



**The Department of Inner Asian Studies,
ELTE University
Involving
Mongolian and Tibetan Studies
with Manchu-Tungusic Studies
Previously also and Siberian Studies
Buddhist religious historical and religious
philosophical program
and previously Program of Korean
language and civilization**

The history of the Department of Inner Asian Studies spanning nearly three quarters of a century is inseparably interlaced with both 20th century Hungarian studies of Altaic, Mongolic and Tibetan themes and with the mainstream of the researches into Hungarian prehistory, linguistics and cultural history. The history of the Department, the teaching and research work here are inseparable from the scholarship of the former and present leaders of the institution, for the academic interests of the founder Lajos Ligeti, his pupil and successor György Kara, and later the latter's pupil Ágnes Birtalan kept further expanding the research area whose appeal had given birth to the Department.

A decisive figure of Hungarian Oriental Studies of international acclaim, Lajos Ligeti started his inquiries about the origins of the Hungarian word stock and these researches led him to become a world-wide acknowledged authority on Oriental studies.

The chair was created for Lajos Ligeti at the Budapest University and he taught there from 1939. Also a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from that year, he started his pedagogical and research work at the Department with several major research trips behind him. The Mongolian language and culture was a major course from the beginning, and in 1942 a course in Tibetan was also initiated. The teaching of the two tightly interrelated disciplines has been going on ever since.

Ligeti laid the greatest stress on philological research, devoted great attention to the analysis of Middle Mongolian and pre-classical literary language. He published several 13–16th century Mongolian literary records in the volumes of *Mongol Nyelveléktár* [Collection of Mongolian Written Records] and *Monumenta Linguae Mongolicae* in collaboration with his students (György Kara, András Róna-Tas, Alice Sárközi, László Lőrincz). Ligeti set up the Research Group of Altaic Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1969, which served as the research basis for education at the Department. After nearly 40 years, the Research Group was abolished by the Academy in 2006 for extra-professional reasons. From among the Research Group members, Alice Sárközi, Géza Bethlenfalvy, Imre Baski, István Mándoky Kongur, Mihály Dobrovits, Zsolt Szilágyi have substantially contributed to teaching and research at the Department. Some of them are still teaching at the university.

When Ligeti retired, György Kara took over the chair. Under his guidance, philology-based

research continued, but thanks to the expanding enrolment and the curiosity of the younger generations, research became increasingly diversified. The weight of Altaic and Buddhist researches increased in teaching. The international relations of the Department kept expanding and tightening with the European centres of Mongol and Tibetan studies, the institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences, as well as with the Mongolian Academy of Sciences.

Until the early 1990s, students could not major in Mongolian and Tibetan, but since 1993 these are also major subjects, which have brought great changes to the life of the Department. Enrolment soared in both disciplines from a few to dozens of students. Parallel with that, new research possibilities opened up for lecturers of the Department and the fellows of the Altaic Research Group: the joint expedition of the Hungarian and Mongolian Academies of Sciences aimed to research Mongolian folk culture and dialects was initiated in 1991 and has been in progress since then under the leadership of Alice Sárközi and Ágnes Birtalan, the present head of the Department. The investigations were supported more than once by OTKA (Hungarian Research Fund), Britain's Arnold – Stein and Taiwan's Chiang Ching-kuo Foundations. Field research was an important method of data collection already in Ligeti's time, and the expedition gave new impetus to this activity. On the basis of the high-standard language acquisition traditionally creditable to the university department, the researchers have gathered information of high scientific value

on the spot. These research results find their way directly into the teaching material, thus the students are taught the freshest findings. Ágnes Birtalan makes it a point to provide PhD candidates and students interested in research with the opportunity of introducing their research themes, e.g. in the Orientalist Student Scholars' conferences. Upon the recommendation of the chair, the faculty leadership endorsed Katalin Uray-Kóhalmi's appointment as guest professor, which greatly bolstered the Manchu and Siberian studies.

The main research fields at present are:

- shamanism, Buddhism and popular religion of Mongolian ethnic groups
- language and culture of the Oirats and Kalmyks
- traditional nomadic culture of Mongolian ethnic groups
- processing of the historical sources

