
History, Timelessness and the Monumental: the Oboos of the Mergen Environs, Inner Mongolia

Christopher Evans & Caroline Humphrey

Concerned with the 'meaning', variability and material transformation of the sacred oboo cairns of Inner Asia, this study focuses upon four of these stone settings within the environs of Mergen Monastery. Two have been rebuilt since their destruction during the Cultural Revolution, and one markedly registers its recent history. The layout of these complex monuments (involving diverse ancillary elements) reflects the processes of Buddhicization of the landscape. Comparison between their form and Buddhist texts outlining oboo construction allows appraisal of their prescription and actuality. These monuments raise issues relevant beyond their immediate cultural and geographical context, as they express an interplay between history and 'timelessness'; the latter effectively amounting to a 'reincarnation' of material culture (i.e. denial of change). Finally, the deployment of oboos relates to broader concepts of landscape orientation; their relationship with Mongolian directional systems is explored.

We stood before an obo[o], one of the largest I have ever seen . . . one of those mysterious places of sacrifice which are still secretly preserved, built of stone cast upon stone through many generations; a home of mystery which has its roots in the origin of the people itself, and whose religious significance goes much further back in time than any of the religions of the modern world (Haslund 1949, 42; emphasis added).

Haslund's hyperbole, characteristic of the European traveller in strange lands, refers to the fact that the origins of the Inner Asian sacred cairn (in Mongolian, *oboo* [ovoo], written *obuga* — literally 'heap' or 'pile') are unknown. Regional scholars are unsure whether it is justifiable to link the cairn building of recent centuries to similar monuments of earlier periods, and consequently they disagree or equivocate about the fundamental meaning of this form of monument. If they do argue for continuity, most suggest, in Marxist terms, that the rationale for constructing cairns changed over millennia with the development of society, but that the previous symbolic meanings lingered in local interpretations. They thus impute a

multiple and uncertain character — referring to all times and thus to no particular time — to this type of monument as a general category (Zhukovskaya 1977; Galdanova *et al.* 1983; Abaeva 1992). In the case of particular oboos, however, scholars are also likely to come face to face with history, for their date and circumstances of construction are often well known. Such a situation may be common to monumental traditions elsewhere in the world. Yet in the Mongolian case there is a further paradox, since symbolic references to 'timelessness' are built into the structure of the oboo. This is not a matter of reference to mysterious origins, but an encoding in the oboo complex of the non-chronotopic and cosmic properties the given oboo is believed to have. Nevertheless, as we show in this study, the choosing of a *particular* symbolic construction of timelessness is tied to the historical circumstances and intentions of the builders. As a twist to this, we observe that — and such is the character of ancient monuments — these circumstances and intentions may later be forgotten, misremembered or entirely reformulated in mythic guise. In other words, understanding the oboo, either by

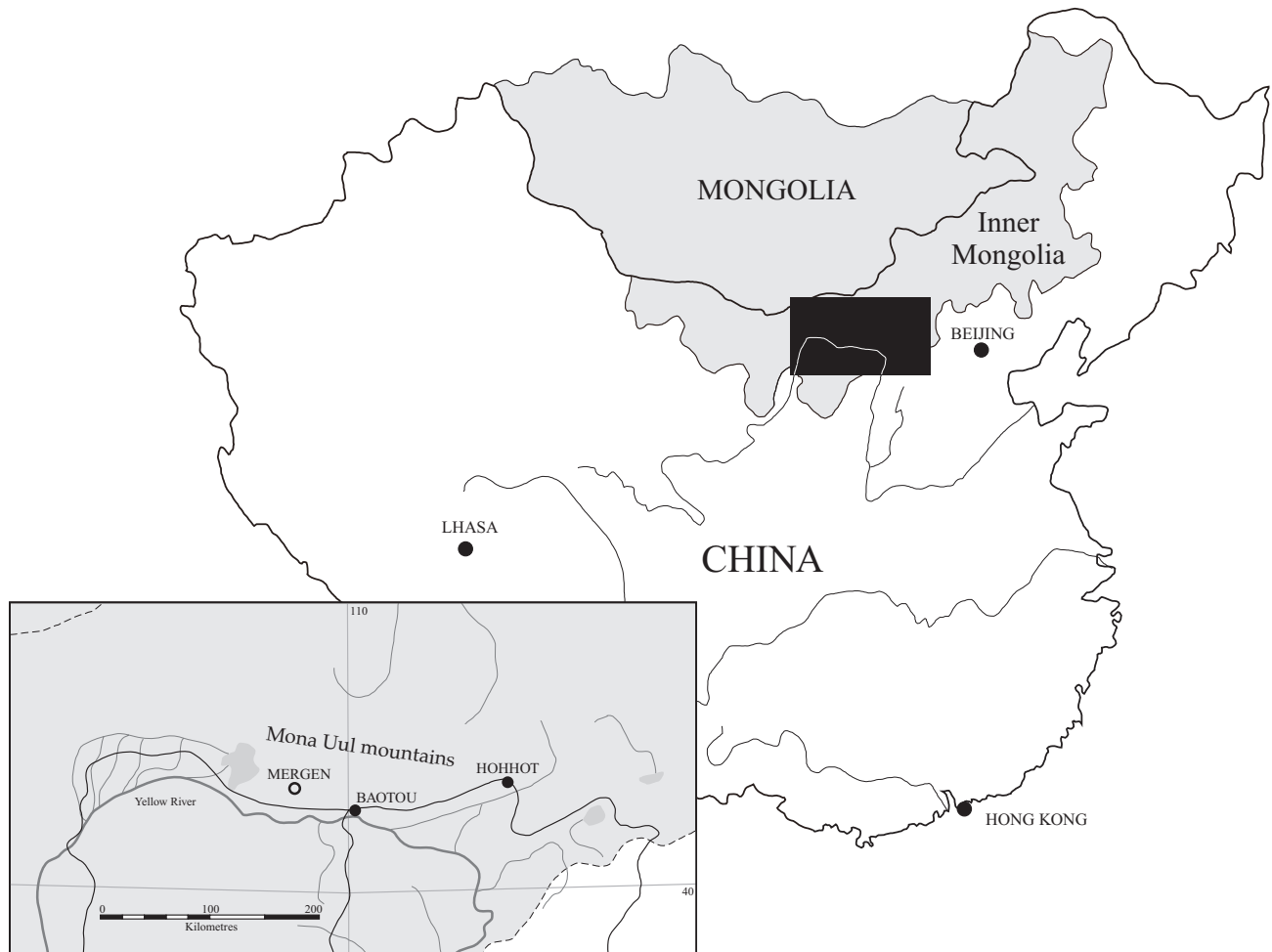


Figure 1. Location map.

local people or by scholars, involves tacking back and forth between different conceptual perspectives on time.

We nevertheless suggest here that the character of oboos can be further illuminated by examination of features that have so far received little attention in the literature: first, the ‘oboo setting’, the complex of major and minor cairns in one ritual site, and second, the distribution and orientation of these ritual sites in a neighbourhood. In this case the study area is the environs of Mergen Monastery, located in north-central China at the foot of the Mona Uul mountains (Fig. 1). Begun in 1998, the project is concerned with the diverse attitudes and spatial traditions of the Mongolian and Chinese communities of the area. Mergen is one of the few active Mongolian-language Buddhist monasteries in Inner Mongolia (Humphrey 2001). It occupies a prominent site in the Mergen River valley, one of a series of such defiles

debouching southwards from the Mona Uul range. Before the Cultural Revolution, when many religious objects and institutions were destroyed, each of the larger valleys had its own monastery, surrounded by a number of protective oboos. The present study may therefore illuminate what might turn out to be a systemic patterning in Mongolian ritual landscapes, though that comparative theme remains to be investigated. The present study concerns interpretation of the Mergen environs alone.

During the 2000 season an archaeological component was added to what had until then been essentially anthropological research, albeit with a landscape focus. A preliminary survey was made of the ancient monuments in the vicinity of the Monastery, including an early length of the Great Wall of China (the Zhao Dynasty, so-called ‘White Wall’), associated forts, a major Han period settlement spread, and various ‘slab graves’ (Fig. 2). Traces of

more recent history were also documented. The Monastery itself was built between the early eighteenth century and the 1930s. Its main temples are intact, but various subsidiary buildings are in ruins. On the surrounding hills remains were also found of Buddhist stupas and minor outlying shrines destroyed in the Cultural Revolution.¹ In the nearby grassland are gun emplacements and bunker/trench systems relating variously to the Japanese invasion in the 1930s and the Sino-Soviet conflict of the 1960s/70s. A Chinese army (PLA) military camp — now abandoned — was built immediately to the south and east of the Monastery, and most recent of all is a derelict Chinese ‘yurt-style’ tourist camp constructed in the late 1980s (Evans & Humphrey 2002). Very much a frontier, this is a landscape in which past and present have no definite divide or obvious cut-off. Appropriately, the main surface finds are variously Han Dynasty pottery and automatic bullet cartridges.

Established at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Mergen was to encompass a vast estate. Arranged around courtyards, its temples, kitchens, workshops and schools extended over c. 20 ha, and its territorial demesne stretched for some 30 square kilometres. It was occupied in the 1960s in the course of the Sino-Soviet troop build-up, when the Chinese army constructed a walled compound around it, ransacked the temples and demolished many of its ancillary buildings (dumps of decorative temple furnishings were found in the course of our surveys). Yet, ironically, it was probably only the occupation by the military that saved the main temples from the ravages of the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution (Fig. 3), since the Jargalant Monastery in a nearby valley was then razed. Several oboos are located just outside the army compound. It tells of their socio-cultural prominence that all the main oboo monuments with which this study is concerned were then variously damaged or levelled, with oboo worship being suppressed from the late 1950s until the early 1980s (Sneath 2000, 112,

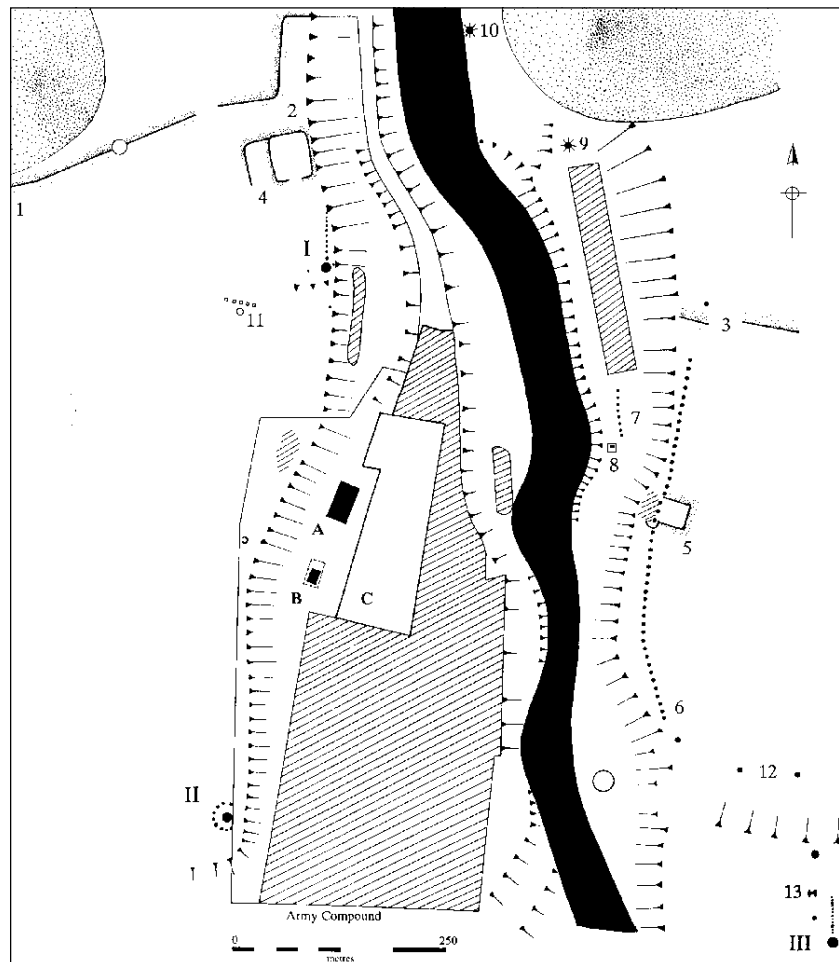


Figure 2. The Mergen environs with main temples (A & B) and monastic precinct (C) indicated; diagonal lines indicate recent military features; I–III) oboo settings; 1–3) the line of the ‘Great White Wall’; 4 & 5) ‘Han’ forts; 6 & 7) cairn lines; 8) small temple ruins; 9 & 10) possible barrow mounds; 11) sach setting; 12) large cairn settings; 13) ‘slab-grave’ settings.

238). Only some have been recently rebuilt. With this recent history as background, fieldwork in such a context invariably has a political dimension and verges upon ‘cultural reclamation’.

Active monuments

The tumuli and burials of Inner Asia have been the subject of much international archaeological attention (e.g. Rudenko 1969; Murail *et al.* 2000). This study, however, is largely concerned with contemporary monument construction, for certainly Mongolian oboos must be counted amongst the world’s foremost *active* dry-stone monument traditions. Here, we will be concerned with those associated with the Monastery and, specifically, the extraordinary lay-

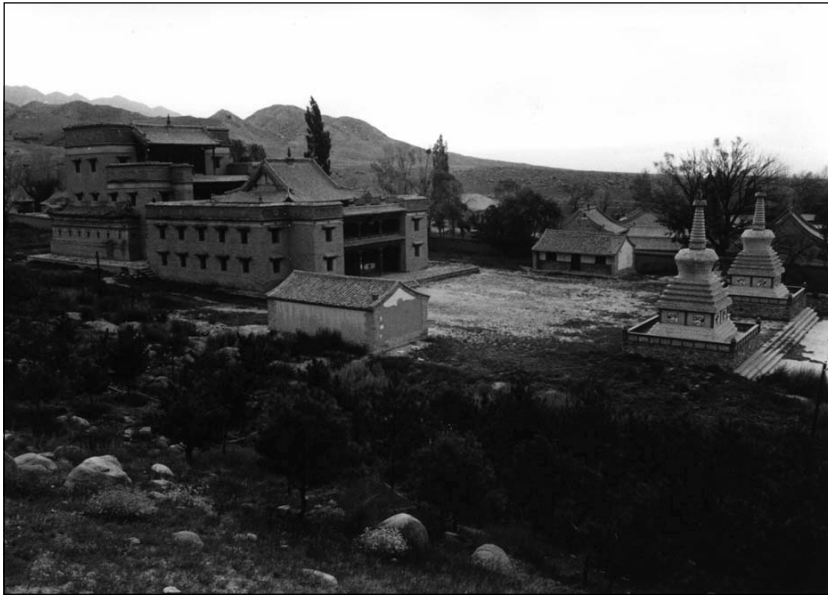


Figure 3. Mergen buildings, looking east to main temple with stupas (far right) marking entrance to the courtyard before it. (Photograph: C. Evans.)

out of one that was re-built only four years ago in 1998. Nevertheless, this article is not primarily undertaken as an ethno-archaeological cautionary tale, providing lessons from the present to inform the past. Rather, it is a reflection of joint archaeological and anthropological landscape research of what is a 'living tradition' in its own right and as a study of the materiality of a contemporary social practice, all be it deeply rooted.

For the purposes of this article, 'oboo' will be used in reference to the largest stone cairns, which are generally of a domed, circular shape, and are set over cones of pressed earth. It is clear, however, through discussion with local informants, that the term is applied to all active cairn construction, ranging from the small stone settings that frame major monuments to the more unstructured heaps of wayside cairns.² Elsewhere in Inner Asia, oboos may occasionally be constructed of branches alone (see below; Figs. 7 & 8), but in the Mergen area *stone* (natural unworked rocks) seems to be a central feature. The other main category of landscape monument — *sach* — involves the use of ceramic building materials to house sacred items.³ The structure of communal sacrificial oboos (*taxidag oboo*) is complex, having several tiers, secret objects buried within, a central vertical wooden pole (*gender mod*), and numerous leafy branches stuck into the top during rituals. Such oboos usually have minor cairns disposed around them. The main cairn has a southward 'front', often with a hollowed recess in which minor offer-

ings are placed.

Although widely discussed in anthropological literature (e.g. Tatar 1971; Humphrey 1996; Sneath 2000) monuments of this type have received surprisingly little archaeological attention. Perhaps because of their active sacred nature, oboos have not been excavated, as far as we know. A few much earlier stone monuments with no current ritual function, but which seem in some ways similar to oboos (e.g. their sitting on hills, dry stone medium, and lack of apparent practical function) have been investigated in Inner Mongolia (Gai 1999, 150).⁴ Several such sites in the Daqingshan Mountains, an eastern extension of the Mona Uul range, have been assigned to the Neolithic Ashan culture, and two of them, at Shamujia and

Heimaban, have been radiocarbon dated as 4240±80 years old. Chinese archaeologists have described the round stone plinths topped with square platforms (one of them having two stone axes inside) as 'sacrificial altars'. They speculate that Mongolian oboos are a continuation of an ancient tradition of 'primitive Nature worship' (Liu 1986, 96). Confirmation from intervening periods that this was indeed a continuous tradition, however, is lacking.

The oboos in the immediate Mergen environs have a close spatial interrelationship with the Monastery, and it would thus seem unlikely that they pre-date its foundation. Yet, as discussed below, even this is not without an element of ambiguity. The one oboo investigated in the wider region is thought to date from *c.* 3000 BC and, again, to relate to 'nature cults' (MICR 1986). Such an early assignation would of course indicate a pre-Mongol association, which seems difficult to sustain given the paucity of excavation and potential problems involving the incorporation of earlier material within the fabric. Having a 14-cairn axial 'tail', this oboo lies on a spur of land whose edges are delineated by a large keyhole-shaped enclosure. Only a short length of the latter's walling was excavated and not the oboo itself, which may be a later addition.

To judge from the sparse early historical materials available, ritual practices combined together at contemporary oboos may have been separate activities at various times and places. They include burying 'treasure' inside it at its inception, setting a central

pole in its top, periodically adding stones and branches to the cairn to 'refresh' or renew it, flying prayer-flags from the branches, laying offerings before it, and the circling of the oboo on horseback or on foot. Si-ma Qian's *Historical Records* of the Hsiung-nu (Huns) of 145–c.90 BC mentions a great gathering in the fifth moon when the Huns make sacrifices to their ancestor, heaven and earth and local spirits (Bürintegüs 1999, 967). Yan Shigu, a Tang Dynasty scholar writing of the Huns, does not mention sacrificial offerings, however, and describes how 'if there is no tree, they would stick up willow branches instead, and numerous horsemen circle around it three times' (quoted in Bürintegüs 1999, 996). Ordos Mongols, who live immediately to the south of the Urad Mongols of Mergen, have both flat-topped oblong altars *and* oboos in their ritual repertoire. Thus, while some kind of link between the domed oboo monuments of today, with their branches sticking out of the top, and the flat-surfaced 'sacrificial altars' of the Neolithic cannot be ruled out, it remains the case that the origin of oboos — if indeed such could ever be traced — is at this time unknown.⁵

Oboos are generally not places of human burial, though they may house relics of ancestors. For example, the clothes, weapons and bones of the horse of Jargal Baatar, the seventeenth-century ancestor of the Urad Mongols, are said to have been buried within the Banner Oboo not far from the Mergen valley (see below). These days, actual graves are avoided by Mongols and are not the sites of communal ritual like the oboos.⁶ Nevertheless, a certain link with burial sites can be made. According to Mongols, if a famous ancestor is transformed, by time and ritual, from the category of 'dead person's soul' to that of 'land spirit-master', the place of burial (usually a mountain) may come to be worshipped and an oboo may be set up there as a focus for rituals (Heissig 1953).

In the Buryat region of southeastern Siberia, it is documented how Buddhist missionaries arrived from Mongolia in the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries and 'converted' previous sites of worship into Buddhist oboos. Some of these were sacrificial altars (*shiree*), consisting of massed heaps of burnt bones on stone bases (Manzhigeev, quoted in Abaeva 1992, 68). Others were for the worship of the spirits of prominent ancestral leaders and warriors (Gerasimova 1981, 168), and yet others were the graves of shamans, whose souls had undergone similar transformation into spirits. Interestingly, in some regions the lamas erased the remains of the shamanic graves and erected their oboos in different places nearby.

Although they considered shamanism a wrongful religion, they were willing to adopt the cairns for the worship of warriors and leaders as oboos, and simply re-named them. Lamas also attempted, not altogether successfully, to abolish pre-Buddhist oboos in the shape of conical tepees, and tried to replace them by standardized round constructions of stone (Abaeva 1992, 72–3). All this suggests some pre-Buddhist notion of the oboo as an ancestral home or spirit-vessel. At the same time, there was a general conceptual link for local people between oboos and rule/governance and standardized ritual, for in recent centuries the communal rites have normally been patronized by powerful dignitaries, who employ Buddhist lamas to chant prayers from set texts. This set of formal and communal activities is conceptually distinct from the more individualised and destabilizing presence of shamanic spirits (see Humphrey 1996), which continued in some areas despite Buddhist disapproval.

In the Mergen region, the suppression of shamanic worship was carried out in the seventeenth century, earlier and far more thoroughly than in Buryatia. Yet even at Mergen, where there are now no shamans and lamas conduct the oboo prayers, much of the festivities seem distant from Buddhist ethical precepts. Large oboos are sites for regular, collective blood sacrifices, followed by games — horse-racing, archery, wrestling — and feasting with plentiful alcohol. The spirit recipients include ancestors whose souls have become invested in the land, together with land-masters of heavenly origin and *luus* (water gods and dragons). Prayers also call on the spirit masters of numerous other places in the vicinity, notably those of the Yellow River (Huang Ho) and the Mona Uul Mountains.⁷ The idea of the 'master' (*ezen*) is one that permeates both everyday life and the spirit-world; the same term being used for both temporal rulers and the supernatural guardians. In the Mergen area, the military aspect of the master is most pronounced. Both the historical ancestor Jargal Baatar and the spirit-master of Shar Oroi, the highest peak in the Mona Uul range, are imagined as warriors on horseback, bearing numerous arms.

Prescribed monuments: the universal and the historical

So far we have argued that despite some intriguing elements that seem to link current oboos to monuments of the distant past, their great diversity (as well as the lack of records) precludes a scholarly

argument for a simple linear tradition from a single 'origin'. If the oboo as a category remains in this way 'mysterious' — a cumulate of possible earlier ritual objects stretching into an unknowable past — particular oboos, as we show later, are clearly situated in documented history. But before proceeding to our analysis of the Mergen oboos, we wish in this section briefly to introduce the *Mongolian* ideas of universality and history associated with these monuments. We contrast the more cosmic ideals of Buddhist lamas with the historically tied ideas of lay people; both are 'locals', the lamas' knowledge being more textually prescribed (see Huber 1999 concerning 'ranked' landscape knowledge).

At least three attempts at Buddhist regularization of the sprawling Mongolian oboo cults are known. One, a text written by Blo-bzang Nor-bu Shes-rab in the eighteenth century, and widely used in the north Mongolian Buddhist world, categorizes oboos into four types: 'supreme', located on the summit of mountains and worshipped for the consolidation of state power and its accord with religion; 'kingly' (hill-top); 'clannic', and 'herdsmens' oboos, the latter honouring local land-spirits (Gerasimova 1981, 166–7). The same idea is expressed in an Outer Mongolian manuscript (henceforward MS5109) which states that the oboos of kings (*xan-u xün*) should be placed on the top of mountains, those of aristocratic lamas and nobles (*taid lam ba noyod*) on the raised shoulders of hills, and those of ordinary peoples (*xarch xün*) in hollows. What this does is to encode in oboos, through their size, height and location, a timeless or abstract relation with political hierarchy. Ordinary people, including those at Mergen, know little of this classification and it is doubtful whether it was put into practice in any region systematically. Nevertheless, the general idea that oboos are ranked, and that this relates both to mountains of varying heights and to the political status of patrons of the sacrifice, is widely held.

The third text, also widely known (including in Buryatia in Russia) was composed by the third incarnation of Mergen Diyanchi, the Mergen Gegeen who presided at the Monastery in the eighteenth century. Recently published in Mongolian, it speculates about the physical form an oboo should take, and the number of subordinate cairns in a setting, in order to express the idea the Lama has in mind. Worried that ordinary people might erect oboos casually, and include offerings to black shamans and shamanesses and indecent blood sacrifices, Mergen Gegeen states that he will institute the correct shape

of the monument and the content of non-sacrificial ritual. Oboos should be set up in 'higher places which are so magnificent anybody would kneel down'. He concludes, after considering whether perhaps 108 cairns should be erected, that an oboo should consist of thirteen cairns. The large cairn in the centre represents Sumeru Mountain, the cosmic centre of the universe. It should be surrounded by smaller cairns representing the four large continents (*tib*) and lesser 'companion oboos' representing the eight small continents, making thirteen altogether.⁸ The Gegeen specifies the proportions of the four layers of the main oboo:

An oboo will be erected laying a circle with a radius of eight cubits (*tohoi*) which is three and a half cubits high in the centre. On this put a circle with a radius of two cubits less than the bottom layer and two cubits high. Then put another two circles each with radiuses of half of the lower layers respectively and each two cubits high. The oboo is round, with four layers (1783; Lobsangdambijalsan 1998).

Thus describing a construction *c.* 7.20 m in diameter and some 4.30 m high (presuming a modern standard cubit measure of 0.45 m), he also stipulated the size of the central pole ('put in a good post as high as a man from a tree with seeds') and the items that should be buried within. Stone, rather than brick or wood, should be used for the monument because its hardness symbolises the strengthening of lives. The branches put into the top should include juniper (the father of wood), reed (the mother), holly (the son), birch (the maternal relatives) and willow (the daughter), because all these are necessary for making good fortune prosper. Models of the sun and moon, various birds and animals, and auspicious signs and mantras should be disposed at the correct directional points of the oboo (which faces south). With a host of other symbolic and cosmic attributes, the oboo as specified by the Mergen Gegeen clearly represents an a-historical notion of universality.

Yet there are the stories of local Mongols that by-pass both lamas' interpretations entirely. These are not concerned with cosmology or abstract notions of rule. Rather, they are historical, in a legendary manner. To give a flavour, two examples concerning the origins of oboos from elsewhere in Inner Mongolia warrant summary. The first is from Jirim, where people say that an Emperor of the Tang Dynasty, Li Jin-wang, had thirteen children. In dispute over the throne, he fled into peripheral Mongol areas to escape his rivals and there people built oboos in memory of him and his children. The second tale relates to Chinese soldiers chasing Mongols as they



Figure 4. *The Hoshuun (Banner) Oboo, looking north against background of Mona Uul ranges. (Photograph: C. Evans.)*

fled back to Mongolia at the end of the Yuan Dynasty in the fourteenth century. Having killed all the Mongols in a given area, they built a cairn on the top of a hill to indicate to other Chinese armies that the region was clear. The Mongols made this practice into their own secret sign. They set up similar cairns in their own areas to deceive the Chinese, so their armies would not come where the signal cairn were built. This way they survived. Later, because the cairns had saved them, they began to worship them as oboos.

With this background, we can now proceed to describe the oboos in the vicinity of the Monastery.

The Mergen oboos

Four oboos have been formally surveyed to date. The *Hoshuun* (Banner) is the largest and is venerated

by the Urad Mongols of the entire district. It lies isolated amid fields some ten kilometres to the southwest of Mergen (Oboo IV: Figs. 4 & 5). The other three lie close outside monastery precinct and are seen primarily as 'guardian-type', intended to ward off evil spirits (I–III: Fig. 2). Of the latter, the western *Olon Huvrag-yn Oboo* ('Oboo of the Many Student Lamas'; Oboo II) has, however, a somewhat different status as it is the only one of these that has recently been rebuilt and its founding is directly connected to the present Monastery. For reasons that will be further discussed below, there must be some degree of doubt concerning the interrelationship of the Monastery with the other two (Oboos I & III). It is generally said by Mongols that a monastery should have protective oboos on its four cardinal axes, and there is a clear link between this idea and the ruined northern oboo, which is prominently situated on a

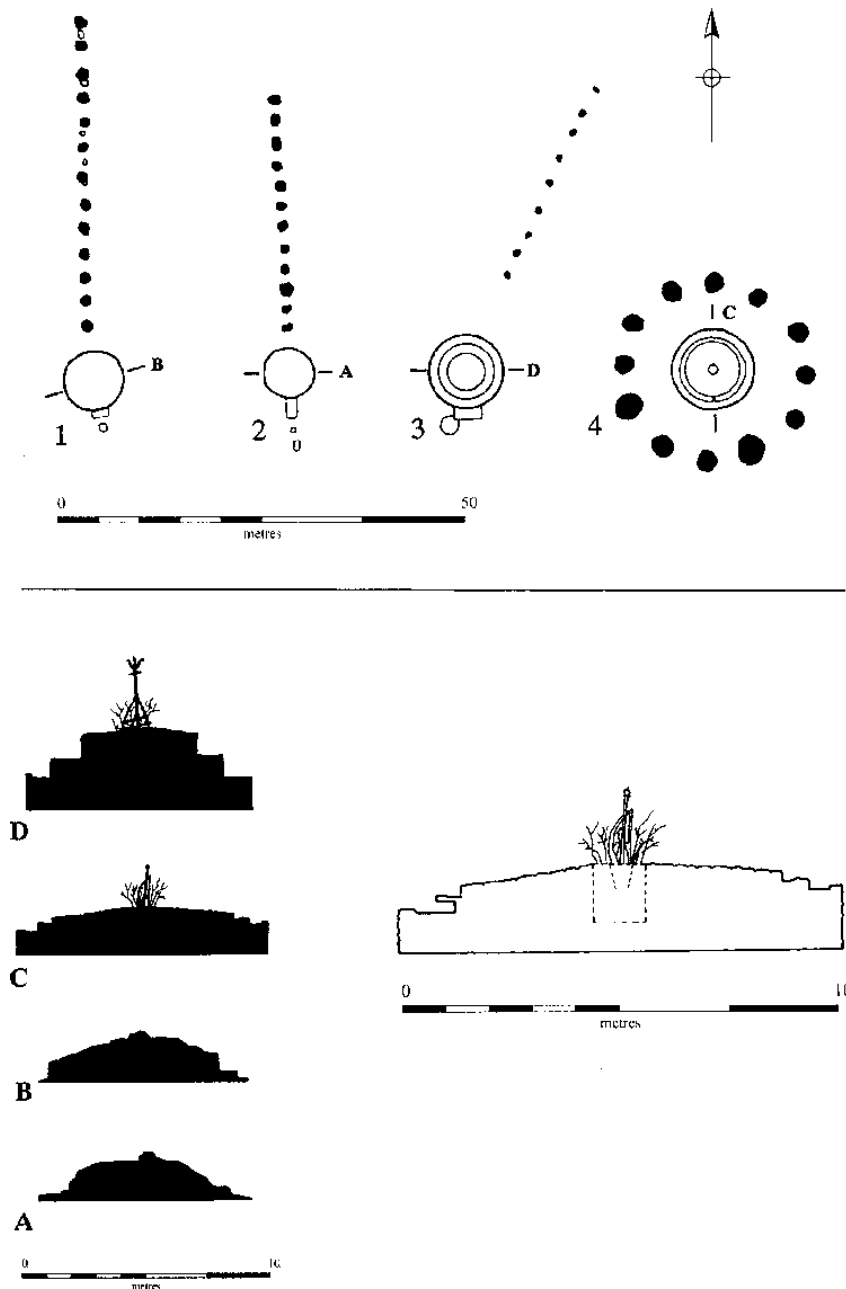


Figure 5. Top, comparative oboo plans: 1) Mergen Oboo north (I); 2) Mergen Oboo east (III); 3) Banner Oboo (IV); 4) Mergen Oboo west (II). Below, comparative elevations: A) Oboo III; B) I; C) II; D) IV; with an enlarged version of Oboo II, right (with open shaft and 'box' recess altar indicated).

scarp above and is 'named' (the *Lamxain* – 'Lamas' – Oboo; I). Yet the one that was recorded across the river in the pastures to the east was clearly felt to be something of a 'discovery' (i.e. the un-named and disused Oboo III). When found it was as if something 'known' had been recovered which previously had been overlooked (the reasons for its 'loss' are

currently unknown). Finally, it was mentioned to us that there used be another large oboo (the *Chindamani* – 'Jewel' – Oboo) in fields south of the Monastery. This, which would have been the fourth of the cardinal oboos, has been lost through the expansion of Chinese fields and housing. Although searched for, no trace of it could be found.

These are substantial monuments: 2–3 m high and 6.3–10.2 m in diameter. The two disused oboos (i.e. those not recently rebuilt, I & III) are at the lower end of this range, and are 6.3/7.6 m in diameter and c. 2 m high (Fig. 5:1 & 2 and A & B). At 3 m height, the impact of the Banner Oboo seems all the more 'monumental' (Fig. 5:3 and D). This, in part, is due to its proportions, as its diameter is actually c. 1.2 m less than that of the Mergen *Olon Huvrag-yn Oboo* (II: 10.2 m in diameter, but also only 2 m high). Wedding-cake like, the Banner Oboo is markedly stepped, its elevated tiers being 0.80–0.90 m high, as opposed to the 0.20–0.30 m rise of the steps of Oboo II, and 1.00–1.20 m deep (as opposed to 0.60–0.80 m). Obviously seeing much active ceremony, the tiers of the Banner Oboo are strewn with broken glass from offerings of alcohol.

The *Hoshunn Oboo* was rebuilt in 1980 by the local 'Banner' political administration, following its levelling during the Cultural Revolution. It is said to have first been established in the mid/late seventeenth century by Urad Mongol princes in honour of Jargal Baatar, the warrior who led them

from Hulun Buir in 1649. When asked why the oboo had been placed at this spot and whether this was not, in fact, the site of an earlier monument belonging to the Urad's predecessors, local Mongols laughed saying that those were 'foreign' people who had been driven out. In other words, there was no reason to respect any place their predecessors had seen as

sacred. Here we are presented with the oboo as a specific construction, rather than a continuous tradition of sacrality attached to a particular spot (see e.g. Bradley 2000). The site of the *Hoshuun Oboo* was presumably chosen for being central in the Banner's territory. If its first establishment can be dated to the late seventeenth century, then it clearly predated the Mergen Gegeen's instructions about how oboos should be built (mid eighteenth century). Indeed, given the bloody legends associated with the Banner Oboo and the continuous tradition of sacrifice there, this very oboo may have been what the Mergen Lama had in mind as what he wanted to reform.⁹ He may have succeeded in eliminating blood sacrifice in the case of the oboos in the immediate vicinity of the Monastery, but the Banner Oboo rituals (conducted, it must be said, by lamas from Mergen) continue with sacrifice to this day. Its four day-long renewal rituals ideally occur every three years and entail the sacrifice of an ox, whose hide is subsequently cut into strips and bound into a rope that symbolically binds and encircles the district's participants. This hide rope is later used for prayer flag-lines carried from the apex of the oboo.

Through decay and subsequent collapse, a ring-type manner of construction was evident in the two lesser Mergen oboos (I & III), and mud-faced seams are exposed within their interior. These attest to a concentric building technique, different from that of the ancient 'altars' thought by Chinese archaeologists to be precursors of oboos. While this technique would suit a sense of the successive expansion or rebuilding of monuments, it would equally complement the sealing-in of something. Recently rebuilt oboos have open, 'well-like' shafts within their cores. While obscured by the thick brushwood cover at the top of the Banner Oboo, the shaft in the *Olon Huvrag-yn Oboo* (II) is c. 1.20 m in diameter and at least 1.30 m deep (Fig. 5). We were told that 'buried treasure' was placed at its base. This involved a pot into which were placed five kinds of grain, silver, gold, a book and mantras.¹⁰ Admittedly, such shafts are not apparent in the 'old' oboos, though, without excavation, tumbled collapse makes certainty impossible.

The link between open shafts and placed items



Figure 6. *The Olin Huvrag-yn Oboo (II), looking north with a large 'original' ancillary cairn in left foreground and the smaller 1998 'forgery' settings tight against the foot of the military wall right. (Photograph: C. Evans.)*

is potentially telling as 'buried treasure' is a central concept within Tibetan Buddhism (Ramble 1997, 176–7). That the oboos' open shafts hold *buried* treasure may, however, reflect distinctively Mongolian attitudes towards land (especially in contrast to the local Chinese frontier economy — bulldozing great field blocks, cutting mines and railway sidings). That their shafts do not penetrate the earth but instead are enclosed within the body of the cairn — effectively presenting *raised* 'subterranean' chambers — complements an ethos of going lightly upon, and not wilfully scarring, the earth. Equally, and in contrast to the bulk of these stone settings, it is surely telling that their pivot is a wooden pole and brushwood branches — the 'organic world'.

Typical of building orientation throughout China in general, oboos face southwards. This is apparent in the small box-like recesses set at the level of the first step tier in both *Olon Huvrag-yn* and Banner Oboos (II & IV). In the case of the latter, the recess is fronted by a raised porch and a sacrifice stone, in the former by a stone hearth. All the survey-recorded oboos have associated minor cairns which, apart from Oboo II, are laid out as 'tails' extending northwards from the main oboo.¹¹ This would seem to be the common manner in which subsidiary settings are disposed in this region, though often the large oboo lies astride the cairn line.

In contrast, the plan of the *Olon Huvrag-yn Oboo*

(II: Fig. 5:4) is encircled by cairns (as specified in the text by Mergen Geegen). Its outer ring had been bisected by the massive wall built by the Army in the 1960s, and the oboo was only rebuilt in 1998 when its circular scheme was also reconstituted. The compound had cut off the oboo's *three* easternmost 'companion' cairns, but when it was rebuilt these were substituted by *four* much smaller settings (Figs. 6 & 9:B).¹² Little more than low stone heaps and less than a quarter of the size of the originals, these are placed hard against the foot of the wall. (The lama who assisted us in the surveys referred to them as 'forgeries'.) The monument now, therefore, variously exists as having 13 'companions', if only those on the wall's exterior are counted; 12, if the original form can be appreciated, or even 16 if all the encircling settings — new and old — are enumerated. Whilst ultimately a product of phasing and 'history', this nevertheless tells of both the simultaneous and cumulative nature of monuments. The manner of its rebuilding also suggests that what is crucial is the provision of an *appreciable* spatial or ritual framework, as those elements of the original plan cut off by the wall seem without sanctity (or recognition). Certainly the division of the monument group by the compound wall is jarring. It provides a backdrop which, impinging on its setting, detaches the oboo group from the 'timeless' and firmly situates it in relation to present historical circumstances.

Lay informants were adamant that the monument must always have involved 13 encircling cairns, though otherwise they had no explanation for its concentric layout (and certainly no immediate knowledge of the Mergen Geegen's prescription). When faced with the plan evidence of its original 12-ancillary cairn form (Fig. 9:B), they were emphatic that the 'missing' mound must have been entirely cut away. This is despite the fact that it obviously had not and, by the interval of their setting, could never have existed. Only the northernmost Mergen Oboo has a 13-cairn tail, with the eastern, Oboo III having 12 (Fig. 5:1 & 2). Currently the Banner Oboo has only nine settings (Fig. 5:3), as the northwestern end of its 'tail' had recently been eradicated by the encroachment of fields. But when first visited in 1998 it did indeed have 13 'companions'.¹³ This is exactly the kind of layout described in MS5109 which states that a main oboo should have a line of 13 'following' (*daguul*) oboos leading to it from the north. In addition, this text also relates that the main oboo should have 'protecting' (*xaragul*) oboos in each of the four cardinal directions; precisely the arrangement of the Mergen Oboo I which also has cardinal cairns.

This apparent 12/13 dichotomy in the disposition of the subsidiary cairns may not, of course, represent a discrepancy at all and the counts of both types could be 13 depending on whether or not the main cairn is enumerated along with the 12 ancillary settings. We should be wary of over-privileging the Mergen Geegen's explanation of the 'one-plus-twelve' type. Legends, such as the one mentioned earlier concerning the Khan with thirteen children, often occlude the numerical distinction. The Banner Oboo's cairns are said to be linked to the fate of a Mongol called Tulga, who led the Red Guards in their orgy of local destruction. When the oboo was rebuilt, feeling guilty for his actions he offered a horse for consecration. Upon its dedication, the horse was set free and ran away into the mountains. Tulga, however, found the animal and secretly sold it — a sinful action. Shortly thereafter he was beaten by local people and died from his injuries. Apparently the corpse strangely decomposed within a day and, against Mongol custom, he was immediately buried. People reported seeing 13 snakes crawl from his grave — one for each of the oboo's ancillary cairns. Yet, this is essentially a tale of action and retribution; it differs from the other oboo stories in that it is *associative* (i.e. post-construction) and does not concern the monument's origins.

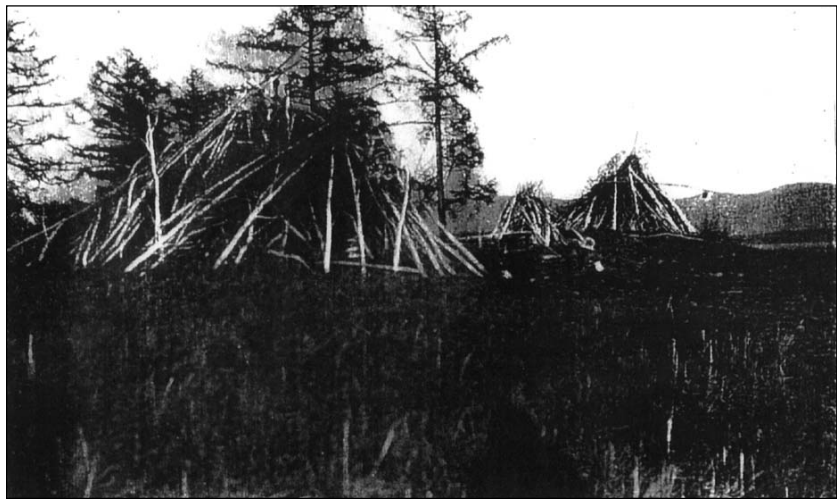
In certain Buddhist ritual texts it is written that oboos should be accompanied by 13 types of armour and that sacrificial animals must be offered in groups of the same number; also the number of land-spirits given in sacrifice in Buryatia is 13 (Gerasimova 1981). Equally, in other Mongolian areas the 12 'directions' are considered to constitute a 'cosmic grid' (eight-divided cardinal axes plus above/below and back/front). Time and the setting of the calendar may also come into play. Apparently, amongst the Darhad Mongols of the Hövsgöl Province on Northern Mongolia, where oboos are constructed of wood in a tepee-like manner, the main construction is flanked by 12 lesser stacks (six each side; Fig. 7 shows an oboo setting of this general type). The smaller settings relate to the zodiac calendar, though most people do not know (or care) of their meaning (and whether 12 or 13 is the appropriate number is also disputed: M.A. Pedersen pers. comm.).¹⁴ Elsewhere in Mongolia still other cairn 'formulas' are known and, given the many permutations of Buddhist systems of numeration, it is difficult to establish whether this 12/13 distinction — as embodied in the plan of Oboo II — has more general implications.¹⁵ No doubt it was the sheer diversity of oboo practices that fostered the Geegen's attempt to encourage greater

orthodoxy.

Although describing a much more pronounced (i.e. steeper) four-tier structure, the basic stamp of the Mergen Geegen's ideal can nevertheless be recognized in the profile of the Banner Oboo with its marked, two-cubit high (0.90 m) stepped rises. This is despite the fact that it lacks the uppermost fourth ring and that its ancillary cairns are arranged as a linear tail and not a circle. It is only Oboo II that has encircling cairns, but in that instance its main mound in no way approaches the Geegen's ideal. Of course, both of these monuments have been re-built in the last two decades and we cannot be certain what form their profiles originally took.¹⁶

One characteristic both these oboos share is their provision for mass ritual circumambulation (e.g. Humphrey 1996, pl. 9; Sneath 2000, pl. 9). During annual ceremonies this is undertaken by the congregation within the 4–5 m wide swathe between Oboo II's central cairn and its encircling 'companions'. With an interval of 8.50 m, the tail-line of the Banner Oboo has a much greater stand-off from its main cairn than the other 'axial' Mergen oboos (I & III: Fig. 5:1–4). This directly relates to the scale of the communal rituals it sees and the passage of group circumambulation. In this manner, whether or not formally demarcated by encircling cairns, circumambulation — walking the oboos' perimeter — effectively contributes a further concentric swathe, echoing the basic structure of the main cairns themselves.

In the light of the Geegen's prescription, taken as a whole the evidence of Mergen oboos probably reflects both chronological difference (Oboos I & III may well pre-date his edict) and changes wrought through local accommodation and translation (i.e. diverse system of enumeration) and, ultimately for Oboos I and IV, their recent rebuilding from the ground up. Within this matrix of tradition, active renewal and ascription, despite basic morphological distinctions, these are all held to be 'monuments' of



Figures 7 & 8. *Oboo variability: above, tepee-like setting in the Upper Yenisei basin, 1910–11 (Carruthers 1914, 246); below, branch 'stack-style' oboo (bound with sheep's wool around a stone core) as constructed by Mongolian communities in eastern Tibet. (Photograph: H. Diemerger; Henan, Quinghai, 2001.)*

the same type; the details of form being irrelevant to the fact that they are all oboos. It is the broader framework in which they are held — in which active and ancient or unused are more important distinctions — that unites them as a ritual construction.

The landscape grid: interrupted geographies

The high compound wall that encloses the monastic grounds distorts its relationship to the immediate environs, detaching it from its surroundings. It blocks the lower horizon along the western side, with the

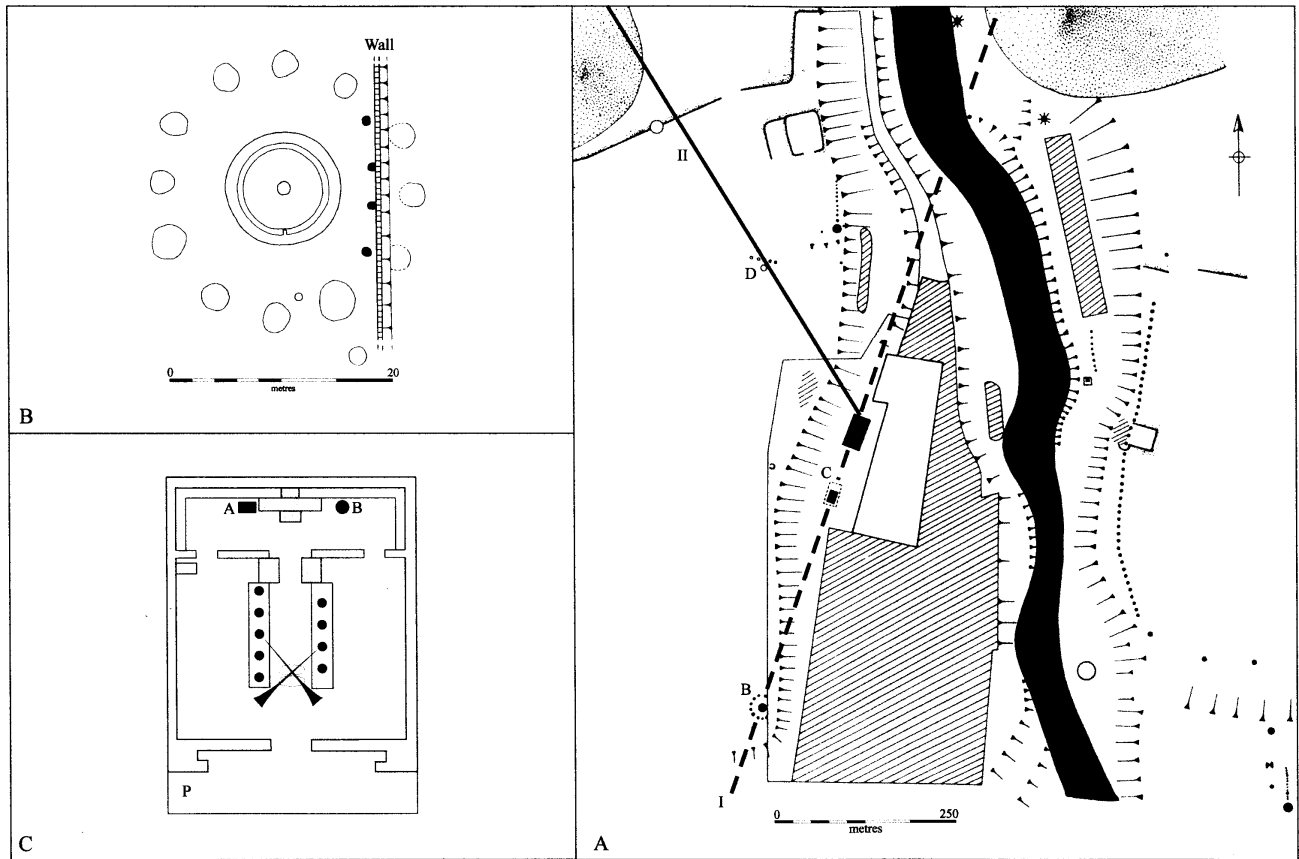


Figure 9. A) The Mergen environs with landscape axes indicated (I & II, dashed black and grey tone lines respectively); B) Oboo II with encircling cairns cut by Army Compound wall (blackened settings indicate secondary, post-wall cairn 'forgeries'); C) embodying the Monastery's main northeast–southwest axis, the disposition of ritual equipment and the seating arrangement of lamas within the small front temple; D) the location of the sach line (see Fig. 10).

result that Oboo II is no longer visible from within the precinct. This, and the fact that prior to our survey in 2000 no large-scale maps were available of the area, gave a certain ambiguity to that monument's relative position. Oboo II is said to lie west of the monastery, and as indicated on Figure 2 this it indeed does. It also falls at the southern end of the central axis of the main temples and the Monastery's destroyed entrance gate (Fig. 9:A). (The ruins of a stupa — another victim of the Cultural Revolution — on the Oxin Tengri mountain peak immediately above the Monastery marks the other end of this alignment.) Lying some 20 degrees east of true north, this contrasts with the roughly due north–south orientation of the 'companion' tails of the other two Mergen oboos (I & III). It does, however, match the orientation of the tail of the Banner Oboo; the latter providing a second alignment in the monument's layout (its front box-recess and porch are oriented due south).

How are we to account for this shared east-of-north orientation — is it, in effect, a 'second north'? This would seem unlikely and, it relates rather, to Mongolian systems of landscape axes.¹⁷ These lines of supernatural influence have their origins on prominent mountain tops. The line upon which the main temples and Oboo II are arranged upon is generated by the benign influence of Oxin Tengri peak, which looms northeast behind the Monastery. Echoed in the layout and furnishings of the temples, and the sitting arrangement of the lamas within them, this is not just a matter of architectural orientation. This axis is embodied in all of their main rituals (Fig. 9:A & C). Furthermore, it relates to the history of the founding of the *Olon Huvrag-yn Oboo* (II). Apparently the lamas quarrelled among themselves and the rebel leader was expelled by the Third Mergen Gegeen. As the rebellious lama retreated in a south-westerly direction he turned round to curse the Monastery. The oboo was then built to counteract this

curse, and its name, 'The Oboo of the Many Student Lamas' reflects another of its functions — the ritual (amicable) gathering of lamas. This northeast–southwest alignment is balanced by an axis running from a northwestern peak (with an oddly evocative outcrop) down southeastwards toward the main temple. The dangerous influence of this line was blocked by the construction of a range of sachs (Fig. 9D). Essentially brick-built mini-stupas, these were levelled during the military occupation of the area, and the rise on which they are sited was then evidently fortified with firing trenches and a gun emplacement ring (Fig. 10). The sachs are said to have been established by the Third Mergen Geegen himself to protect the Monastery (and he is also said to have set up smaller sachs at each of the four 'diagonal' corners of its precinct). Yet the five sachs do not lie at a right-angle across the northwest–southeast diagonal, and from this it could perhaps be inferred that originally they related to still another axis.

Equally, around the base of the small southern temple the footings and column bases of an earlier temple are apparent. This was evidently aligned more to the northwest than the main stupa/temple/oboo axis. It is said that this reorientation occurred when a round boulder rolled magically from Tibet down to the front of the temple. This stone still lies there at the foot of an incense offering plinth made from the same pink stone as used in the earlier temple. It is difficult to know how to evaluate these findings and clearly they warrant further study. They suggest, however, that elements of the directional 'grid' were only emergent through time and experience within the landscape.

Given this local system of landscape 'qualities' and alignments, how is it that the tail of the Banner Oboo follows approximately the same east-of-north orientation as the Monastery itself? Could it be that the Monastery's alignment has been projected as a more general area-wide orientation? In all likelihood this instead reflects the landscape setting common to the Monastery and the Banner Oboo. Like the Monastery, the Banner Oboo lies in pasture before the mouth of a major valley through the mountains and

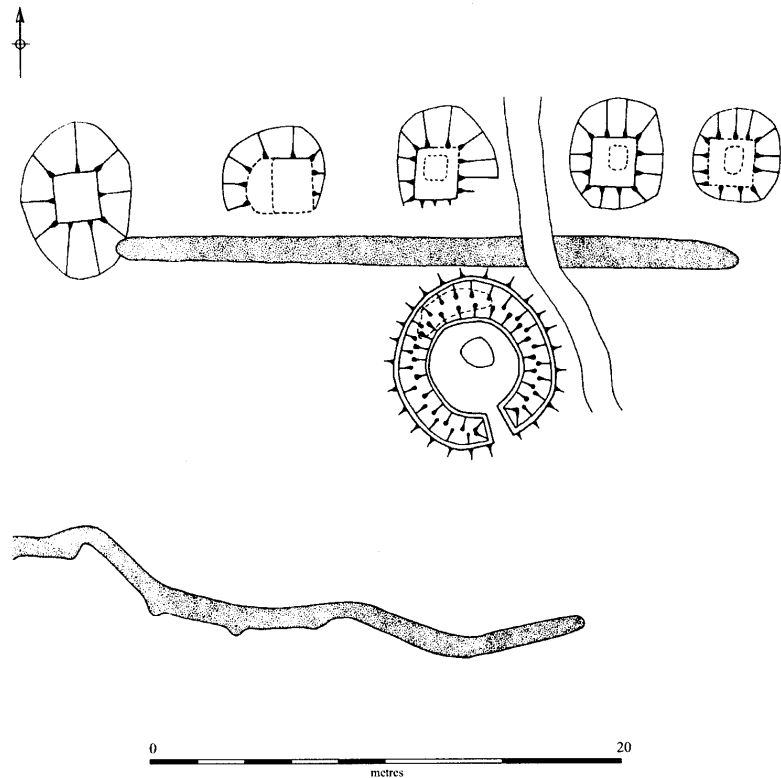


Figure 10. *The Sach setting: strewn with brick rubble, the five low mounds (with raised square-set cores) carried small brick-built 'stupa-like' shrines. Stippling indicates defensive features relating to the Sino-Soviet conflict; the embanked circular ring is a contemporary gun emplacement.*

its tail appears oriented on a peak to the northeast. Whatever the basis of their shared alignments, at a level of basic principles the Banner and *Olon Huvragnyn* Oboos share a comparable spatial structure. They fall at the ends of northeast–southwest diagonals — respectively the cairn line and Oxin Tengri stupa/temple axis — and, reinforced by their regular circumambulation, stop the southward projection of their diagonals. In this manner, though oboos are obviously associated with a series of 'world-centring' rites, their deployment in the Mergen landscape is similar to the sachs and relates to the blocking of spiritual influence. In the case of the smaller 'ancient' oboos (I & III) it is a matter of guarding (*hariguulag*) against 'evil' flows and repressing (*darlag*) dangerous local spirits, whereas for the larger rebuilt oboos their location appears both to have this function and to channel auspicious axes.

All three types of sacred monument found in the Mergen environs (obooos, stupas and sach) are held to be active in the repression or repulse of the dangerous spiritual forces flowing along the axes described. They differ, however, in the other religious rationales for their construction. Stupas are

built to hold relics, especially the ashes of famous deceased lamas, and they are accorded worship. The sach contains the relics of broken statues of deities, these being too sacred to be thrown away. The oboo, as we have seen, houses 'treasure' items symbolic of fertility and success, but it also may be a repository of ancestral values and accordingly is by far the most active, in respect of communal ritual, of the three types.

Despite attempts at their 'regularization', trying to fix *a* meaning or find *an* answer to the layout of oboos is probably futile. Ultimately deriving from specifically local interpretations of basic ritual principles, our study highlights just how potentially complex is the interplay of their components and the possible permutations of their many parts. Not only does this involve the size/form and orientation of the main cairn (and what lies buried within), but also the number and arrangements of its companion settings. Nevertheless, the cumulative character and the underlying dualism (i.e. two orientations; concentric and linear layout) of Mergen's monuments appears unequivocal and this reflects the broader nature of ritual practice. On the one hand, there are things that are generally understood and which evoke symbolism relating to renewal (e.g. physically enlarging the oboo, the re-establishment the flag-lines and the binding of the community) and auspicious landscape situation. Yet there are also elements of their formal structure which are variously repeated or re-created but which seem to have *little discernible content* (e.g. 12 vs. 13 cairns) — speculation, but no authoritative explanation. This seems to reach beyond the vagaries of interpretative ambiguity or 'fluidity' and, inaccessible to 'simple' phenomenological approaches (cf. Tilley 1994), pertains to acts undertaken for their own sake revolving around the enactment of ritual form alone. It is the ensuing suspension of the 'daily' that is crucial rather than the specific details of either liturgical content or physical form (see Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994; see also Buffetrille 1997 concerning ritual prescription and what is done). This has obvious ramifications for the reading of past monuments elsewhere; for example, the 'real', if any, meaning of subtle site-type distinctions and the potential for *substitution* (e.g. stone/wood building materials, replacing of one species for another in ritual offerings, or one form of oboo/temple succeeding another). It is the generic understanding of the construction of ritual space and its attendant sacrifices or behaviours (and 'expectations') that are paramount. Equally, the re-constitution — effectively, in a Buddhist context, the *reincarnation* — of ritual

space and its contribution to a sense of 'timelessness' must be acknowledged. We see this process in the *re*-construction of monuments *re*-employing original materials, intentionally avoiding design or style innovation and with a strict adherence to 'traditional' form.

Yet, somewhat contradictorily, there is also an interaction with history. Through time, framing narratives change. The vigorous expansion of the Mongols into the region during the seventeenth century (as celebrated by the establishment of the *Hoshuun Oboo*) has, in the face of latter-day state suppression, now become a story of deeply-rooted cultural resistance.¹⁸ It is recent history, and particularly the construction of the Army compound (and the prohibition of oboo worship) that accounts for the arrangement today of the Mergen *Olon Huvrag-yn Oboo*. The site's imbalanced plan and uncomfortable setting expresses a dynamic tension. Here we see an *active* though ancient monument tradition impinged upon by the 'present' — Inner Asia poised upon the brink of war. Now released from these events, in the name of cultural rejuvenation, the monument is being re-subsumed within a *timeless* tradition evocative of the ethos of Haslund's introductory passage above. It can only be presumed that other monuments in other times have undergone similar transformational crises — moving, as it were, in and out of time.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the McDonald Institute's inspired support for the project. Equally, the advice, support and the co-operation of colleagues in both Britain and China warrants acknowledgement, particularly Barbara Bender, Richard Bradley, Hildegard Diezmerger, Mark Edmonds, Hürelbaater, James Laidlaw, Monxbuyan, Nasanbayer, Morten Axel Pedersen, David Sneath and Mergen's lamas. The illustrations in this article reflect Marcus Abbott's and Andrew Hall's expertise in the face of our field efforts.

Notes

1. We use the word *stupa* to refer to monuments locally known as *suburgan*. These are constructed of brick, painted white, and consist of a round cupola on a square base. Finished at the top with a pointed finial, the stupa contains a hollow chamber in its base for relics (Fig. 3; see e.g. Irwin 1979).
2. Wayside cairns are not worshipped in communal rituals like the main oboos, but passers-by often make small offerings there or add a stone to them. Consisting of informal heaps of rocks (usually no more than

- c. 0.90–1.20 m high), unlike worshipped oboos (*taxidag oboo*) they are not planned constructions.
3. The term *sach* seems to be a very local one and we had difficulty in discovering exactly what it referred to, as all monuments of this type were apparently destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. From informants' reports and inspection of former *sach* sites we concluded that they could have the form either of a small stone oboo or a tiny brick stupa, but in either case contained a moulded clay urn (approx. 20 cm in height) containing relics.
 4. 'Archaeological discoveries indicate that constructions with features similar to the oboo were built at least from Neolithic times. There are many such examples, among which the remains of an altar of the *Hong Shan Wen Hua* (Red Mountain Culture) is typical. This is located in Harchin East County in Liaoning Province. The main bodies of the altar are a round and a square construction. At the front is the round one and there are stones piles to the right and left, and further behind is a large square construction' (Gai 1999, 150, quoting Guo & Zhang 1984). We should note, however, that this combination of round and square objects is not typical for the contemporary oboo, and Gai gives no indication of what kind of 'altar' he has in mind.
 5. In certain Mongol regions there is another kind of 'oboo' which does have an altar-like function, in the sense that sacred items are laid out on it and offered up to deities. This is the flat-topped rock, or temporary heap made of stones and snow, that each family sets up at Lunar New Year celebrations for laying out offerings, lighting a fire, and burning incense in honour of the sky and ancestors. This 'altar' is called oboo by Zakamensk Buryats (Galdanova 1992, 112) and Horchin Mongols (Humphrey 1996, 178–9).
 6. The recent graves of Mergen lamas are sited within earthwork monuments, including a fort associated with the Zhao Dynasty Great Wall and within a cluster of Han period barrows some kilometres away.
 7. As Gerasimova (1969) shows for the Buryat region, this listing of geographically-dispersed spirits indicates that any given oboo is part of a system or network. These can extend over great distances and often cross national frontiers; the study of listed place names can indicate the dimensions of the sacred geography of given communities of worshippers.
 8. In contrast to the more widespread axial-cairn settings, the circular layout of the Mergen's prescription may relate to 'formal' Buddhist concerns with mandala-type cosmological modes of landscape/world organization (e.g. see papers in MacDonald 1997).
 9. Unlike the Mergen oboos, the rituals associated with this oboo seem to have always been bloody and militaristic, rather than of a Buddhist nature. Before its levelling in the Cultural Revolution, sacrifices were apparently held once a year by the three Banners of the Urad. According to informants, prior to 1947 these involved human sacrifice; preferably 'hairy' Chinese men, who apparently offered themselves for payment to their families and to acquire merit for their souls. In that year, unable to find a suitable victim, an ox was substituted and this custom was thereafter retained. Other Mongols we consulted however doubted that human sacrifice ever occurred annually and was instead reserved for times of war.
 10. This assemblage has distinct links to the contents of a pot holding 'things that will multiply' at the *Maani* ritual held annually in the main temple. (Mumford 1990, 96–7, relates a comparable pole-capped 'vase deposition' during the construction of a stupa.) Another informant, however, reported that a bull skin had been placed in the oboo's shaft. During the Cultural Revolution the armour and clothing of the Jargal Baatar was apparently stored for safekeeping under the neighbouring *Jahiragch Oboo*. On its razing the clothing was rescued and today is kept in the southern temple in Mergen Monastery.
It is reported that when the Japanese occupied Manchuria their army removed the 'treasure' from oboos and, attempting to require ritual power (and slight the local populace), replaced it with samurai swords and pictures of the Emperor (D. Sneath pers. comm.).
 11. The meaning of the enumeration of tail-cairns is discussed below, as is also the alignment of some on 'spiritual' landscape diagonals. Otherwise, it is possible that other axial orientations relate to the demonstration of cardinal directions and, by extrapolation, the calendar year. A need to 'fix' time and space may well have been greater in the open grasslands of Mongolia proper (as opposed to the more varied landscape of Inner Mongolia).
 12. The monument was rebuilt at the instigation of a local village elder in an effort to heal rifts amongst Mergen's lamas.
 13. The *Jahiragch Oboo* (Oboo of the Administrator) was also inspected, though not formally surveyed. This is situated on a scarp above the site of the next Monastery west of Mergen which, with the oboo, was entirely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. It was re-established in 1983. Out of a sense of guilt the local Mongolian villagers now contribute bricks to the oboo's fabric which they themselves had taken and re-used from the Monastery's ruins. This oboo is quite small, with its main cairn estimated to be c. 5 m in diameter and c. 1.60 m high. Unlike the Mergen North and East Oboos (I & III), its sits *astride* its 12-cairn north-south axis; three settings lying south before it and nine behind to the north.
 14. While the lesser oboo stacks are closed or solid, the much larger central setting is hollow and has a stone oboo within its interior; circumambulation occurs around it inside the cavity of the timber 'teepee stack'. The oboo is decorated with both Buddhist and shamanist objects (M.A. Pedersen pers. comm.).
 15. Akiba and Akamatsu describe an east-west axial arrangement at the Gangjuur Monastery amongst the

- Daur Mongols of Manchuria (1941, cited in Humphrey 1996, 179, note 12). There eight cairns lay aligned on either side of the main oboo (17 altogether). Elsewhere in Mongolia, seven and nine cairn-line 'tails' occur, and the application of a smooth rendering upon the main cairn's stonework has been documented (Sneath 2000, pl. 9 and pers. comm.). As regards Buddhist enumeration consider, for example, the 13 'umbrellas' or 'wheels' and the stages of Buddhahood reflected in the levels of Tibetan *chorten* or the 33 levels of heaven and the 99 skies. See e.g. Tucci 1932 and Snodgrass 1985 concerning the relationship of stupas and *chorten*. The complex interaction between stupas and oboos — at Mergen they are both constructed along the same landscape axes — will be fully explored within the project's final publication.
16. The re-built line of Oboo II is visible above the basal stone course, so that it originally must have had the same large diameter — 10.20 m — as today. We can be less sure of the pre-Cultural Revolution form of the Banner Oboo. The large subsidiary cairn beside its front altar may well pre-date the present layout, and other 'suggestive' configurations protrude from the ground surrounding the oboo.
 17. Mongolians have a strong sense of auspicious 'paths' and movement within landscape, which includes avoiding the invisible routeways (*güidel*) of devils and ghosts. There are also more abstract systems which determine the direction of journeys. The 'Black Dog's Mouth' (*xar noxoin am*), a notional cosmological creature whose 'head' and 'tail' — opposed good and bad axial ends — shifts with the seasons, and the 'Eight Seats' (*naiman suudal*) relating astrological positions to the cardinal directions. Reference is also made to astrological sources when Mongols site buildings.
 18. Almost achieving the status of a cult deity, pictures of Genghis Khan are today proudly displayed in many Mongolian houses and shops, with sacrifices being offered at his Mausoleum. Now even accommodated by officialdom, oboo ceremonies are considered a tourist attraction and feature in Chinese travel literature.

Christopher Evans
 Cambridge Archaeological Unit
 Department of Archaeology
 University of Cambridge
 Downing Street
 Cambridge
 CB2 3DZ

Caroline Humphrey
 Department of Social Anthropology
 University of Cambridge
 Free School Lane
 Cambridge
 CB2 3RF

References

- Abaeva, L.L., 1992. *Kult gor i buddizm v Buryatii*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Bradley, R., 2000. *An Archaeology of Natural Places*. London: Routledge.
- Buffetrille, K., 1997. The Great Pilgrimage of A-myes rma-chen: written tradition, living realities, in MacDonald (ed.), 75–132.
- Bürintegüs (ed.), 1999. *Mongol jang üile-yin nebeterhei toli* [Encyclopaedia of Mongolian Custom, Volume of Spiritual Culture]. Chifeng: Inner Mongolian Science and Technology Press.
- Carruthers, D., 1914. *Unknown Mongolia*. London: Hutchinson.
- Evans, C., 1999. Cognitive maps and narrative trails: fieldwork with the Tamu-mai/Gurung of Nepal, in *Shaping Your Landscape: the Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape*, eds. R. Layton & P. Ucko. London: Routledge, 439–57.
- Evans, C. & C. Humphrey, 2002. After-lives of the Mongolian Yurt: the archaeology of a Chinese tourist camp. *Journal of Material Culture* 7, 189–210.
- Gai, S., 1999. *Meng-gu-zu wen-wu yu kao-gu yan-jiu* [Studies on Mongolian Material Culture and Archaeology]. Shenyang: Liaoning National Press.
- Galdanova, G.P., 1992. *Zakamenskie Buryaty*. Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- Galdanova, G.P., K.M. Gerasimova, D.B. Dashiev & G.T. Mitupov, 1983. *Lamaizm v Buryatii XVIII - nachala XX v*. Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- Gerasimova, K., 1981. De la signification du nombre 13 dan le culte des obo (trs. Hamayon & Popova). *Etudes Mongoles* 12, 163–75.
- Guo, D. & K. Zhang, 1984. Liaoning sheng ha-zuo-xian Donbshan zui Hongshan wen-hua jian-zhou qun-zhi fa-jue [A brief report on the excavation of a stone-block construction of the Hongshan culture at the beak of Dongshan Mountain in Harchin east County in Liaoning province]. *Wen Wu* [Cultural Relics] 1984, no. 11.
- Haslund, H., 1949. *Mongolian Journey*. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul.
- Heissig, W., 1953. A Mongolian source to the Lamaist suppression of shamanism in the 17th century, *Anthropos* 48, 1–29, 493–536.
- Huber, T., 1999. *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet*. New York (NY): Oxford University Press.
- Humphrey, C. (with U. Onon), 1996. *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Daur Mongols*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Humphrey, C., 2001. Contested landscapes in Inner Mongolia: walls and cairns, in *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, eds. B. Bender & M. Winder. Oxford: Berg, 55–68.
- Humphrey, C. & J. Laidlaw, 1994. *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: a Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of*

- Worship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Irwin, J., 1979. The stupa and the cosmic axis: the archaeological evidence, in *South Asian Archaeology 1977*, ed. M. Taddei. Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 799–846.
- Liu, H., 1986. Neimenggu danqingshan xiduan xinshiqishidai yizhi [The new Stone Age remains found at the Western Daqingshan Mountains in Inner Mongolia]. *Kaogu, Baotoushi Wenwu Guanlisuo* [Baotou City Institute of Historical Relics] 225, 485–96.
- Lobsangdambijalsan 1998 (1783). *Vchir-dara Mergen diyanchi lama-yin gegen-u gbum jarlig hemegdehü orshiba* [The Whole Teaching of Vchir-dara Mergen diyanchi lama]. Hohhot: Inner Mongolian Educational Press.
- MacDonald, A.W. (ed.), 1997. *Mandala and Landscape*. (Emerging Perceptions in Buddhist Studies 6.) New Delhi: D.K. Printworld.
- MICR – Management Institute of Cultural Relics of Baotou City, 1986. Excavations of a Neolithic site of the Western Daqingshan mountains, Inner Mongolia. *Kaogu* 6, 485–96.
- MS5109 *Obugan-u egütexü jang üilen selte orusiba*, Archives of the State Library of Mongolia (5109/96, 194.2, 0–1444).
- Mumford, S.R., 1990. *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal*. Madison (WI): University of Wisconsin Press.
- Murail, P., E. Crubézy, H. Martin, L. Haye, J. Buzek, P.H. Giscard, T. Turbat & D. Erdenebaatar, 2000. The man, the woman and the hyoid bone: from archaeology to the burial practices of the Xiongnu people (Egyin Gol valley, Mongolia). *Antiquity* 74, 531–6.
- Ramble, C., 1997. The creation of the Bon mountain of Kongpo, in Macdonald (ed.), 133–232.
- Rudenko, S.I., 1969. *Die Kultur der Hsiung-nu und die Hügelräber von Noin Ula*. Bonn: Rodulf Habertl Verlag.
- Sneath, D., 2000. *Changing Inner Mongolia: Pastoral Mongolian Society and the Chinese State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Snodgrass, A., 1985. *The Symbolism of the Stupa*. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University.
- Tatar, M., 1971. Zur Fragen des Obo-kultes bei den Mongolen. *Acta Orientalia* (Hungary) 24 (Fasc. 3), 301–30.
- Tilley, C., 1994. *A Phenomenology of Landscape*. Oxford: Berg.
- Tucci, G., 1932. *Stupa: Art, Architectonics and Symbolism, Indo-Tibetica*. Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.
- Zhukovskaya, N.L., 1977. *Lamaizm i rannie formy religii*. Moscow: Nauka.

Author biographies

Christopher Evans has been the Executive Director of the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (University of Cambridge) since its establishment in 1990. Publishing widely, he has the singular claim of specializing in both Fenland and Himalayan archaeology. With a particular interest in ethnoarchaeology, over a number of years he has been involved in interdisciplinary ethno-historical researches with the Gurung communities of Nepal. There, co-Director of both the Kohla and Sinja Valley projects, relevant fieldwork summaries are published in *Ancient Nepal* and a monograph is currently in preparation.

Caroline Humphrey is Professor of Asian Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, UK and a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. She has worked since 1966 in Asian parts of Russia, Mongolia, Inner Mongolia (China), India and Nepal and her research interests include the study of ritual, cultural environments, and economic and political transformations. Her relevant publications include: *Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm* (Cambridge University Press 1983); *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual* (with James Laidlaw, Clarendon Press 1994); *Shamans and Elders* (Clarendon Press 1996); *Marx Went Away, but Karl Stayed Behind* (Michigan University Press 1998); *The End of Nomadism? Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia* (with David Sneath, Duke University Press 1999).