of Manchu absolutism, Kanghsi is the least justified to claim the military glory for the exploits of 1696. The supply of the central army which he commanded was most safely secured and it advanced at a comfortable pace through regions full of magnificent pastures. In the end, he did not participate in a single battle. The operations of 1696 were won only thanks to the decisive blow inflicted upon the Oirats by the Western Manchu army (on the left wing) in the region of Dzun modo on the river Tola, 60 kilometres east of the present Ulan batur khoto, the capital of the Mongolian People's Republic.

The commander of the Western army, Ta Chiang-chün Fiyanggô 大將軍費揚古 received the order to throw his army in the autumn of the same year through the most desolate part of the Gobi, namely the Ghalbün gobi of the former aimak Bogdo khan ula of the Mongolian People's Republic. A detailed description of his campaign is to be found in the work: "Short Memoirs of Yin Hua-hsing about his Campaign to the West" (提督殷化行西征紀略)¹⁵. As the high command was well informed about the desolate character of the region, it was ordered to establish in advance half-way between the rivers Huang-ho and Ongin ghol (in Khalka), i. e., in the very centre of the Gobi, a fortified base where

14) *Puteshestvie . . .*, v. III, pp. 233-234; *Meng-ku yu-mu-chi*, pp. 387-388.

15) Pozdneev, "Erdeni-yin erike", pp. 378-392.

“Since I have stored a sufficient quantity of provisions, I have ordered the soldiers to dig a moat 9 feet deep and to build a wall 6 feet high with gates on the north and south sides and with barricades that can be opened and closed”.

Naturally the garrison of this lonesome desert-fort could only live by importing food-stuffs. Therefore it was neglected after the conclusion of the operations against the Oirats, probably towards the end of the 18th century. But its strategical significance during the Manchu wars in Dzungaria must have been very great, because it secured the point of vantage for the invasion of West-Mongolia on the shortest route between the latter and the interior of China.

Doubtlessly the Chinese high command selected the roads through Dariganga in the 15th and 17th centuries. I have mentioned above, quoting from my work: “Travels through Dzungaria”¹⁸, that the conditions in the Mongolian People’s Republic are particularly favourable to vegetation, hence, likewise producing a permanent abundance of cattle. These factors were assuredly taken into consideration by the Chinese high command, the more so, as Dariganga could serve as a natural base for one of the shortest routes from the interior of China to Central Khalka.

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Translated by Rudolf Löwenthal 羅文達

18) Materialy MONK AN SSSR, no. 5, p. 41, etc.

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