

Paper presented at

*International Conference on Central Eurasian Studies: Past, Present, Future*, University of Maltepe, Istanbul, 17–19 March 2009. To appear in conference proceedings edited by Dr. Guljanat Kurmangaliyeva Ercilasun et al.

## The Turkological Legacy of the Swedish Diplomat Gunnar Jarring

by

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# The Turkological Legacy of the Swedish Diplomat Gunnar Jarring

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The Swedish Turkologist and Ambassador Gunnar Jarring (1907–2002) had two remarkable careers and he is well known for both of them in their respective contexts. During his early years of academic studies at the University of Lund, Jarring received a thorough training – first in Sanskrit and Slavic languages, later in Turkic languages. His choice of specialization in 1929 led him to a period of research in Kashgar in present-day Xinjiang, where he developed his life-long devotion to the Uighur language and culture. His linguistic competence was in fact also decisive for his second career – that as a diplomat. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War his knowledge of languages not so common in Sweden in the 1940s brought him first into the intelligence service of the Swedish army and subsequently into formal diplomatic service. During the following years Gunnar Jarring was to hold some of the most prestigious diplomatic posts of his country, among others New Delhi, Washington, the United Nations and Moscow. He was a UN mediator in the Kashmir conflict in the 1950s and in the Middle East a decade later. In 1971 he was a candidate for the post of Secretary General of the UN, in an election he lost by a few votes to Kurt Waldheim.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Jarring Collection of Central Asian Publications at Stockholm University**

Besides his scholarly work on Uighur lexicography, folk literature and ethnology, Gunnar Jarring took a keen interest in the Central Asian region as a whole, from a linguistic and literary point of view as well as an historical and political one. A large part of his vast library consisted of publications on Central Asia, both from the region itself and from other parts of the world, not least the former Soviet Union, where Jarring was Ambassador from 1964 to 1973. His collection of Central Asia publications was finally donated to the Swedish Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, which had Ambassador Jarring among its fellows. The collection consists of almost 5000 volumes, a number of manuscripts, catalogues and maps as well as more than 3000 offprints, most of which were signed by their authors with dedication inscriptions to their colleague and friend, Ambassador or Professor Jarring.

A few years before Jarring passed away, this collection was upon his own request deposited at the University of Stockholm, where it was catalogued and prepared to become the core of The Gunnar Jarring Library inaugurated on 12 October 2007 in memory of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Gunnar Jarring. For this occasion, a bibliography of a particularly precious part of the Jarring Collection was published, *A Bibliography of Literature on Journeys and Explorers in Asia in the Gunnar Jarring Library at Stockholm University* (Schlyter, 2007). All of the most renowned accounts of expeditions to Central Asia from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries can be found here, along with a great number of less known accounts, some of which are very rare and accessible at just a few or perhaps even no other libraries in the world. Besides the travelogues and related literature, linguistic treatises and dictionaries for many Central Asian languages can also be found in the collection, as well as books on history, religion, literature and several other disciplines (see Figures 1 and 2 below).

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<sup>1</sup> This introductory paragraph is based on a speech delivered by Professor Staffan Rosén, Stockholm, on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Gunnar Jarring; see Schlyter, 2008:213–214.

*Gunnar Jarring*

Секретно.

*Изъ Превокальмъ сего въ  
Николаю Степановичу  
Петрову*

**ОТЧЕТЪ**

*авт.*

*Автора*

о поездкѣ въ Кашгаръ и южную Кашгарію въ 1885 году *24/11 88г.*

Старшаго Чиновника особыхъ порученій при Военномъ  
Губернаторѣ Ферганской Области

Поручика В. Л. ГРОНБЧЕВСКАГО.

(ПЕЧАТАЕТСЯ НА ПРАВАХЪ РУКОПИСИ).

*Is a Russian translation of the original  
(Central Asian Review Vol. IV, 1913)*

Г. Н. Маргеланъ,

*1298*

Fig. 1. The secret report of a journey to the Kashgar region by Lieutenant Gronbchevskiy in the year 1885. This particular copy of the published version once belonged to Ambassador Jarring and is now to be found in the Gunnar Jarring Library at Stockholm University.

G. John Ramstedt

# МОНГОЛЬСКО-РУССКІЙ СЛОВАРЬ,

СОСТАВЛЕННЫЙ

ПРОФЕССОРОМЪ С-ПЕТЕРБУРГСКАГО УНИВЕРСИТЕТА

К.В. ГОЛІСТУНСКИМЪ.

ТОМЪ ПЕРВЫЙ.

С-ПЕТЕРБУРГЪ.

1895 г.

Лит. А. Иконникова Риббикал эл. 9.

Fig. 2. One of the oldest and rarest dictionaries in the Gunnar Jarring Collection at Stockholm University is this Mongolian-Russian Dictionary compiled by Professor Golstunskiy. Its first owner was the Swedish-Finnish scholar of Altaic linguistics Gustaf John Ramstedt (1873–1950).

## Gunnar Jarring's Last Manuscript

Ambassador Jarring's last contribution to his own collection of Central Asia publications at the University of Stockholm was his handwritten manuscript for the second edition of *An Eastern Turki–English Dialect Dictionary*. This piece of work then marks the end point of Jarring's research – three quarters of a century long – on the language and culture of the Turks. This manuscript together with his own copies of references for his dictionary, sometimes with notes by Jarring himself, gives us a unique chance to follow the history and development of his career as a Turkologist and Central Asia specialist.

Ever since the first edition of this dictionary was published (Jarring, 1964), Gunnar Jarring seems to have been working constantly on a revised and substantially enlarged version of this dictionary. He was engaged in this enterprise, especially after his retirement from the Swedish Foreign Ministry in 1973, till the very last year of his life, at the age of 94. During the same period he published several minor works containing edited texts in literary Uighur and to an even greater extent in oral varieties of this language, together with translations, commentaries and glossaries. The last publication in his life-time appeared on the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth: *Central Asian Turkic Place-Names* (Jarring, 1997) – a dictionary of more than 500 pages compiled on the basis of a great number of reports from the Sven Hedin expeditions, Gunnar Jarring's own transcriptions of Eastern Turki dialect material, and many of the works listed in the aforementioned bibliography of reports on expeditions eastward in Asia. All of these late publications of his Gunnar Jarring employed extensively as references in his manuscript of the second edition of the Eastern Turki dialect dictionary, such as *The Moen Collection of Eastern Turki Proverbs and Popular Sayings* (Jarring, 1985) and *Garments from Top to Toe* (Jarring, 1992), just to mention two such minor monographs often quoted in the dictionary.

In 1964 Jarring called his dictionary an “index” to his collection of Eastern Turki oral texts published in four volumes between 1946 and 1951 (Jarring, 1946–1951). A number of other texts were included as well. In the same preface he commented that it had been his intention to take into account all published Eastern Turki texts and to include the total word material of all these texts. However, lack of time had prevented him from doing so, he wrote, and for this reason he had decided to draw exclusively on his own material.

Thus, ever since the time he was working on the first version of his dictionary, Jarring had had a desire to produce the ultimate exhaustive dictionary of Eastern Turki, or as he also commented in the 1964 preface, the Eastern Turki language up until the mid 1930s – the language of a non-modernized society. This desire apparently never left him. During the last thirty years of his life he worked constantly on this project and produced hundreds and thousands of handwritten pages, all of which are now part of the Gunnar Jarring Library in Stockholm.

Jarring finished his manuscript and could have it all typed before he died. He also took an active part in the preparations for the transfer of the files and printouts to the Department of Central Asian Studies in Stockholm for the final editing and publishing of the manuscript. However, he left his manuscript without a preface or any other commentary to this huge corpus of lexical material. One of the initial tasks in our final editing of the dictionary was to identify the sources that Jarring refers to, sometimes by means of rather opaque acronyms or just a surname leaving it to the editor to make up the rest. Much guidance could, however, be found from earlier publications by Jarring, even though the same acronym or abbreviation was not always used.

The new edition of *An Eastern Turki–English Dialect Dictionary* is not only a linguistic treasure. It is as much a treasure of cultural history, providing us with information from a great number of sources not so easily accessible. For example, let us look up the word *burka* – a word that is nowadays mostly heard of in connection with women in Afghanistan. Did the *burka* ever appear among the Uighurs, and if so, when and under what circumstances did it appear? In his manuscript for the new extended edition of the Eastern Turki dialect dictionary, Jarring quotes an article published in 1871 in the British *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*. The entire lexical entry reads as follows:

*burka* veil; *burkha* a sort of sack, which covers them (the women) from head to foot, a piece of muslin, with eyeholes, being used as a cover for the face. This is a new custom in Kashgar, introduced by the order of Atalik, which the women particularly dislike (Montgomerie, Journal R. Geogr. Soc. 41 (1871), p. 178); cf. WB<sup>2</sup> IV:1890  
*bürkä* Schleier

The author of the article in the first reference, Major Montgomerie, presents a report of a journey from Kabul to Kashgar at the end of the 1860s – an expedition that for various reasons did not return until two years later. The traveller was not Montgomerie himself but a Turkic-Persian immigrant to India. The “Mirza”, as he was called, had been employed by the British before. By the end of 1867 he was sent out on this new mission to Kashgar. The “atalik” mentioned in this quotation was Yaqub Beg – the ruler of an Islamic state in Eastern Turkestan for about ten years, from 1866 to 1877. Yaqub Beg was a strict and demanding Islamic leader who put the Islamic law into force and who did not allow women to be unveiled outdoors.

The word *burka* cannot be found as an entry in the first, 1964 edition of Jarring’s lexicon. Nor is there any entry for *atalíq*. *Jaqob* as a proper name is there as well as *beg*. However, there is no information about Yaqub Beg. The new extended edition, on the other hand, has them all – *burka*, *atalíq* and *Yaqub Beg*. We even find Yaqub Beg’s full title: *atalíq gha:zí* – a title which according to Montgomerie had been given to Yaqub Beg by the Emir of Bukhara.

Before we arrive at *burka* in this dictionary, we find the word *burgut*, where Jarring refers to *birgut/burgut*, interpreted as “the golden eagle” (*Aquila chryseatus*) in a frequently quoted source written as SH followed by a number for page. SH stands for Robert Barkley Shaw, presented as “Political Agent, late on special duty at Kashghar, Gold Medallist, Royal Geographical Society” in his work *A Sketch of the Turki Language as spoken in Eastern Turkistan (Kashghar and Yarkand)*, published in two parts, one in 1878 and the other in 1880. It is Part 2 of this work, *The Vocabulary*, that is being referred to by capital SH in the new version of Jarring’s Eastern Turki dialect dictionary. The political agent Shaw from the Royal Geographical Society apparently took a special interest in plants and animals. There are many of them in his vocabulary. Further down under the entry *burgut* in the new Jarring edition, we find the same Shaw, however, this time spelled out as Shaw, since the book referred to in this case is not the aforementioned *A Sketch of the Turki Language* but *Visits to High Tartary, Yarkand, and Kashghar (Formerly Chinese Tartary) and Return Journey over the Karakoram Pass*, published for the first time in 1871, with a reprint in 1984. In Shaw’s travel narrative, Jarring has spotted an interesting passage about a *burgut* or “birkoot”, as it is spelled there. This time Jarring does not write out the particular passage from Shaw’s *Visits* ...:

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2 WB stands for W. Radloff, *Versuch eines Wörterbuches der Türk-Dialecte*, 1893–1911.

At one of these places I was shown a newly-caught black eagle of the sort called 'Birkoot,' which are trained to catch antelope and deer as falcons do birds. The unfortunate creature was hooded, and wrapped up, wings, talons and all, in a sheep-skin and this bundle was suspended (head downwards) from the man's saddle during the march. They consider this treatment has a tendency to tame the bird! [pp. 157f.]

The passage ends with a note about Marco Polo having observed similar eagles at the court of the Chinese Emperor.

With the abundant number of references the dictionary becomes a guide to older accounts of the history and culture of the predominantly Turkic population of Xinjiang. In addition to the published, though now old and rare, sources, there is also much unpublished material referred to by Jarring. One abbreviation occurring with great frequency in the dictionary is capital R. R can be found in Jarring's last published work, *Central Asian Turkic Place-Names* (Jarring, 1997), where it was identified as "unpublished materials by G. Raquette in the Library of the University of Lund".<sup>3</sup> For example, the lexical entry *sač*, 'hair', has in addition to quotations from the first 1964 edition of the dictionary as well as other published sources, phrases and explanations from the unpublished "Raquette" material at Lund, such as the expression *sač qoša*q for a *rit de passage* where a *čokan* – girl or woman who has not given birth to a child – acquires the status of *dzuvan* – after childbirth – and gets her hair plaited in a new fashion.

### **Return to the Uighurs**

In September 1929 Gunnar Jarring travelled to Kashgar to do field work for his Ph.D. thesis on the sound pattern of Eastern Turki (Jarring, 1933). In 1978, almost 50 years after his first stay in the region, Jarring was invited by the Chinese government to visit Kashgar and Xinjiang (Sinkiang) once again. Several excursions to libraries, museums and institutes were arranged for the Swedish guest. His Chinese hosts asked for his opinion on various issues. From a discussion of minority languages and literatures at the Nationalities Institute in Peking Jarring reports in his book *Return to Kashgar* (Jarring, 1986) how he approached this request from the Chinese:

The Uighur dialects had not been studied much, and the number of dialect samples in phonetic transcription was minimal. There existed a wealth of folk tales, folk literature, riddles, proverbs, and speech mannerisms, which all, most likely, dated back to cultures that have long since disappeared. You have asked me for advice, I said, and my advice is: save all that can be saved of Sinkiang's folk literature, because it is in danger of disappearing. It is based upon an oral tradition, upon memories, not upon books and periodicals. Find people who are fifty, sixty, and seventy years old. They can remember and tell the stories. But there is little time. The twentieth-century modernizations will soon change their way of life. If the minority cultures and literatures are to survive, it will be necessary to spare no effort. [p. 17]

The one who truly heeded this piece of advice, perhaps more than anybody else, was Gunnar Jarring himself. When he retired from the Swedish Foreign Ministry, Jarring returned to the Uighurs and their language. In fact, he had never really left them. However, after his

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3 Gustaf Raquette, a former missionary and doctor at the Swedish Mission in Kashgar, was Jarring's teacher of Turkic languages at Lund in the 1920s.

retirement as an Ambassador in 1973, he could once more devote more of his time and energy to them – as he had done before he became a diplomat, as a student of Turkology – a half-century earlier, in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Gunnar Jarring Collection of publications on Central Asia at Stockholm University provides us with an exceptionally rich material for studies of the accumulation and formation of Western knowledge on Asia in general and Central Asia in particular during the colonial era up until the cold-war era. The men and women setting out on expeditions to Inner Asia and beyond did so for a great variety of reasons. One of the research projects initiated at The Gunnar Jarring Library in Stockholm focuses on reports by early Western explorers traveling in Central Asia at a time when the region was under pressure from the two main actors in the Great Game – the Russian and British Empires. Our future publication of the second extended edition of Jarring's *Eastern Turki–English Dialect Dictionary* will be another important contribution to the knowledge of Central Asian cultural history.

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