

GÉZA URAY

(1921—1991)

Stuck on a complicated problem in an Old Tibetan text, I automatically began to dial his phone number when I realized that what had been the natural thing to do for forty years would now be in vain.

Géza had already left the University when, in 1951, Ligeti started a new course in Tibetan. For the beginner, it seemed impossible to learn the bibliographical essentials needed to pass the first exams. Somebody mentioned Uray to me, and I visited him in the small room which he shared with an other colleague in the new Institute of Linguistics. He thoughtfully asked me about my plans and problems, and then offered to help with my first bibliography of Tibetan studies. Since then, bibliography and Tibetan studies has been our common interest.

Géza Uray was born in Budapest in 1921. His father wanted to see him become a professional officer, and he reluctantly enrolled at the Military Academy in 1939. Certainly, he was the last person one could picture lined up in a parade. In 1940, he transferred to the University, where he first studied law, but soon joined those attending the first of Ligeti's official lectures on Tibetan, begun in 1942 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Csoma's death. In 1944, he could not avoid the draft, and was for a time also a POW of the Russian Army. In 1947, he returned to the University where he first finished his law studies, and then having in his hands something his family considered adequate to live on, passed his exams in Tibetan, receiving the equivalent of an MA in 1948. His thesis was a great success, and Géza got a position at the Institute of Inner Asia. By then, the political climate, however, was such that in 1949 he had to leave the University; from then on, he worked as a fellow of the Linguistic Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. To tell the truth, the Institute was not much interested in his knowledge in Tibetology, but he turned out to be a very precise bibliographer and the Institute had to publish a bibliography of Hungarian Linguistics. So he became a staff member of the Bibliographical Department, and worked there until 1973 when, under the direction of Ferenc Tókei, a Workshop of Oriental Studies was set up. Uray moved to this department, and after that he had more time for his Tibetological studies. He retired in 1984 but remained there as a part-time consultant. In 1977 he was invited to Vienna to the *Institut für Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde* as *Gastdozent*. His lectures and his dedication to his students were much appreciated, and he got further invitations for the years 1981—82, 1986—87 and 1990—91.

In 1970, he defended his second dissertation, this time for the "Candidate of Sciences" degree, and in 1988, got the academic title "Doctor of

Sciences" from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for his contribution to Tibetan scholarship. The Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, made him a titular Associate Professor in 1979, and a titular Full Professor in 1990. He held special courses at the Chair of Inner Asian Studies, Budapest, and post-graduate courses for young students of Tibetology.

In August of 1991, a Festschrift was published in Vienna to celebrate his seventieth birthday. A "List of Géza Uray's works" appears on pp. XV—XXXIV. The List is not final, because some of his papers are still unpublished. It does, however, give a picture of his scholarly activities. The Tibetological work of G. Uray can be divided into roughly two parts. In the first period, he was more interested in the language. His first publication, in 1949, was in Hungarian, because this was the requirement for doctoral dissertations. There was, however, a two page English resumé, and his tables and examples were also accessible to readers who did not know Hungarian. His was the first attempt to classify Tibetan dialects along the lines of historical linguistics. Though the "List" mentions only two reviews, the work was cited by many other scholars as well. His paper on the Tibetan diminutive suffix $-u(rta > > rte'u$, where $-u < bu$) (List No. 7) was an important step in historical morphology, as was his other paper on the suffix $-e$ (List No. 12). In his paper on some problems of Tibetan verbal morphology (List No. 8), he made methodological remarks on the works of J. Durr and R. Shafer, and tried to investigate what type of help could be got from the Ancient Tibetan material, and from the historical approach. In his paper on duplication, gemination and triplication in Tibetan (List No. 16), he investigated a special feature of noun formation. In an important review article of M. Hermann's *Tibetische Dialekte von Amdo* (List No. 18), Uray reconsidered the system of East Tibetan dialects. He was confronted with the problems of the alphabetic order of the Tibetan alphabet and the origin of the letters ba and wa , and solved the history of these two letters impeccably, stating that wa was originally $a-chung + ba$. This paper had also important implications for the historical phonology of Tibetan (List No. 19).

The second period of Uray's work began with a paper on the four horns of Tibet according to the Royal Annals (List No. 32). He first investigated the occurrence of the Old Tibetan term ru "horn: a military and economic unit in the Old Tibetan Administration". What was originally intended to be a linguistic paper on an old Tibetan term became a study on early Tibetan military administration. To get his results, he had to deal with many philological problems in the Old Tibetan sources as well. For a time, a thorough, many-sided investigation of Old Tibetan words and terminology remained this basic approach. He wrote on the Old Tibetan expression $dra-ma drangs$ (List No. 36); on the titles and offices of the $brung-pas$ and great $mngans$ (List No. 37); on the composed social term $rgod-g-yung$ (List No. 61); on the administ-

rative term *khrom* (List No. 93); on the title *dbang-po* (List No. 120); on the *stong-sde*, the “thousand districts” (List No. 101); and on the geographical name *Nyag-nyid* (List No. 116). Pelliot, in a remark on a publication of F. W. Thomas’s, suggested that the word “*greng*” occurring in the Tun-hunag and Miran texts could be identical with the Chinese ethnic name Ch’iang. This would have had serious implications for the Chinese transcription of Early Tibetan, and also for historical phonology. Uray investigated all occurrences, and came to the conclusion that the Tibetan word had nothing to do with the Chinese ethnic name Ch’iang, but its original meaning was “man, the upright one” in contrast to “*dud* — beast, animal, the one bent down” (List No. 50).

Beside special papers dedicated to the clarification of the semantic field of special Old Tibetan words, as in his paper on the verb *bon* (List No. 47), he published a series of studies investigating the Old Tibetan historical sources and also their relationship to later Tibetan historical literature. Such are his notes on a chronological problem in the Old Tibetan Chronicle (List No. 54); on the traces of a narrative of the Old Tibetan Chronicle on Zing-po-rje in the Mkhas-pa’i dga’s-ton of Dpa’-bo gtsug-lag phreng-ba (List No. 55), and the narrative on Srong-btsan sgam-po and on Tibetan legislation and early state organization in the same Mkhas-pa’i dga’s-ton (List No. 67). This latter paper is a masterful study on the changes in Tibetan historical tradition. As major contributions to the study of Old Tibetan sources we can further mention his papers on the song of Queen Sad-mar-kar in the Old Tibetan Chronicle (List No. 66), on the Annals and their role in Old Tibetan bureaucracy (List Nos 69, 72), on the Annals of the ‘A-zha principality (List No. 88), and on the Tibetan chancellery’s practices in the local states of Kansu and Khotan under Tibetan domination (List No. 94). He also made a thorough study of the Tibetan documents from the post-Tibetan Tun-huang era (List No. 117). A good survey is his paper on the Old Tibetan sources dealing with the history of Central Asia up to 751 A.D. (List No. 89).

Tibet’s relationship with the West was discussed in his papers on the Gesar problem (List Nos 103, 108), and on Tibet’s connections with Nestorianism and Manicheism in the 8th–10th centuries (List No. 102).

His writings in Hungarian publications are mainly for the interested layman. His articles in the Hungarian lexicon of world literature (till letter 0) give a comprehensive overview of Tibetan literature and its most important authors. He wrote an excellent chapter on Tibetan writing (List No. 92) in a university textbook. Just as important were his book reviews, most of them published in *Acta Orientalia Hungarica*. In almost all of them, he not only reviewed the book in question, but also gave some of his findings, those which he did not elaborate in separate papers. After 1983, many of his papers were translated into Chinese.

Those who are acquainted with Uray's writing know that all of his papers reflect a profound knowledge of the sources and of the literature. His sober judgments on many a difficult and debated question of Old Tibetan philology made him a classic already in his lifetime. Many of us tried to persuade him to publish an introduction to the Old Tibetan sources. In 1987, at the Csoma de Kőrös Symposium, Sopron, he announced the publication of a work with the title *Einführung in die frühen tibetischen Quellen der Geschichte und Kultur Tibets bis zum Anfang des 11. Jhs.* He set to work on this, and in 1988 sent a typewritten version of the first part to some colleagues "for the purpose of information, and in the hope that they might contribute some helpful remarks and supply additions in whatever way possible" (from a letter signed by G. Uray and Ernst Steinkellner, December, 1988). This short version contains some very important chapters of the planned work. As far as I know, he worked on further chapters until his death. We can only hope that though the *Einführung* shall now remain a torso for ever, scholars of Tibetan studies will have access to the parts already finished.

In the very last minutes of his life in Vienna, he was handed the Uray-Festschrift (*Tibetan History and Language. Studies dedicated to Uray Géza on his seventieth birthday*, hrsg. von Ernst Steinkellner, Wien 1991, Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde. Heft 26, 538 p.). Thirty three authors wrote papers in the volume and many more signed the Tabula Gratuloria. His friends, colleagues and pupils were around him either physically or in spirit in his last days. His memory and his life's work will ever remain with us.

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