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Cover calligraphy  Yan Zhenqing 颜真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover illustration  Herbert Allen Giles (source: Gems of Chinese Literature [Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1922])
A NOTE ON THE WORD BÖRTE IN THE
SECRET HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS

I. de Rachewiltz

The word börte occurs in the Secret History of the Mongols as a term qualifying the ancestral wolf (börte ċinō) and as the name of Činggis Qan’s first wife (Börte Ījin). The rendering of this term in the Chinese interlinear version and the sectional summary is ts’ang-se 色‘the colour of ts’ang (or ts’ang-coloured)’, but the Chinese gloss is ambiguous. The term ts’ang, just as its synonym čh’ing 青, designates in fact a number of colours, or shades of colours, from ‘sky-blue’ to ‘ash-grey’ (hence its extended meaning of ‘old’), to ‘green’ and ‘black’.

Our dictionaries of Written Mongolian register the word bortil, barto with the meanings of ‘speckled, spotted, mottled’, and some of them make börte equivalent to bortil. Cf. kh. bört ‘white, pale white (whitish) with dark grey spots (said of an animal)’.5

In view of this, it is not surprising that the translators of the Secret History have differed from the beginning in their interpretation and rendering of börte in the combination börte ċinō, which some regarded (and a few still do) as a proper name. A number of scholars—the following list is only representative—translate it as ‘blue’ (Naka, Kozin, Murakami, Even & Pop), ‘bluish’ (Mostaert, Cleaves), ‘blue-grey’ (Ligeti, de Rachewiltz, Taube), ‘grey’ (Haenisch, Pankratov, Wei, Ozawa, Kaluzynsky), ‘grey or grey-blue’ (Grousset), ‘brown’

Abbreviations:

bur. = Buriat
chin. = Chinese
kh. = Khalkha
mo. = Written (Script) Mongolian
tu. = Old Turkic

français (Kasan, 1844–49); several repr., p.1261a; Mongyol Kitad toli. Meng Han tzu-tien 蒙漢辭典 (Kóeqota, 1976), p.516c; F. D. Lessing, gen. ed., Mongolian-English dictionary, corr. repr. (Bloomington, 1982), p.128a. Lessing gives also the meaning of ‘grey’, but I think that this is taken directly from Kowalewski (op.cit., p.1260b). Lessing also equates bortii with börte, following Kowalewski (loc.cit.) and K. F. Golstunski, Mongol’sko-russkii slovar’ (St. Petersburg, 1893–1901), vol.II, p.283c. However, the equivalence börte = bortii is due to Kowalewski himself, who assumed that the word börte in the names Börte ċinu-a and Börte Įjin of Sārang Sečen’s Erdeni-yin tobći corresponded to mo. bōrū, witness his entry s.v. börte, bortii ‘bigarré, bariölé, tacheté, tigré: bōrte ċinu-a loup bigarré, gris’. Burté-tchino, l’un des ancêtres de Tchinguiz-khan’. See below, n.16.


1 See I. de Rachewiltz, Index to the Secret History of the Mongols, Uralic & Altaic Series 121 (Bloomington, 1972), p.13, 1.502 (§ 1); p.26, 1.1326 (§ 66) et passim (see ibid., p.200a).

2 Yuan-ch’ao pi-sbih 元朝秘史 (Su-pu ts’ung-k’ān 四部叢刊 ed., 3rd ser.) 1, 1a–b.


4 Cf. the Qorin nigetū tayilhuri toli (Chang-chia-k’ou [Kalgań], 1979), p.278a; J. E. Kowalewski, Dictionnaire mongol-russe-

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6 I assume the reader is acquainted with the well-known works of these authors, most of which are listed in the Bibliography and survey of studies on the Secret History of the Mongols compiled by D. Cerempiil and B. Servzav (Ulan Bator, 1990). The following are not cited in the above bibliography: M.-D. Even and R. Pop, tr., Histoire secrète des Mongols: Chronique mongole du XIIIe siècle (Paris, 1994); M. Taube, tr., Ghehime Geschichte der Mongolen. Herkunft, Leben und Aufstieg Chinggis Qans (Leipzig & Weimar, 1989); B.I. Pankratov, "Obrazcy perevodov iz 'Yuan'-ca bi-shi' (podgotovka k prechati i predislowie Yu. L. Kroyala)," in V. M. Solincev, gen. ed., Mongolica: K 750-letiyu "Soksrovennogo skazaniya" (Moscow, 1993), pp.103-24; Š. Gadamba (Gaadamba), Mongol-un, nituqa tobqiyan (Ulan Bator, 1990); H.-P. Vietze, "The title of the 'Secret History of the Mongols' presented to the 34th International Congress of Asian and North African Studies in Hong Kong 1993, Professor Hidehiro Okada contributed about the Chinese gloss cangse [= ts'ang-se—I.R.] or cang-colored on the Mongolian word børte, that cang, when used singly, means either 'dark green' or 'blue'. But when combined with a character meaning 'hair' fa 髮 or 'beard' ran 鬚, it means 'grey, ashy' and is glossed banbai 班白, literally 'spotted with white'. Since cangse in this passage refers to the fur of the wolf, the Chinese translator must have correctly understood the combination bo-r-te ci-no as meaning 'piebald wolf'. Anyway, all modern translators since Naka Michiyo, who give a 'blue-grey wolf' in their texts, have been misled by their insufficient knowledge of the Chinese language."

I think that Vietze’s conclusion is somewhat hasty. To begin with, he fails to mention that, in the passage in question, Gaadamba refers to the wolf as xox čono 'blue wolf', and not simply as čono 'wolf'. I think that Gaadamba has done so on purpose, indicating that the animal had a grey-speckled 'blue' coat, which is not the same as a wolf 'having grey-brown spots'. Secondly, any person with an elementary knowledge of Chinese, i.e. enough to use a Chinese dictionary, can find out that ts'ang (cang) in combination with hair, beard, temples and age has the meaning of 'grey' (> 'old') which is what 'spotted with white' really means. The reason why some translators have opted for 'blue-grey' rather than 'grey' is because a) the semantic spectrum of the expression ts'ang-se allows for it; and b) such a rendering is justified.

7 See E-erh-teng-t’ai 額爾登泰, Wu-yün-ta-lai 烏雲達貴, A-sa-la’u 阿薩拉圖, "Meng-kuyi-shib" 之《秘史·習釋》(Huhehot, 1980), p.159 (cf. Eldengtei, Ouyundalai, Asaraltu, "Mongol-yin, nituqa tocibyan-’u jarin uge’s-’in tahilbun[Kökeotwa, 1991], p.279); D. Čering-sodnam, "Mongol-yin, nituqa tocibyan-’u orčityuya tahilbun(Peking, 1993), p.272; U. Onon, tr., The history and the life of Chinggis Khan (the Secret History of the Mongols) (Leiden, 1990), p.2, n.4. The interpretation of børte as ‘wolf’ derives from the false equivalence børte = tu. bori ‘wolf’ which has been adopted by a number of Mongol scholars (Palladii [Kafarov]), 'grey-speckled blue' (Gaadamba), and 'piebald' (Vietze). Other scholars, especially from Mongolia and China, have correlated the term børte with börtü and with other Mongol and Turkic forms, obtaining definitions such as ‘spotted, speckled, mottled’ (Eldengtei, Ouyundalai & Asaraltu, Čering-sodnam), and even ‘wolf’ (most recently Onon).


9 It is also inaccurate to say that "cang, when used singly, means either ‘dark green’ or ‘blue’." These meanings are regularly found in combinations of cang (ts’ang) with other words, many examples of which are given in Morohashi, op. cit., s.v. (no. 31627).
by other considerations—historical and symbolic—to which I shall return presently. Thirdly, the rendering of ts’ang-se as ‘piebald’ is not correct, since this term properly applies to an animal that has a fur of two colours irregularly arranged, i.e. in patches (especially black and white) as in the case of a horse. When the Chinese translators wrote ts’ang-selang 蒼色狼, they certainly did not mean ‘a piebald wolf’, for this is not the meaning conveyed by ts’ang-se. The term ‘piebald’ in the extended figurative sense of ‘motley’ may render mo. bortu, barto (as Sastina has indeed done), but this meaning of bortu, barto cannot be reconciled with that of ts’ang-se, a gloss which, until proof of the contrary is adduced, we must accept as essentially correct. The solution to this problem must, therefore, be searched for elsewhere.

I think that certain remarks by Pelliot and by Mostaert can help us substantially to elucidate the problem of interpretation.

In his review of Riza Nour’s work Oughouz-namé, épopée turque, Pelliot commented on the expression kôk bôri, which Radlov10 had translated as ‘der blaue Wolf’, and Riza Nour as ‘loup gris’, as follows: “M.R.N. a raison, à mon avis, de traduire kôk bôri par ‘loup gris’ et non par ‘loup bleu’; kôk s’applique aux deux couleurs, et kôk bôri est encore aujourd’hui le nom usuel du loup gris au Turkestan chinois; mais en même temps, la traduction par ‘gris’ fait disparaître l’uniformité de la désignation pour cette couleur presque sacrée et consacrée; M.R.N. reviendra au ‘bleu’ quand il s’agira plus loin des poils et de la ‘crinière’ de l’animal.”11 And, in a later passage of the same review, Pelliot translates kôk as ‘gris’ when referring to the wolf’s hair and ‘crinière’.12 Turkic kôk does indeed mean ‘blue’ and ‘grey’, as well as ‘blue-grey’ and ‘green’, just as chin. ts’ang and cî’ing.13

Mostaert, for his part, noted with regard to börte: “Pour la qualification ‘bleuâtre’ donnée au loup, cf. l’expression Gö’kçö nox ‘chien bleu’, qui est un des nombreux termes désignant le loup chez les Ordos (Dict. ord., p.495b).”14 Cf. also kh. xoq noxo ‘wolf (euph.)’; bur. xiçe noxoi ‘grey dog’.

In view of the above, and the close affinity, if not outright identity, of the kôk bôri of the Turks and the börte činô of the Mongols, it seems to me that both the meanings of ‘grey’ and ‘blue’—as descriptive of the bluish-tinged ash-grey of animal furs—are definitely present in the word börte. Therefore, I am of the opinion that ‘blue-grey’ is still the best and most accurate rendering of börte. Does that mean that börte and mo. bôršû, bôršô are not related? On the contrary, I think that börte > bôršô through progressive assimilation,15 and that in the course of time the word underwent a semantic shift, from ‘blue-grey’ to ‘particoloured, variegated’. The definition ‘blue-grey’—as indeed plain ‘grey’—implicitly contains a duality and so the germ of a multiplicity of colours, hence the semantic change.16 If this is so, the reading bôršô should be discarded in favour of bôršô, as it has already been done by the compilers of the excellent Mongol Kitad toli.

And, returning to Činggis Qan’s wife, I would suggest that, faute de mieux, the nearest equivalent of her name in a Western language is probably Céleste.
Due to a printing irregularity, some of the Chinese characters in Ch’en Chih-mai’s article in the last issue of *East Asian History* were truncated. We therefore reproduce below all the characters in that article in order of their appearance:

**Page 35**

**Text**

*shān shuǐ huà* 山水畫

**Notes**

*Lin ch'iian kao chih* 林泉高致; *Kuo Ssu 郭思; Li t'ai ming huà chuî* 歷代名畫記; *Shān shuǐ chuîèb* 山水诀

**Page 36**

**Text**

*Wu Tao-tzu 吳道子; Wang Wei 王維; Li Ssu-hsün 李思訓; Wu Tao-hsüan 吳道玄; Chang Yen-yüan 張彦遠; Li Chao-tao 李昭道; T'ang Ming-huang 唐明皇; Hsüan-tsung 玄宗

**Notes**

*Ch'u au p'în lu 古畫品錄; Liu fa 六法; Ch'i i yün shêng tung 氣韻生動; Tsung Ping 宗炳*

**Page 37**

**Text**

*Chia-ling River 嘉陵江; Hsieh Ho 謝赫; Ku bua p'în lu 古畫品錄; Liu fa 六法; Ch'i i yün shêng tung 氣韻生動; Tsung Ping 宗炳*

**Notes**

*Chu Ch'ing-hsüan 朱景玄; T'ang ch'ao ming huà lu 唐朝名畫錄*

**Page 38**

**Text**

*ts'un 坳*

**Notes**

*Wang Hui 王維; Yün Shou-p'îng 恬壽平; T'ân Ch'ung-kuang 端重光; Hua ch'iüan 畫筌; Fang Hsün 方薰; Shan chêng chuî huâ lu 山靜居畫論; Shêng Tâ-shih 盛大士; Ch'i i shân wo yu lu 溪山臥遊錄; Chiang Chi 蒋驤; Ch'üan shên pi yao chuîèb 傳神祕要訣; Ku fa yung pi 骨法用筆; Ying wu hsâng hsing 應物象形; Sui lei fu ts'ai 隨類賦彩; Ch'êng ying wei chuîèb 經營位置; Ch'üan i mo chuîèb 傳移模寫; Tsou I-kuei 鄭一桂; T'ung Chi-ch'ang 董其昌; Mo Shih-lung 莫士龍; Ch'ien Yung 錢泳; Lü yüan huâ hsüèb 厲園畫學*

**Page 39**

**Text**

*An Ch'i 安岐; Chîng Hao 荊浩*

**Notes**

*Kung Hsien 龔賢; Hua chuîèb 畫訣*

**Page 40**

**Text**

*Lu Shan 廬山; Kuan T'ung 關仝*

**Notes**

*Pi fa chuî 筆法記; Hsüan bo hua p'îu 宣和畫譜*

**Page 41**

**Text**

*Chao K'uan-yîn 趙匡胤; T'ung Yüan 董源; Mi Fu 米芾; Hua chung chuî hong 畫中之龍*

**Notes**

*Hua shîb 畫史; T'ung Ch'i-ch'ang 董其昌; Hua yen 畫眼; Wang Yüan-ch'i 王元祁; Lu t'ai i hua k'ao 麗台題畫稿; Shen Kua 沈括; Meng ch'i pi t'an lu hua 幢溪筆談畫; Yün Kê 憨格; Yün Shou-p'îng 憨壽平; Nan t'ien hua pa 南田畫跋*

**Page 44**

**Text**

*Chü Jen 巨然; K'ai Yüan Temple 開元寺; Chîng-Kuan-Tung-Chu 荊關董巨
CORRIGENDA

Li Ch'êng 李成 text page 45
Chieh tzu yüan hua p'u 芥子園畫譜 notes

Fan K'uan 范寬; Ch'in Ling 秦嶺 text page 46
Hsü Tao-ning 許道寧 text page 47

Mi tien 米點; Mi Yu-jên 米友仁; Kao K'ê-kung 高克恭 text page 48
wên jên hua 文人畫

Hui-tsung 徽宗; K'ai-fêng 開封; chin tsu yu tai 金紫魚袋 text page 49
Chuang Tzu 莊子

Wang K'o-yü 汪珂玉; Shan bu wang lun hua 珊瑚網論畫 notes
Kuo Jo-hsü 郭若虛; Chien-t'ang River 錢塘江; Hsi Hu 西湖 text page 50

"China in the Eyes of French Intellectuals," East Asian History 12, pp.51–64
Captions to Figures 14 and 15 should be exchanged pages 61 and 62

"H. A. Giles versus Huang Chengyi," East Asian History 12, pp.135–57

Treaty," should read Treaty;
Sbijaku zasshi 99.7 (July 1986): 75–102 should read Sbijaku zasshi 99.7 (July 1990): 1–41
May 21, 1994 should read May 21, 1884

NHC (in two instances) should read NCH page 155, note 93