

DOI: 10.17746/1563-0110.2017.45.4.113-121

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## **A Late 16th to Early 17th Century Mongolian Ceremonial Helmet from the Moscow Kremlin Armoury**

*This article describes a richly decorated iron helmet from the collection of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury. The specimen has never been analyzed in detail before. It has been ascertained that it was one of the gifts sent by the Khotogoid Lama Erdeni Dai Mergen Nangso to the Russian Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov on January 14, 1635. The helmet was handed over to the State Treasury no later than November 29, 1636, and later transferred to the Armoury. Apart from the helmet proper, the headgear in its initial condition includes a tripartite aventail made of narrow iron plates and decorated with colored velvet and silk, a cloth arming cap, and yellow satin straps, which were tied under the warrior's chin. All the organic parts have been missing since the early 1700s. The base of the apex and the peak are covered with inscriptions in Sanskrit, containing the Simhamukha Mantra. This mantra was meant to protect the warrior from adverse charms and weapons. The technological analysis suggests that letters on the base of the apex were gilded, and those on the peak, silvered. Initially, the Armoury experts identified the helmet as a "Manchu hat". The typological analysis suggests that the headgear was made by Central Asian (Mongolian or Oirat) artisans in the late 16th or early 17th century. The specimen may be used as a standard for dating and attributing randomly found and unattributed combat and ceremonial headgear worn by Late Medieval and Early Modern Central Asian nomads.*

**Keywords:** Moscow Kremlin, Armoury, Mongols, Khotogoids, Oirats, protective weapons, helmets.

### **Introduction**

Over recent decades, the Russian and international scholarly community has seen a steady growth of interest in the military history, weaponry, and military arts of Central Asian nomads of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period. Special studies have shown that the warfare of the nomads during this historical period did not degrade, but on the contrary actively developed and adapted to the new military and political conditions

of the "Gunpowder Revolution". The Mongolian and Turkic nomads of the 16th–19th centuries not only adopted new types of weaponry (guns and cannons), but also persistently improved the traditional weaponry of ranged and close combat, as well as the protective armor set (Bobrov, Borisenko, Hudiakov, 2010: 30–287; Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 75–681).

A specific feature of sources concerning the armor of the Late Medieval nomads is that most of the objects of protective weaponry originated not from

closed archaeological sites, but from random finds, old arsenals, private collections, etc.\* This circumstance hampers dating and attribution of armor, helmets, vambraces, and shields of the Mongolian and Turkic nomads of the 16th–19th centuries. In this context, the objects of protective armor, whose place and time of production can be reliably established using written sources and typological analysis, are of special value. These objects may serve as a kind of reference materials for dating and attributing armor elements from random finds and old weaponry collections. Publishing such specialized material sources, which were previously unknown to a wide circle of specialists and lovers of military history, makes it possible to clarify many problems related to the evolution of warfare among the nomads of the 16th–19th centuries. The unpublished artifacts of the Central Asian peoples inhabiting the Great Steppe, which are kept in museum and private collections of the Russian Federation, are of particular interest from that point of view.

Collections of the Moscow Kremlin Museums include a richly decorated iron helmet (Inv. No. OR-2058), which for various reasons for a long time did not attract the due attention of Russian and Soviet scholars. Its only colored image (in three projections) was made in the first half of the 19th century by the Academician of historical painting F.G. Solntsev for the edition, *Antiquities of the Russian State*. In addition, a black-and-white photograph of the helmet full-face was published in the third part of the book, *Inventory of the Moscow Armoury* in 1884 (Opis..., 1884: Tab. 342, fig. 1). This article aims to present the helmet to a wider scholarly audience and to provide a description of its structure and decoration, as well as its dating and attribution, since this object is of considerable interest for Russian and international archeologists, weaponry experts, and military historians.

### **Circumstances and time of acquisition of the helmet in the Moscow Kremlin Armoury**

We can establish how and when the helmet entered the Tsar's Treasury on the basis of Russian official

documentation in the first half of the 17th century. For the first time, the helmet is mentioned in the report on the Embassy of the Toms son of a boyar Y.E. Tukhachevsky to the Khotogoid Ombo Erdeni Khong Tayiji (June 3, 1634 to May 12, 1635) (Materialy..., 1959: 203–214).

The Khotogoid State was founded at the end of the 16th century by the famous Mongolian military leader Sholoi Ubashi (1567–1627), who took the title of “Khong Tayiji” (“Grand Prince”). During the flourishing of their state, the Khotogoid rulers controlled northwestern Mongolia and a significant part of southern Siberia, and waged long (often successful) wars with their Oirat and Khalkha neighbors. Sholoi Ubashi became the first Mongolian ruler with whom the Russian State established direct diplomatic contacts (1616). Noting his military and political power, Russian diplomats (following the Oirats and the Yenisei Kyrgyz people) began to refer to the Khotogoid Khong Tayiji as Altyn Khan (“The Golden Khan”). This honorary title spread to the descendants of Sholoi Ubashi (Shastina, 1949: 385).

In the early 17th century, Russian envoys regularly visited the state of the Altyn Khans. Vasily Tyumenets went to the headquarters of the Khong Tayiji in 1616; Kazyi Karyakin in 1631; Yakov Tukhachevsky, Druzhina Agarkov, and Luka Vasiliev in 1634–1635; Stepan Grechenin and Bazhen Kartashev in 1636–1637, and Vasily Starkov and Stepan Neverov in 1638. During negotiations, the envoys discussed political, economic, and military cooperation between the Russian State and the State of the Khotogoids. At the same time, the goals of the negotiating parties differed significantly. The Moscow Government expected that the Altyn Khans would become Russian subjects and would give a corresponding *shert* (oath of allegiance), while the Khotogoid Khong Tayijis perceived the Russians only as military allies who could be used to fight their political opponents in Central Asia. Misunderstanding and mutual claims made the negotiations come to a deadlock in 1638 and resulted in the interruption of talks for 19 years (Ibid.: 384–387).

The exchange of gifts, which often included weaponry, was an important element of diplomatic etiquette in the 17th century. A portion of such gifts (the Moscow diplomats traditionally defined them as “tribute”) was given to the Russian envoys on January 14, 1635\*. This time, the Khotogoid Ombo Erdeni Khong Tayiji (the son of Sholoi Ubashi) and his

\*The abandonment of the traditional funerary rite when the weaponry belonging to the deceased was placed in the grave together with his body was caused by the spread of beliefs among the nomads that directly or indirectly prohibited placement of objects of material culture that were not directly related to the relevant religious cult (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 44, 45).

\*All dates are given according to the Julian Calendar.

spiritual adviser, the Lama Erdeni Dai Mergen Nangso, brought as a gift to the Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov items of defensive weaponry including the helmet under consideration, “On the 14th day of January, Altyn Tsar let Yakov and Druzhina, and the Boyar’s son, and the servants go home. And the Altyn Tsar made tribute from himself to the Tsar and Grand Prince Mikhail Fyodorovich of All Russia: a set of copper silvered armor with a silver breastplate, a jasper stone, snow leopard skin, two hundred sable skins, and 10 beaver skins... And the spiritual father of the Tsar, Altyn Dai Mergen Nangso, sent tribute from himself to the Tsar and Grand Prince Mikhail Fyodorovich of All Russia: a set of armor and an *iron cap lined with colored green velvet* [our italics – *the Authors*], and armor vambraces, and a snow leopard skin, and 100 sable skins” (Materialy..., 1959: 212–214). In an entry from the inventory of the Arsenal of Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich (1642–1643), it is specified, “Helmet of damask steel with written Arab words. Sent from the Tungus lands with the armor provided with colored velvet. The price is 5 rubles. And upon inspection, on the upper part of the helmet on the base of the apex, there are silvered and gilded Arab words. The *gorodok* and the area above the *verie*\* are also silvered upon iron. And Arab white silvered words are on the peak. Iron upon colored velvet is attached to the ears and the back of the head”. Along with the vambraces, the set with the helmet included a set of plate-sewn armor: “armor with sleeves; it has five shield plates with buttons on hinges. The armor and shield plates are covered with bad colored velvet with floral patterns of various colors. The Laba [Lama] sent it as a tribute to the Tsar in 144 (1636). The price of the armor is thirty rubles” (Opis..., 2014: 104, 105).

The further destiny of the helmet can be traced using the receipt and spending book of the State Treasury. The entry of November 2, 149 (1640) states that on this day, among other items from the Treasury, the Armoury received for storage a “helmet of damask steel; silvered Muslim words are on the helmet above the forehead. This helmet was sent to the Tsar as a tribute from Loba [Lama] Erdeni Dai Men Gerlanzu of the Tunguz lands in the year 144 (1636) on the 29th day of November, with a price of five rubles” (Opis..., 1884: 35). Thus, the analysis of the diplomatic documentation on the history of Russian-Mongolian relations in the first half of the 17th century shows that the helmet was sent as a gift to the Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich by the influential Khotogoid Lama Erdeni

Dai Mergen Nangso on January 14, 1635, and almost two years later (on November 29, 1636) it entered the Treasury, from where on November 2, 1640 it was transferred to the Moscow Kremlin Armoury.

The first detailed description of the helmet was made by the authors compiling the inventory of the treasury of the Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich and Tsarevich Aleksei Mikhailovich, “Words are engraved on the upper frontal part of the helmet; the back and the sides of the plank [that is, the plates on the neck guard and ear guards of the aventail – *the Authors*] are covered with colored velvet, floral patterns of dark-red, and green, and yellow silk, with a price of five rubles. The Laba sent it as a tribute to the Tsar in 144 (1636)” (Opis..., 1884: 35; Opis..., 2014: 105). In the Armoury inventory of 1643, the helmet is listed as No. 5. In the inventory of 1687, it was referred to as a part of “the German and Kalmyk hats”, where it was indicated under No. 3: “Iron Kalmyk hat, smooth on the lower part with an upright tube above; was sent to the Armoury from the Treasury, having a price of twenty-five *altyns*; the straps are of yellow satin... And according to the current inventory of the year 195 and upon inspection, that hat corresponded to the old inventory books; the armored ear and back pieces are covered with colored velvet; Kalmyk words are on the upper part of the hat under the upright tube and on the peak. According to the current estimate, one and a half ruble” (Opis..., 1884: 35).

The inventories of 1701 and 1711 indicate that the helmet still had the aventail during this period, but already in the documents of 1727 it was stated that “...there is no lining in the hat, and according to the present examination, there are no earpieces” (Ibid.). The helmet suffered the greatest damage during the fire of 1737. In the inventory of 1746, where it was listed in the category of “Yerikhonka hats” under No. 15, there is a note “burned” (Ibid.). Apparently, as the result of fire, the headpiece ultimately lost its plated and sewn aventail and other organic elements. In 1812, the helmet, together with other items, was taken by the President of the Imperial Academy of Arts, Privy Councilor in Deed and the well-known scholar A.N. Olenin “for research”, and was returned to the museum collection only on June 18, 1843 (Ibid.: 36).

The compilers of the “Inventory of the Moscow Armoury Chamber” of 1884 systematized the documents of the past years and proposed their attribution of the helmet. They defined the head of the headpiece as a “Manchu hat” and gave a brief description, “Plated, of damask steel, raised silver words are over the forehead; the peak is box-shaped; a finely molded iron

\*Embossed bands and angles on the upper part of the helmet.

upright tube is on top” (Ibid.: 35). At present, it seems possible to clarify the attribution of this helmet.

### Helmet structure and decoration

According to its material, the helmet belongs to the class of iron headpieces; according to the design of the crown, to the order of riveted headpieces; and according to the shape of the skull, to the type of cylindrical-conical headpieces (Fig. 1). Its total height is 22.3 cm; the frontal-occipital diameter is 20.5 cm; the temporal diameter is 20.8 cm. The weight of the helmet is 1.2 kg.

The headpiece was riveted with four plate-sectors. Their joints are covered with wide (1.8 cm at the top, 7.5 cm at the bottom) iron bands with a cut-out edge and a front surface in relief. Each of them has two pairs of symmetrical indentations where the rivets, which connect the bands with the plates of the crown, were hammered. A clearly pronounced horizontal reinforcement rib crosses the skull of the helmet and gives the headpiece a characteristic cylindrical-conic silhouette. The upper parts of the plates of the crown and the overlays are covered with a weakly expressed pattern in relief made in the technique of metal embossing. The pattern (about 8.0 cm wide) is composed of a series of repeating Y-shaped symbols (Fig. 1). The employees of the Armoury in the 19th century called such ornamental decoration “paths connected with each other by small towns” (Opis..., 1884: 37). In the modern weaponry literature, it is called a “two-fingered palmated” pattern (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 437).

An additional fastening element of the crown’s plates is the band, which is an iron strip with an even edge (3.5 cm wide); its ends are connected at the back of the headpiece (Fig. 1, *d*). Eight rivets with hemispherical heads (0.35 cm in diameter) were driven along the upper edge of the band for connecting it with the plates of the crown and the overlays. Twelve through holes for attaching the aventail were punched along the bottom edge of the band.

A “box-shaped” peak, consisting of a horizontal pentagonal “shelf” (14.5 cm long) and vertical “shield” (1.0–1.7 cm wide), was riveted to the frontal part of the helmet. The peak was attached to the crown with three rivets hammered into the mounting plate on the inside of the helmet skull. The edges of the “shelf” and “shield” are equipped with a convex rim (Fig. 1, *a–c*). The surface of the peak is covered with relief inscriptions in Sanskrit (see below), made in

the technique of chased engraving (the convexity of the elements is achieved by removing the background metal with a graver). Initially, the markings were silvered, but later (possibly in the fire of 1737) the silvering was mostly lost.

The helmet is topped by an apex consisting of a base (*podvershie*) and upright tube-socket for the plume. The base has the form of a short cylindrical thimble with a convex rim along the lower edge (2.2 cm high; 4.3 cm in diameter at the top, and 5.1 cm in diameter at the bottom). The sides are covered with gilded inscriptions in relief in Sanskrit (see below). The upper part of the base is decorated with images of eight convex three-petalled buds covered with gilding. Rivets for attaching the apex to the plates of the skull are hammered between the buds. The plume socket is a hollow upright tube (7.3 cm high, 1.2 cm in diameter) with three washer-like fittings in the lower, central, and upper parts (1.7 cm in diameter, 2.0, 1.7, and 1.8 cm high, respectively). The fittings are pentahedral and taper towards their middle parts.

The use of gilding and silvering in the decoration of the helmet was confirmed by an expert on precious metals and jewels of the Moscow Kremlin Museums, N.V. Parmenova. The analysis was carried out using a Prisma-M (Au) energy dispersive X-ray fluorescent unit. Notably, low assay gold with a high content of silver was used. Thus, the concentration of gold on the base was 53.46 %; the concentration of silver was 27.99 %. The silver content on the peak was 78.90 %.

The inscriptions in Sanskrit, placed on the peak and the base (Fig. 2) are of considerable interest. They were translated and analyzed by V.P. Zaitsev, Researcher at the Department of the Far East of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences. It was established that all three inscriptions (one on the base and two on the peak) were written using the “Lantsa” (“Ranjana”) alphabet. Each inscription consists of 17 characters and is read from left to right. The inscription on the vertical “shield” of the peak is divided into four parts of three, six, five, and three characters, respectively. The writing style on the base is slightly different from the style of characters on the peak. All three inscriptions are almost identical and transmit the same text. The inscription on the peak contains an error. Transliteration of the text on the base is as follows:

“// a ka sa ma ra ca śa ta ra sa ma ra ya pha ḍa :”.

On the peak, the syllable “o” (ॐ) was mistakenly written instead of the first syllable “a” (अ):

“// o ka sa ma ra ca śa ta ra sa ma ra ya pha ḍa :”.



Fig. 1. Helmet from the Moscow Kremlin Armoury (Inv. No. OR-2058).  
a – front view; b – left view; c – right view; d – back view.



Fig. 2. Drawing of the inscription on the base of the helmet's apex (by V.P. Zaitsev).

The orthography of the inscriptions on the helmet suggests that this text was “translated” (copied using the “Lantsa” alphabet) from the Tibetan version:

“a ka sa ma ra tsa sha da ra sa ma ra ya phaT :”.

The text is a mantra of the Lion-headed or Lion-faced Dakini (Simhamukha). The mantra performed a protective function, was used for “repelling murder” and “repelling the enemies”, helped to deflect the enemy’s magical impact, and protected against enemy weapons. According to the tradition, even simple wearing of a mantra on the body had a protective effect. Despite such characteristics, this mantra occurs extremely rarely on the combat headgear of the peoples of Central and East Asia. At present, the helmet from the collection of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury is the only headpiece of the series decorated with such inscriptions.

The organic elements of the helmet were lost in the first half of the 18th century (see above), but thanks to the inventories of 1640, 1687, 1727, it is possible to clarify some features of their cut and design. Thus, it is known that originally the headpiece was equipped with an aventail consisting of three elements: a pair of earpieces (“side pieces”, “ears”) and the back piece (“back”, “back of the head”). The aventail had a plate-sewn (“armored”) structure of armoring. The iron plates (“planks”) were riveted to the inner side of the organic base in such a way that only the rivet heads were visible on the outside. The aventail was covered with a special sheath of silk and brocade of green, yellow, and red colors, decorated with an embroidered floral ornamental pattern (in the inventory of the treasury of Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich and Tsarevich Aleksei Mikhailovich, they were called “herbs”). A cloth arming cap (“lining”) was attached to the inner side of the skull. The helmet was additionally fastened on the head with special straps of yellow satin, which in the fighting position were tightened under the chin of the warrior (Opis..., 1884: 35).

## Discussion

Iron riveted helmets made of four plate-sectors and four wide onlays with two pairs of indentations are a typical kind of combat headgear of the warriors from Central Asia and southern Siberia of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 425, fig. 153; p. 434, fig. 165, 1; 167, 1–3; p. 439, fig. 171; Bobrov, Myasnikov, 2009: 236, fig. 1; p. 237, fig. 2; p. 238, fig. 3; p. 240, fig. 4; LaRocca, 2006: 69, 87). However, it should be noted that the vast majority

of the Mongolian, Oirat, Tibetan, Bhutanese, and Buryat helmets of this series have spherical-conical or hemispherical shapes. Riveted cylindric-conical headpieces are not generally typical of the defensive armor of nomads inhabiting the region, yet they were typical of the Manchu (and more broadly the Later Jin, Qing) panoply of the 17th–19th centuries. Probably, precisely this fact allowed the employees of the Armoury in the 19th century to define the helmet in question as a “Manchu hat” (Opis..., 1884: 35).

Such an attribution seems erroneous. With the exception of the silhouette of the skull, the helmet has little in common with uniform Manchu cylindrical-conic “zhou” skulls. The crown of these helmets was traditionally riveted not of four–eight iron sectors, but only of two large curved plates supplied with a horizontal reinforcement rib (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2003: 197, tab. 16, fig. 11–13, 15, 16, 18). The Qing onlays (“lian”) covering the joints of the plates, were convex and narrowed, with an even, not jagged edge (Ibid.). In the rare cases when they were supplied with indentations, the indentation had the shape of a three-petalled bud (Ibid.: Tab. 16, fig. 11). An almost mandatory element of the Manchu “zhou” hats was a massive forehead “hue” plate with cutouts above the eyebrows, which is absent in the helmet under consideration.

The wide iron band riveted on the back of the head is typical of the Mongolian, Oirat, and southern Siberian headgear of the 16th and 18th centuries, while it is extremely rare for the Qing helmets (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 425, fig. 153, p. 427, fig. 155, p. 428, fig. 156, 157, p. 429, fig. 158, 159, p. 430, fig. 160, p. 431, fig. 162, p. 435, fig. 168, p. 436, fig. 169, p. 438, fig. 170, p. 440, fig. 173, p. 441, fig. 174, p. 443, fig. 175, p. 444, fig. 176, p. 445, fig. 177). The plate-sewn aventails were attached to the Manchu helmets using massive rivets with hemispherical heads (which survive in most cases even after the loss of the aventail). However, the holes on the headpiece under consideration are empty, which suggests that the aventail was attached to a leather strap stretched through those holes. Such a system of hanging the aventail often appears on the Mongolian, Oirat, southern Siberian, Tibetan, and Bhutan headpieces of the 16th–19th centuries (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 420, 440, fig. 173, p. 441, 449, 460, fig. 190, 2, 3, p. 467).

“Box-shaped” peaks consisting of a horizontal pentagonal “shelf” and vertical “shield” are a classic element of face protection on the Central and East Asian helmets of the 15th–19th centuries (Ibid.: 418, 421, 426, 432, fig. 167, p. 440, fig. 173; p. 441, 443,

444, 446, 447, 450–452). The peculiarity of the object in question results from its decoration pattern. At present, we know of 59 Oirat, Mongolian, and Qing helmets decorated with Buddhist symbols. Inscriptions with religious content have been found on 45 of them. However, in all known cases they were made on the crown or in rare cases on the band. The helmet from the collection of the Moscow Kremlin Museums is the only example of a series where the inscriptions cover the “shelf” and “shield” of the peak. The technique of their application also shows marked specificity.

The base of the apex (*podvershie*), made in the form of a short cylindrical thimble with a convex rim along the bottom edge, does not have exact parallels among the known headpieces of Central and continental East Asia. In its construction and silhouette, it occupies an intermediate position between the almost flat bases of Oirat spherical-cylindrical helmets, and the bases in the form of a high cylinder tapered in the center of Ming, Qing, and Korean helmets (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2003: 197, tab. 16, fig. 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19; Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 440, fig. 173, p. 441, fig. 174, p. 444, fig. 176; LaRocca, 2006: 65, 86). The closest to our helmet are the thimble-like bases of the Central Asian (Oirat?) helmets from the territory of the Volga region, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia (spherical-cylindrical helmet No. 1233 from the collection of the State Hermitage) (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 432, fig. 163), but their silhouette and decoration are significantly different. The upright tube-socket of our headpiece, equipped with three faceted head-pieces, belongs to rare varieties of Central Asian plume sockets of the 15th–18th centuries, and occurs on some Mongolian and Oirat helmets of that period (LaRocca, 2006: 73; Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 418, 444).

The pattern in relief similar to the tracks of two-toed bird paws is absolutely atypical of Manchu headgear, but can be found on Oirat helmets of the 17th century (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 429, 438; LaRocca, 2006: 87). Notably, the decoration of the Far Eastern “zhou” helmets of the 17th–19th centuries shows essential differences from the helmet under consideration (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2003: 197, tab. 16, fig. 11–13, 15, 16, 18).

In the first half of the 17th century, both Central and East Asian helmets were provided with plate-sewn aventails. The coloring of the Manchu aventails was strictly unified and regulated. Thus, yellow aventails were added to the helmets of the elite corps of the “Yellow Banner” and the “Bordered Yellow Banner”. However, according to the imperial regulations, yellow fabric was combined not with green (as on the

helmet in question), but with red (edging) and blue (lining) colors. As far as the Oirat plate-sewn armor is concerned, yellow-green colors, on the contrary, occur quite often in their decoration. Thus, for example, a tripartite aventail, covered with green cloth, is kept in the collection of the Tobolsk State Historical and Architectural Museum-Reserve, and a Dzungarian laminar armor “robe” with yellow cloth covering, green edging, etc. is kept in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography of Siberia at Tomsk State University (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 448, 449, 466–468; Bobrov, Ozheredov, 2010: 25). Thus, the color choice of the aventail on the helmet from the collection of the Moscow Kremlin Museums also shows that it is closer to the headpieces of the Mongolian-speaking nomads inhabiting Eurasia in the period under consideration.

The combination of Central Asian technologies and structural and decorative solutions with a cylindrical-conical skull allows the conclusion to be drawn that the artisan-creator of the helmet followed the Central Asian military and cultural tradition, but was familiar with the products of Manchu gunsmiths. If he lived on the territory of Mongolia, the helmet could have been manufactured not earlier than the late 16th century. If the headpiece was made by Oirat artisans, it must have occurred most likely from the 1610s to the first half of the 1630s. In both cases, the lower border of the period when the helmet decorated with Buddhist symbols could have been made can be reliably established from the time of the spread of Lamaism among the Mongols and Oirats (Zlatkin, 1983: 98–103). In this context, the person of the helmet donor becomes of considerable interest.

Erdeni Dai Mergen Nangso-lama\* was a part of the highest elite of the Northern Mongolian state of the Altyn Khans. He was the most famous and respected representative of the Lamaist church in the state of the Khotogoids and served as the spiritual mentor of the Ombo Erdeni Khong Tayiji and his closest relatives. The Russian envoys publicly called the Lama “the teacher of the Mughal land, the spiritual father of Altyn Tsar and his mother Chechen-Tsarina, and his brothers”, “the spiritual father of all Mughal Noyans and herdsmen of the Tangut land”, etc. (Materialy..., 1959: 207–214; Opis..., 2014: 104, 105). The high-ranking Lama lived in the Altyn Khan’s domain “for

\*In the Russian sources of the first half of the 17th century, the spiritual instructor of the Khotogoid Khong Tayiji is called the Tangut (that is, the Tibetan) laba Irdenei Dain Mergen-lanzu, Dain Mergen-lanzu, Tai Mergen-lanzu, Irdenei Dain-men Gerlanzu, etc.

hire; in a year he receives a hundred sheep, serves him according to their faith, and in Russian terms is instead of a priest” (Shastina, 1949: 387).

Erdeni Dai Mergen Nangso actively participated in the political life of the state of the Altyn Khans, received ambassadors, conducted diplomatic negotiations, etc. In addition, he often traveled around the region. In his own words, the Lama “visited... the Chinese and Tangut lands [i.e., Tibet – *the Authors*], and the Black Kalmaks [i.e., Oiratia – *the Authors*], and many other lands” (Russko-kitaiskiye otnosheniya..., 1969: 109–111; Opis..., 2014: 104, 105). Erdeni Dai Mergen Nangso also travelled a lot around Mongolia. Apparently, the Lama was given our helmet as a gift during one such trip. Such a practice of offering weaponry to the Lamaist priests was widespread among the Central Asian nobility in the historical period under consideration (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 48).

In the mid 1630s, Erdeni Dai Mergen Nangso, among other wealth, owned a military arsenal including elite weaponry objects of foreign and local production. Thus, for example, the Lama had a richly decorated Late Jurchen (Manchu) helmet, which he gave as a gift to Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich in 1637 (Opis..., 1884: 19, 39; Opis..., 2014: 105). As follows from the description of the armor, the core of the weaponry collection of the Altyn Khans’ spiritual advisor consisted of the products of Central Asian and primarily Mongolian artisans (Opis..., 1884: 39; Opis..., 2014: 104, 105).

Domestic production of armor was rapidly developing in 17th century Mongolia. According to the reports of the Ambassadors of Daisha-zaysan, “They have plenty of iron ore, and they make armor, and brigandines, and spears on their own” (Bobrov, Hudiakov, 2008: 353). In addition, a number of suits of body-armor reached the Khotogoids as tribute from the peoples of southern Siberia (Ibid.: 348). Thanks to a purposeful policy aimed at the development of weaponry production, the Altyn Khans, as well as their Khalkha and Oirat neighbors, managed to form large contingents of armored (*kuyashnaya*) cavalry. In the Russian documents of the 17th century, detachments of Central Asian nomads of 400, 2000, 4000 *kuyashniks* are mentioned (Ibid.: 360, 361). Such cavalry armored units, trained in close combat using long pole and bladed weapons, were the main striking force of the army of the Khotogoid Altyn Khans in the mid 1630s, “The Mughal Altyn people go to combat with bows, spears, and sabers; there are no firearms. And they go to battle against their enemies wearing armor, brigandines, helmets, vambraces, and poleyns, while some more wealthy people on the battlefield have

horses wearing iron armor and other implements” (Ibid.: 558).

It seems quite logical that for demonstrating his wealth and influence, Erdeni Dai Mergen Nangso might have given the Tsar a gift of armor of both foreign and local production. If our helmet of the Central Asian type was sent to Moscow in 1636, the headpiece forged by Manchu armorers (Inv. No. OR-2057) was sent in 1637.

## Conclusions

A comprehensive analysis of the sources has made it possible to specify the time of manufacturing and the attribution of the helmet from the collection of the Moscow Kremlin Museums (Inv. No. OR-2058). Thus, the suggestion by the employees of the Armoury in the 19th century as to the Manchu origin of the headpiece was not confirmed. Most likely, the helmet was made by Mongolian or Oirat artisans in the late 16th to the first third of the 17th century. Theoretically, some changes in the construction of the headpiece and its elements could have been introduced until the middle of January, 1635. The helmet was commissioned by a noble Central Asian feudal who confessed Lamaism (and hence the Buddhist mantras on the base of the apex and peak). In the mid 1630s, the owner of this headpiece was Lama Erdeni Dai Mergen Nangso, the spiritual advisor of the Khotogoid Khong Tayiji. At the reception on January 14, 1635, the helmet was handed over to the Russian envoy Y.E. Tukhachevsky as a gift to the Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov. In 1636, this headpiece entered the State Treasury from where it was transferred to the Moscow Kremlin Armoury in 1640. Availability of written evidence that reliably localizes the time of this helmet’s functioning makes it possible to use it as a reference example for dating and attributing combat headpieces of Central Asian nomads of the Late Medieval and Early Modern period.

## Acknowledgements

This study was performed under the Research Public Contract (Project No. 1.4539.2017/8.9). The authors are grateful to V.P. Zaitsev, Researcher at the Department of the Far East of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, for his expert assistance in reading and interpreting the inscriptions in Sanskrit, as well as in reconstructing the name and title of the Buddhist priest—helmet donor; and also to N.V. Parmenova, an expert in precious metals and gemstones of the Moscow Kremlin Museums, who established the presence of gold and silver on the headpiece.

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Received May 12, 2016.