

DRAFT

CHAPTER 7

ZANABAZAR'S SECOND TRIP TO TIBET

Most traditional accounts do not mention Zanabazar's trip to Inner Mongolia to meet the Dalai Lama in early 1655. Skipping over this episode, they relate instead that in the summer of 1655 Zanabazar decided to make another trip to Tibet: ". . . I should like to accomplish my pious desire of again making obeisance to the Dalai Lama," Zanabazar announced. "and especially to the Holy Panchen Vajradhara Lama [Panchen Lama] and hear the initiations and empowerments and so on which I meditated on before." In preparation for the journey he decided to go into meditation for several months at his newly established retreat of Tövkhon near Erdene Zuu. In the autumn of 1655 he left for Tibet.

The *Rosary of White Lotus* claims that this trip to Lhasa was made "incognito" but offers few other details. If it was done incognito it is possible that Zanabazar announced that he was going in a very lengthy retreat and then after a few months in meditation in Mongolia quietly slipped off to Tibet with only a few escorts. We are offered no clues as to why Zanabazar chose to travel clandestinely. Indeed, at this point the traditional Mongolian accounts of Zanabazar's life become untethered from reality and assume an altogether fabulous character.

"Then taking six men as escorts," one account informs us, "he proceeded by forced stages continually on horseback and in seven days and nights arrived in the land of Tibet." The timeframe here is obviously erroneous. As noted earlier the fastest ever recorded trip from Örgöö to Lhasa was made in seventy-nine days by Avgan Dorzhiev in 1899-1900.

The speed of the journey was explained by the assertion that it was not accomplished by the traditional means of horse and camel. Instead, Zanabazar and his six traveling companions turned into turpans, the so-called "lama ducks" (*galuu* in Mongolian) common in Mongolia in sum-

merit, and flew to Tibet. Any number of miraculous events occurred during this flight south to Lhasa. Some of the more picturesque is paraphrased by Pozdnev from traditional accounts:

A Mongol of Sain Noyan aimak who was keeping watch over his grazing sheep saw seven turpans flying through the skies toward the southwest. Knowing that these birds are found only in Khalkha during the summer, the Mongol decided that now, in late autumn, only Buddhas or Bodhisattvas could be flying in the form of these ducks. He immediately herded his sheep home and said to his wife, 'A procession of Buddhas is coming, cook some meat right away and prepare a dombo of tea. I will go to entertain them.' The Mongol woman cooked tea and food, and her husband, taking these refreshments with him, set forth toward the southwest, the direction toward which the birds had flown. It had already become dark when he saw that there were seven persons whom he did not know sitting on the open and level steppe. Coming up to them, he told them of his vision, what he had surmised, and of his decision to entertain the Buddhas, and then he concluded this tale by saying that insomuch as the number of wayfarers who were sitting here coincided with the number of flying birds, he would therefore make them a present of his refreshments. The wayfarers accepted the food which had been brought to them, and the Gegen (it was he and his lamas) gave the cordial Mongol a handful of flour as a return gift and said: 'put this in your sacrificial cup used to summon happiness and thereafter you will be happy for all time.' This prophecy was wholly fulfilled, and the descendants of this Sain Noyan man live as rich men to this very day.

Yet again:

On the way, of course, the Gegen was protected by the mighty choijons (protective genii), but, nevertheless, the trip was not managed without adventure. As they camped for the night at the Tarya-khulusun landmark, the wayfarers had all of their horses stolen. When they arose in the morning and the time for their departure was already approaching, they reported the loss to the Gegen. 'I am protected by a large number of Choijins, but what was Jamsaran [one of his traveling companions] doing?!' cried the vexed Gegen, and then he ordered his servants to go searching toward the east. At that same moment and, in fact, from the east a cloud of dust arose and began to approach nearer. These were the Gegen's seven horses galloping, and there were two thieves bound by their hair to the horses' tails. The Gegen praised Jamsaran for his punctual delivery of what was lost and continued farther on his way."

After a procession of such adventures Zanabazar and company arrived in Tibet. As on his first trip he supposedly went first to Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse to see the Panchen Lama, although the usual caravan route from Mongolia culminated in Lhasa. Unfortunately, according

to the traditional account, the Panchen Lama had died three days before Zanabazar's arrival. "Oh how unhappy I am, cried out Zanabazar, "Knowing my teacher, Vajra-dhara, to be of great age, I purposely made great haste that I might bow to him and acquire the rest of the precepts which I was not able to get before from his spiritual treasure house."

Again this is an erroneous version of the events. The First Panchen Lama, Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltsen, was alive and kicking in 1655-56 and did not actually transmigrate until 1662. It is not at all clear why the authors of the traditional Mongolian accounts chose to insert here a fictional version of Zanabazar's meeting with the Panchen Lama. Perhaps they simply wanted to surround Zanabazar's trip with as much of an aura of mystery and miracles as possible. If this is the case they did not disappoint. After Zanabazar set forth a mandala in front of the body of the deceased Panchen Lama the latter's face became animated; when Zanabazar set forth a second and a third mandala the Panchen Lama began to speak: "I should not have returned," announced the revived Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltsen, "but once it became known to me that thou didst come from a far land and art wasting away in such sorrow, I resolved to come back." The Panchen Lama then delivered a sermon and instructed Zanabazar on the Yamantaka Tantra and numerous other subjects. The *Rosary of White Lotus*, which judiciously omits the whole seven-days-to-Tibet avian journey and the miraculous revivification of the Panchen Lama, says only that Zanabazar requested teachings from both the "Royal Father and Son" (Panchen and Dalai lamas) and "offered great prayers for the long life of the All-knowing Panchen."

According again to traditional sources, the Panchen Lama asked Zanabazar if many people on Mongolia had been reincarnated in the higher spheres of the Buddhist universe. Zanabazar opined that not many were born into higher realms nor were many reborn into lower realms as animals, pretas, and so on; most were reborn as human beings. The Panchen Lama then told Zanabazar that he should teach the Khalkh Mongols to recite the prayer known as *Burilbi Lhabum*. Pozdneev, writing in the early 1890s, reported, "Modern lamas affirm on this subject that it was owing to just this prayer that Buddhism flowered in Khalkha to such an extent that the Khalkhas now received not only ordination as bodhisattvas in their lifetime, but also rebirth as real bodhisattvas on their death." Unfortunately I have not been able to identify this prayer further, nor to determine if it is still on use today.

Taking his leave of the Panchen Lama, Zanabazar proceeded to Lhasa for audiences with the Dalai Lama. Other than the fact that Zanabazar received unspecified teachings from the Dalai Lama the *Rosary of White Lotus* adds nothing more about this, the second, or perhaps third, of Zanabazar's visits with the Great Fifth. Other accounts say simply that Zanabazar received precepts and dedications from the Dalai Lama and that the latter gave Zanabazar permission to visit any monastery in Tibet. What monasteries he may have visited is unknown, but apparently he made an impression while traveling through Tibet, since we are told that a whole host of legends, many of them no less miraculous than the Mongolian versions, eventually accrued among Tibetans about this, Zanabazar's second sojourn in Tibet.

There is one event which supposedly took place in Lhasa while Zanabazar was there that is not mentioned in any other traditional accounts but is nevertheless become a part of the oral history of the Bogd Gegeen which has survived down to the present day. This is his alleged meeting in the Tibetan capital with Galdan, the son of Baatar Khongtaiji, the chieftain of the Choros Oirat.

The people known as the Oirat, or Western Mongols, consisted of four main tribes, the Choros, Dörböt, Torgut, and Khoshot. As mentioned earlier, Boibeghus Baatar, head of the Khoshot, had converted to Buddhism in 1620 and other Oirat rulers soon followed. It was Boibeghus Baatar's brother Güüsh Khan who had defeated the King of Tsang and helped the 5th Dalai Lama assume both spiritual and temporal power in Tibet. Although the Khoshot retained great influence because of their role as "Protectors of Tibet", in the political realm they were soon out shadowed by the Choros, who in the 1620 and early 1630s were led by the charismatic warlord Khara Khula. Based just west of the Altai in the upper Irtysh River–Lake Zaisan–Tarbagatai Mountains region, Khara Khula attempted to rally around him the Western Mongol tribes who had earlier followed the Oirat khan Esen (r. 1439–1455) and like Esen entertained dreams of reuniting all the tradition Mongol peoples, including the Khalkh, or Eastern Mongols.

Following the death of Khara Khula in 1634 his son Baatar Khongtaiji organized what would become known as the Zungarian Khanate (The name derives from the Mongol *zuungar*, or "left hand", or "eastern side"; although the Oirat dwelt in the west end of the Mongol lands, the Choros

tribe was the easternmost tribe of the Oirat confederation and thus on the “left hand” looking southward, as the Mongols always oriented themselves.) Setting out on an ambition campaign of nation-building activities, he established a permanent capital city called Kubakserai on the Imil River and encouraged trade, agriculture, and small-scale industries like metal-crafting. He defeated the Kazakh tribesmen to his west, sponsored an invasion of Tibet under the leadership of Güüş Khan which in an attempt to depose the last king of Tibet and install the Dalai Lama as both the spiritual and secular leader of the country, and instituted extensive diplomatic and trade relations with the Russians to his north in Siberia. He had every intention of building a permanent, lasting nation which would transcend the ephemeral groupings and temporary alliances typical of nomadic peoples.

His nation-building was legitimized by the Dalai Lama, who in 1635 gave Baatar Khongtaiji the title of *Yerdyen* and recognized him as the undisputed leader of the Oirats. The Dalai Lama was motivated in part by a desire to keep the Oirats firmly in the Buddhist camp. As the Oirats expanded westward they became more in more in contact with followers of Islam. As one historian points out, “The West Mongols were located on the border between the Islamic world of West Asia and the Buddhist sphere of East Asia. In the 1630s, it was still an open question as to which way the Oirats would go, whether west to become part of Moslem culture or east to become part of the Buddhist sphere of East Asia. By granting this title to Batur [Baatar Khongtaiji] and thus taking his side in the internal politics of the Oirat tribes, the Dalai Lama hoped to acquire a forceful partisan for the Buddhist cause.”

Recognized as the khan of the Oirats, Baatar Khongtaiji then attempted to unite all the Mongols. By the end of the 1630s the Ming Dynasty was collapsing and he sensed that a power vacuum was about to develop in Inner Asia. The Mongols, he believed, could fill this vacuum under his leadership. In 1640 he convoked an assembly of most of the Mongol peoples of Asia and proposed a pan-Mongolian confederation which would form a united front against all external enemies including the Chinese, Manchus, and Russians and settle all internal differences in a peaceful manner. The meeting was held in early August at a place called Ulaan Buraa, near the Tarbagatai Mountains on the border between what is now the Xinjiang province of China and Kyrgyzstan. Present were representatives of the various tribes of the Zungarian confederation, including Güüş Khan

of the Khoshot Mongols, whose daughter Baatar Khongtaiji had married.

From the eastern end of the Mongol world came the Tüsheet Khan Gombodorj—Zanabazar's father—the Zasagt Khan Subadai, various princes of the house of Setsen Khan, and other Khalkh leaders. Zanabazar, who had been named the Bogd Gegeen a year earlier, would have been almost five years old at the time. There is no indication that he himself attended the meeting. From the western reaches of the Mongol world came the Torgut from the steppes of the lower Volga River. The attendees, under the leadership of Baatar Khongtaiji, attempted to draft a code or treaty which would provide mutual protection to both the Zungarians and the Khalkh, guarantee the free movement of peoples between the various Mongol lands, and defend the smaller tribes against foreign aggression.

Buddhism, under the auspices of the Dalai Lama, was to be the unifying thread in this new coalition. That is why it was so important to put the Dalai Lama on the throne of Tibet with the Mongols nominally in charge. It was in this context that Baatar Khongtaiji had sponsored the earlier Mongol incursions into Tibet under the leadership of Güüsh Khan. As we have seen, two years later in 1642, Güüsh Khan finally deposed the last king of Tibet and installed the Dalai Lama as both the spiritual and secular leader of the country. The Dalai Lama now looked to the Mongols for support in the political realm, while the Mongols, and particularly the Zungar Khanate, could count on the blessings of the great spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism. It was a relationship beneficial to both.

The 1640 convocation was perhaps the last viable attempt to create a Pan-Buddhist world stretching from the Siberian taiga in the north to the crest of the Himalayas in the south, and from the Khingan Mountain in the east to the Volga River in the west. It was also perhaps the last chance to unite the Mongols into one great nation. As it turned out, long-standing disagreements among the various Mongol factions prevented the coalescence of the proposed union. For starters, the Zungarians felt that they themselves, as a rising power in Central Asia and the sponsors of Buddhism under the Dalai Lama, should play the leading role in the coalition, while the Khalkh still claimed that as the legitimate Chingisids, the descendants of Chingis Khan, they were the rightful leaders of the Mongol world. As for religion, they had their own little five-year old boy, Zanabazar, who they hoped would become the leader of Buddhism in country of the Khalkh.



Galdan, one of Baatar Khongtaiji's twelve sons, and the grandson of Güüsh Khan on his mother's side, was born in 1644. By then it had become a custom among the Oirat nobility to send some of their sons to Tibet to study and perhaps became monks. Galdan, who his father had marked out for a religious vocation, was dispatched to Tibet when he was six or seven. As a contribution to the Dalai Lama, Galdan's father had sent along a gift of 110,000 taels (one tael equals roughly one ounce) of silver and a hefty amount of gold which was intended to be used for gilding ganjirs, the stupa-shaped ornaments found on the roofs of temples. According to the *Rosary of White Lotus* Galdan was soon recognized as an incarnate lama of Wensa Monastery, which it places about twenty miles east of Shigatse.

Galdan was accompanied by a Oirat named Namkhajantsan (1599–1662), who later became better-known by his title Zaya Pandita. Namkhajantsan first came to Tibet at the age of nineteen. He was ordained by the Dalai Lama himself and ended up staying in Tibet for eighteen years. He then apparently went back to Zungaria and later returned with Galdan. A formidable polymathic scholar, he became famous for inventing the so-called "Clear Script" (tod bichig), a modification on the Uighur script already in use by the Mongols. Over 2000 manuscripts on religious subjects written in Clear Script still exist in the libraries of Ulaan Baatar, including forty-seven by Zaya Pandita himself composed between 1652 and 1662. He is probably the best known of Oirat Buddhists scholars.

Details of Galdan's early life in Tibet and his training in Buddhism are lacking. It is unclear if he was already in Tibet when Zanabazar made his first trip there in 1650–51 but he was certainly there in 1655 when Zanabazar came on his second trip. As noted, the Mongolian novices and monks who came to Lhasa tended to stay at Drepung, where a special college would eventually be set up for their studies. Whether Gandan studied here or at Wensa near Shigatse is unknown, but in either case it not unlikely that these two scions of the most prominent families in the Mongol world, whose fathers had in fact met at the 1640 congress held at Ulaan Burgaa, would come to know each other. Zanabazar, the Sixteenth Jebtsun Dampa and first Bogd Gegeen of Mongolia, was already an acknowledged leader of Buddhism in Mongolia. Galdan was the son of perhaps the most powerful Mongol of the time and the only one who entertained visions of a Pan-Mongol world stretching from the Khingan

Mountains of Manchuria to the Volga River in Europe. While Zanabazar would seem to have been the dominant figure in religion, Galdan, as his birthright, might well have thought himself as Zanabazar's superior in the secular realm. Did some jealousy or animosity between the two seed itself at this time? Was personal animosity the root cause of the vicious war which eventually broke out between the eastern and western Mongols, in which Zanabazar and Galdan would play the leading roles, and which would result in the almost total destruction of the Zungarians and the subjugation of the Khalkh by the Qing Dynasty of China? We can only speculate, but as we will see many of Galdan's later actions bore the mark of a personal vendetta against Zanabazar.

None of the tradition histories nor the *Rosary of White Lotuses* mention a meeting between Zanabazar and Galdan in Tibet. Nevertheless, many Mongolians that I have spoken to believed that they did meet and that the seeds of animosity between the two were sown at this time. When I questioned these people about where they heard about Zanabazar and Galdan in Tibet most said something along the lines of "Oh, everybody knows that happened." A few, however, remembered that they read about this episode in a novel by S. Erdene entitled *Zanabazar*, published in Ulaan Baatar in 1967. This novel, although long out of print, remains very popular with Mongolian who are able to get their hands on it (it has recently been reprinted and is available once again in bookstores), and I have been assured that it has great literary merit. Since it is a novel, it contains no bibliography or notes about the sources of the Erdene's information about Zanabazar. Although it hews to the basic outline of Zanabazar's life, it contains a lot of material, especially large chunks of dialogue between Zanabazar and various other protagonists, obviously invented by the novelist.

Included in the novel is a rather lengthy section about Zanabazar and Galdan in Lhasa. According to our novelist this encounter happened during Zanabazar's second trip to Tibet in the years 1655–56. The ten-year old Galdan was living in a Mongolian ger along the Kyichu River in Lhasa, not far from the Dalai Lama's summer camp. Although Zanabazar is now a young man of nineteen or twenty, the precocious boy Galdan calls him by the nickname "Zana" and makes fun of his big ears (a notable feature on all portraits and statues of Zanabazar).

"It's good that you'll be the head of Khalkh, and I'll be the head of

Oirat and lead all the nations of Mongolia in a virtuous way, Galdan tells Zanabazar. "Zaya bagsh [Zaya Pandita] want to proclaim me as 'Boshigt,' the religious leader of the Oirat next year. I heard he negotiated it with the Dalai Lama [The Dalai Lama did eventually give Galdan this title, but not until 1679]. So it is not pointless that we met here, is it, Brother Bogd?"

The two young scions are both aware of the brewing conflict between the Khalkh and the Oirat, but according to our novelist:

Zanabazar and Galdan don't seem to care, they keep up their relationship of being brothers. The Dalai lama knows the situation going on behind their backs, but he keeps silent, pretending that the conflict between Khalkh and Oirat is not his affair. But since Zanabazar is already mature enough to consider matters of state and the religion, he is quite concerned about it and keeps his ears open to what is going on back in Mongolia. He wants to know Dalai Lama's attitude towards this issue [the relationship between the Khalkh and the Oirat] and he is waiting for convenient time to talk with him about what the state and religion of Mongolia is going to be like in the future. So he asks himself the question, 'Who are we? [himself and Galdan]. If we truly have a fate connected to state and religious affairs, will our seats will be same some day or will one of them will be lower or higher? What happens in the future will be a result of the fact that we were both the disciples of a same person [the Dalai Lama] and were once brothers in the Red Palace of the Potala.

The two spent considerable more time together, visiting the Dalai Lama at the Potala and attending the Monlam, the great prayer festival held during the Lunar New Year in Lhasa. One day they are out riding horses on the steppe near Lhasa. The novelist continues:

Galdan looked wonderful on his horse, a snow-white Arabian, and his blue-sky colored cloak was fluttering in the wind. Zanabazar looks at Galdan and thinks, "You are a son of a khan who wants himself to be khan of all the Mongols. Maybe you're just spoiled and pampered. But who knows? Chingis Khan set off on his horse when he was around ten years old. Now the times are different, unfortunately. The fate of Mongolia is not only in our hands but also in the hands of those in the Potala in Lhasa and in the palaces of Beijing."

Soon they pass by a camp of beggars gathered around a bonfire. One old toothless, one eyed man shouts at them:

"Hey! You Mongolian Bogds! Look at me. I am the Red Amulet of Utai [?] that turns into a gorgon in the hereafter. Look at me. Let me tell you your fortune. Both of you will forget your Mongolia because you keep drinking

the piss of the Dalai Lama. Now both of you are scarecrows with Mongolian skin and Tibetan flesh. Your virtuousness has already left you behind. You will go back to your country carrying the black sin of the Tibetans. Are you listening to me? So you will make Mongolians carry the black sin and tread a bloody road of great distress. Oh, you poor boys," he shouted at them in Mongolian. Galdan's two followers and Zanabazar's eunuchs run up and hit the beggar, knocking him to the ground. Galdan gave Zanabazar a very frightened look. He was quite shocked. "What did he say?, Brother Bogd? What disgusting thing did he say?" Galdan asked with a shaking voice. Zanabazar did not seem to care, he just stared into the light of the bonfire. "Don't worry," he said, It's just a mad man talking nonsense."

Zanabazar was more disturbed by the beggar's prophesy than he liked to admit. Later he ruminates:

The rivalry between people, aimags, even brothers will lead us all down a bloody road. Now the only way to save my people is to spread Buddhism and thereby tame the jealousy and revenge. That is why I have come here to study with the Dalai Lama. But I have learned all that I can in Tibet . . . Therefore, I need to go back to Mongolia as soon as possible. When I am back to my country, I will build temples, and make Erdene Zuu become like Kumbum [monastery near present-day Xining which he had visited earlier] at the very least, if I cannot make it become like Lhasa. Khalkh has the wealth and the means to do this. Khalkh can afford it. A new era will abolish the suffer of the wars of many generations, direct the heart of people who want a peaceful life and lead them on in a virtuous path. There will be temples and monasteries rich with offerings and donations and thousands of disciples of Buddha will flourish in the vast area of Khalkh. Dear Buddha! Please give me the heart and intelligence needed to expand the road of virtuousness and lead the people of Mongolia!

Zanabazar and his party leave Lhasa on the old caravan route to Mongolia. At Go La, the first pass north of Lhasa, he stops and turns around for his last look at Lhasa. Just then Galdan and his entourage ride up to say goodbye and wish him a successful journey. Of course, we do not know if these events actually took place, or were just imagined by the novelist. If the two did see each other at Go La it would have been their last friendly meeting. Zanabazar and Galdan would encounter each other in later years, this time on the well-documented historical stage, and the conflict between the two would have tragic consequences for the people of Mongolia.

As mentioned, none of the traditional accounts mention the alleged meeting between Zanabazar and Galdan in Tibet, nor do they offer any

details of Zanabazar's return trip to Mongolia other than the fact that he arrived back in late autumn of 1656. The trip was deemed a success, however, in large part due to the numerous miraculous events which supposedly took place both on the way to Tibet and while visiting the Panchen Lama. These legends, Pozdneev tells us, "had in their time an enormous influence on the minds of the superstitious Mongols and thus we are inclined to trust the biography of the Ondür-gegen which states that the Khalkhas, on hearing about the circumstances of this trip made by their hutukhtu to Tibet, began to venerate the hutukhtu and pray to him far more than they had before."