

Sir Gerard Clauson and his *Skeleton Tangut Dictionary*

Imre Galambos

Sir Gerard Leslie Makins Clauson (1891–1974) worked most of his life as a civil servant and conducted academic research in his spare time.¹ Only after retiring in 1951 at the age of 60 was he able to devote his full attention to scholarly endeavours, which were primarily focussed on Turkish languages. Thus as a scholar, today he is primarily remembered for his contribution to Turkish studies, and his *Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* is still an essential reference tool in the field.² Yet in addition to his study of Turkish and Mongolian linguistics, he also worked on a number of other Asian languages, including Tangut. Even though his extensive list of publications includes a small number of items related to Tangut studies,³ he devoted an incredible amount of time and effort to studying the language and to compiling a dictionary. He never finished the dictionary but deposited a draft version along with his notes in seven large volumes at the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), so that they would be available to anyone who wished to study Tangut and perhaps continue his research. Eric Grinstead, who used the dictionary when working on the Tangut manuscripts at the British Museum, called it “a paragon of excellence” in comparison with high level of errors in dictionaries available at the time.⁴ Indeed, the erudition of Clauson’s dictionary is obvious even upon a cursory look at the manuscript version and had it ever been published, it would have undoubtedly made a major impact on scholarship. This paper introduces the available material in an attempt to shed some light on an unknown episode in the history of Tangut studies, a promising start that due to a variety of reasons never reached its potential.

1. The Tangut collection in London

The Tangut material in London originates from the third Central Asian expedition of Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943), who visited the ruins of Khara-khoto in 1914. Although the site had been excavated in 1908–1909 by the Russian team led by Pyotr K. Kozlov (1863–1935), Stein was still able to gather a considerable amount of material, including fragments of manuscripts and printed books, and a variety of art objects. Following the expedition, the results of the excavations were deposited at the British Museum from where part of them were shipped to India on account of the Government of India having sponsored part of Stein’s expedition. But the majority of the textual materials remained at the Museum and with the establishment of the British Library were subsequently transferred there. Today, the 6,000 plus Tangut fragments in London represent one of the important collections of Tangut material in the world. Unfortunately, the collection remained almost entirely unstudied until the 1960s.

¹ I would like to thank the staff of SOAS Archives for their assistance in working with Clauson’s papers. I am also grateful to Mr. Oliver Clauson who was kind related some of his memories concerning his father’s work on Tangut in a telephone interview on 23 March 2015. Special thanks to Nathan Hill, Sam van Schaik and Kirill Solonin who helped to locate archival sources and gave useful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

² Clauson 1972.

³ Clauson 1940 and 1964, and 1969 and 1973, respectively.

⁴ Grinstead 1972, 30. Grinstead was referring to the index of characters to the Russian edition of the *Sea of Characters* (Keping et al. 1969) or the index in Vol. 1 of Sofronov’s grammar (Sofronov 1968), both of which, according to Grinstead, had numerous errors.

The first inventory of the texts obtained from Khara-khoto was completed by Stein himself. In Volume 1 of the scientific report of his third expedition, published in 1928 in four folio-size volumes under the title *Innermost Asia*, he elaborates on his visit to the site at great length, giving an exhaustive account of everything he saw or excavated at the ruins, from traces of irrigation channels to discarded shards of pottery.⁵ To supplement his description of the site, Stein also included a considerable number of photographs and maps. Naturally, fragments of manuscripts and printed books occupy a prominent place in Stein's narrative, not the least because they helped to date the site and establish its cultural identity. The 90-page detailed list of objects found at the ruins is in fact the first catalogue of the Stein collection from Khara-khoto, even though it primarily focuses on books with illustrations and allocates a considerable amount of space to various artefacts. The reason for highlighting the non-textual aspect of manuscripts was probably that at this time Tangut was still largely undeciphered and Stein was unable to find anyone who could catalogue the fragments and describe them from the point of view of their content.

Despite Stein's meticulous description of Tangut items found at the ruins of Khara-khoto, the collection seems to have received little attention. It is somewhat surprising that the fragments in London remained dormant and nobody consulted them, even though there was an obvious interest in Tangut materials worldwide during the pre-war period. While it is true that the Russian collection was much richer and appeared to have an inexhaustible supply of exciting texts, these only became accessible when Russian scholars studied and published them. Under such circumstances, it would have been sensible for European scholars to turn to the fragments kept in London, had this been possible. Yet it seems that the collection was either not easily accessible or largely unknown to contemporary scholars.

Initially, the person in charge of the Chinese material in the British Museum was Lionel Giles (1875–1958), a sinologist by training who catalogued the Chinese manuscripts from Dunhuang.⁶ Along with the Chinese language material, the Tangut fragments would have technically also been under his care, although he never published anything related to this part of the collection. There is indication that in his dealings with Chinese scholars, Giles was at times reluctant to facilitate access to the Dunhuang manuscripts.⁷ Yet the situation with the Tangut collection must have been different and there is no record of any requests to see the fragments during Giles's time at the Museum.⁸ Perhaps researchers believed that it was too fragmentary to be of practical use. Whatever the reasons for the neglect of the collection may have been, the situation changed following the retirement of Giles. From 1957 onward, the person in charge of the Chinese collections was Eric Grinstead, who became the first person doing research on the Tangut fragments. It was no coincidence that this was also the time of the revival of Tangut studies in Russia, one of the first steps of which was the posthumous publication of the works of Nikolai A. Nevsky (1892–1937). Nevsky's research on Tangut was published in 1960 in two large volumes

⁵ Stein 1928, v. 1, 429.

⁶ Giles 1957.

⁷ In a Chinese-language article Frances Wood (Wu 2011) writes about Giles's reluctance to show the manuscripts to Chinese scholars. See also Rong 2012, 212.

⁸ There is in fact correspondence among Clauson's papers (Letter dated 5 November 1935, SOAS Archives, MS 84335) in which F. W. Thomas suggests to him that they should solicit Giles's help to assign more specific meanings to the Chinese glosses published in Nevsky 1926. This reveals that neither Thomas nor Clauson regarded Giles as a difficult person who would hinder their attempts to work on Tangut.

under the title *Tangutskaya Filologiya* (Tangut Philology), the bigger part of which comprised a facsimile version of a handwritten Tangut dictionary.⁹ The Russian publications triggered Grinstead's interest in Tangut and Nevsky's dictionary provided a practical means for reading the fragments at the British Museum.

As a result of Grinstead's publications, scholars in Russia and Japan took notice of the Stein fragments in London. Archival documentation related to the collection (currently held at the British Library) includes correspondence from the 1960s with Russian and Japanese scholars who showed interest in the collection. Thus a letter from 1966 by the Russian Tibetologist Bronislav I. Kuznetsov (1931–1985), addressed to A. F. Thompson of the India Office Library, enquired whether their collection had “Tangut books” recovered by Stein, as he was particularly interested in the Tibetan transcriptions of Tangut words.¹⁰ To this Miss Thompson replied that all of these were at the British Museum and Eric Grinstead was in the process of compiling a vocabulary, also pointing out that the Library of SOAS had “some unpublished material deposited some time ago by Sir Gerard Clauson.” To this, she added that “[y]ou probably know that Sir Gerard has done a good deal of work on Tangut.”¹¹

Two more letters are from Hashimoto Mantarō 橋本萬太郎 (1932–1987), a linguist who worked both in Japan and the United States. While still in Japan, until 1962 he had studied Tangut phonology together with Ishihama Juntarō 石濱純太郎 (1888–1968), who had been Nevsky's colleague during the 1920–1930s. According to the letters, after having left Japan, Hashimoto had no chance to converse with colleagues on Tangut matters and so reading Clauson's article in *Asia Major* was “a great encouragement” for him, although he was also sad to learn that this article was Clauson's “swan song” with regard to Tangut studies.¹² In the next letter, Hashimoto thanked Grinstead for sending him offprints of his two articles published in the *British Museum Quarterly*.¹³

From 1963, Nishida Tatsuo 西田龍雄 (1928–2012) of Kyoto University visited the British Museum with the aim of studying the Tangut fragments. He remembers in a later publication that at this time the materials in the Stein collection were “preserved in bags, sealed and stored away, as yet unclassified and practically in the state in which they were first excavated.”¹⁴ He later made additional visits and helped Museum staff with renumbering some of the fragments. He also assisted in the conservation of the collection, providing conservators detailed instructions as to which fragments belonged together and how they should be aligned and positioned in relation to each other.

These activities show that after Grinstead became the person in charge of the collection, the fragments became well-known in the academic community and there was considerable interest in them. It would have been around the beginning of his tenure at the Museum that Grinstead

⁹ Nevsky 1960.

¹⁰ Handwritten letter dated 29 January 1966 (British Library). These letters are not catalogued but form part of the documentation attached to the Tangut collection.

¹¹ Typescript letter dated 10 February 1966 (British Library).

¹² Typescript letter dated 17 January 1965. The article referred here is Clauson 1964.

¹³ Typescript letter dated 19 May 1966. The articles in question are Grinstead 1961 and 1962.

¹⁴ Nishida 1964–1966, v. 2, 512.

learned about the existence of a dictionary compiled by Clauson which had been deposited at the Library of the SOAS by the author sometime in the second half of the 1950s. This impressive work, referred to by its creator as a “skeleton dictionary,” was the result of intensive labour over the course of many years. In a letter to James Douglas Pearson (1911–1997), Librarian of SOAS, Clauson wrote about the reasons for discontinuing work on the dictionary and depositing it along with his notes at SOAS the following way:¹⁵

As regards to the MS material, Simon’s idea, which I am very willing to adopt, is that I should present it to the Library, subject to the right to reborrow it in the (very unlikely) event of wishing to do so. The stuff is frankly in a bit of a muddle, but it represents a very large quantity of work & would be a great help if anyone ever wished to embark on Hsi-hsia studies. He would do so with my blessing & I would gladly explain to him what the stuff all represents. It includes inter alia a skeleton dictionary of the whole language. I stopped work on it partly because of other distractions but mainly because the job could not be done properly without getting access to further material which is known to exist in Russia. At the time I stopped, communications with Russia were impossible & it was believed that the stuff was hopelessly mislaid. However an article by Z. I. Gorbacheva in *Uchëniye Zapiski Instituta Vostokovedeniya* Vol. IX shows that it has now been located & put in order & very likely photographs of the other material required could be got.

You might like to put this letter with the material so that this clue is not lost.

One of the interesting points in the letter is that Clauson considered the possibility of taking the dictionary back from the SOAS Library and resuming work on it, which indicates that he did not keep a copy to himself, even if by this time this would not have posed a challenge from a technical point of view. In fact, Clauson himself mentioned in a publication that he had sent a microfilm copy of his dictionary to Mikhail V. Sofronov in Moscow.¹⁶ Thus it seems that he considered the volumes he deposited in the SOAS Library an official master copy which functioned very much like a publication, albeit an unofficial one.

In the letter to Pearson, Clauson identifies the reason for discontinuing his work on the dictionary as not being able to access to the Tangut material kept in Russia. The fact that he never raises the possibility of looking at the collection in the British Museum demonstrates that he not only did not have access to the Stein collection but possibly was unaware of the amount of Tangut material there. Apparently, Clauson was working with the Tangut materials published before World War II in Russia, and possibly Japan and China, and with time these became insufficient for his purposes. He notes that the material in St. Petersburg may have been “mislaid,” even though a recent publication showed that the situation may not have been as hopeless. The

¹⁵ Letter dated 29 June 1956 (SOAS Archives, MS 84335).

¹⁶ Clauson 1964, 55. In his monograph on Tangut grammar, Sofronov expresses his gratitude for having received a microfilm version of the dictionary and mentions Clauson’s research on the Tangut language in his overview of Tangut studies (Sofronov 1968, v.1, 4 and 26, respectively).

publication he mentions in the letter is Zoya I. Gorbacheva's short catalogue of texts identified in the Kozlov collection, which came out in 1954.¹⁷

2. Clauson's research on Tangut

Clauson's name is seldom mentioned with regard to Tangut studies because his publications on the topic are few and cursory.¹⁸ By far the greatest part of his research remain unpublished and his actual impact on the field was primarily through personal contact and correspondence. Clauson began studying Tangut around 1935, which coincides with the time other scholars around the world were also engaged in Tangut studies. Among the main figures of this scholarly trend at that time were Nevsky, Aleksandr A. Dragunov (1900–1955), Ishihama Juntarō and Wang Jingru 王靜如 (1903–1990), to whose publications Clauson had access.¹⁹ Stuart N. Wolfenden (1889–1938), the American linguist at the University of California, Berkeley, who normally worked on Tibeto-Burman dialects, also wrote a couple short studies on Tibetan and Chinese transcriptions of Tangut words and Clauson would have naturally read these.²⁰ Especially Nevsky's progress on the original collection looked promising and it was known that he was compiling a dictionary of the Tangut language, which was expected to advance the field forward.

Clauson corresponded with Frederick W. Thomas (1867–1956), professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford, who at the time was working on the decipherment of the Nam and Zhuangzhung languages, manuscripts of which had been discovered in Dunhuang. In a couple of letters from November 1935, Thomas commended Clauson for his progress in reading the Tangut script, noting that he himself had also tried his luck with Tangut but had to lay it aside indefinitely in order to be able to finish his study of Tibetan documents. Although we do not have Clauson's side of the correspondence, Thomas's letters make it clear that Clauson was exploring the idea whether the Nam language was related to Tangut, and tried to use, without much success, the list of Tangut words published by Nevsky to verify the hypothetical connection.²¹ As Thomas was interested in proving a different identity to the Nam language, he was less excited about such a possibility, writing that "I have been hoping that my language is not Si-hia [*sic*], though of course related to it more or less, as I have something else to do with it."²² In another letter three days later, Thomas wrote:²³

Many thanks for your letter. We will see further about the identity of the two languages! In the meanwhile you are attacking the major problem of the script, the solution of which would be a real triumph.

¹⁷ Gorbacheva 1954.

¹⁸ See, for example, Nie Hongyin's review of Tangut studies (Nie 1993), which makes no mention of Clauson.

¹⁹ E.g. Dragunov 1929; Long, Nie and Wang 1930; Wang 1930 and 1932–1933; Nevsky 1926 and Nevsky 1931. We should also note that Clauson began studying Japanese only during WWII (Bosworth 2001, 92) and so at this time he would not have been able to rely on Japanese scholarship.

²⁰ Wolfenden 1931 and 1934.

²¹ This must have been a reference to Nevsky's *Brief Manual of the Si-hia Characters with Tibetan Transcriptions* published in Osaka (Nevsky 1926).

²² Letter dated 5 November 1935 (SOAS Archives, MS 84335).

²³ Letter dated 8 November 1935 (SOAS Archives, MS 84335).

I have not doubted that the language would be related to the Hsi-hsia; but if the Hsi-hsia is the language of the Tang-hsiang & went into Kansu only in the XIth century, that would be less welcome to me, though I really have no serious ground for hoping otherwise.

Thus Thomas was dubious about such a connection and regarded Tangut and Nam distant relatives at best. But Clauson remained optimistic and believed that a thorough study of Tangut might help to identify it with one of the languages written with the Tibetan alphabet (but not in the Tibetan language), which had been found among the Dunhuang manuscripts. He periodically returned to this idea even in publications written later in his life.²⁴

World War II interrupted Clauson's work on Tangut and it was more than two decades later that he was able to return to it. By this time, however, as we have seen above in his letter to SOAS Librarian Pearson, he had already given up the idea of completing his dictionary because of the dearth of texts accessible to him as a result of the long hiatus in Russian academia following the political events of the late 1930s and World War II. His son Mr Oliver Clauson also points out that as some of his colleagues had seen their research papers destroyed during the war, Clauson was anxious about the possibility of losing his Tangut notes and wanted to deposit them in a public collection.²⁵ Yet it is clear that he did not stop his research until much later. In fact, his son remembers that the Tangut language and the dictionary remained a major part of their life during the post-war period, and his father brought his research with them to family vacations to work there.²⁶

In 1960 Clauson attended the International Congress of Orientalists in Moscow where he presented a paper in which he identified the recently excavated site of Ak-Beshim with the city of Suyab known from Chinese sources.²⁷ While in Russia, he also travelled to Leningrad where he visited the exhibition of manuscripts from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies (predecessor of the current Institute of Oriental Manuscripts). The exhibition also included material from Khara-khoto and one of the staff members in charge of welcoming foreign visitors was the young Evgeny I. Kychanov (1932–2013) who had recently defended his doctoral dissertation on the Xixia state and been granted access to the Kozlov collection.²⁸ Many years later Kychanov remembered that his meeting with Clauson had been significant from the point of view of Kychanov's new career because Clauson praised him in *Asia Major*, and this made his name widely known in academic circles in the West.²⁹ Kychanov also pointed out that Clauson had studied Tangut earlier but by the time they met he was already working on Central Asia,

²⁴ See, for example, Clauson 1964, 73 and 1969, 419.

²⁵ Interview, March 23, 2015.

²⁶ Mr Oliver Clauson also remembered that his father collaborated with a Czech scholar who was also interested in the Tangut language. This must have been Kamil Sedláček, a linguist mainly working on Tibetan. In fact, Clauson's papers at the SOAS Archives, include a sheet of paper with the name Sedláček on one side and some Tangut characters and radicals on the other. In his article on the origin of the name of the Tanguts, Sedláček (1964, 184, n.14) refers to a letter from Clauson dated 26 November 1961, showing that the two of them indeed corresponded around this time.

²⁷ Garufov et al. 1962–1963, v. 3, 126–127.

²⁸ Kychanov 2012, 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20. The article Kychanov is referring to is Clauson 1964, which cites quite a few works of Kychanov.

which suggests that by 1960 Clauson had only a passive interest in Tangut studies and had given up hope to ever finish his dictionary.

In 1964, in the same *Asia Major* article where he praised the research of Kychanov, Clauson wrote in general about the future potentials of Tangut studies, closing it with some personal remarks that relate the reasons why he decided to abandon his research in this field:³⁰

So far as Tangut studies are concerned this is, I hope, my swan song. When I embarked upon them over thirty years ago I regarded them as a fascinating exercise in cryptography, with a little mathematics thrown in. But I very soon found that a profound study of Tangut was impossible without, if not a profound, at any rate a good knowledge of Chinese, Tibetan and, if possible, some Hsifan languages. To have described my knowledge of any of these languages as better than inadequate would have been gross flattery, and so I retired from the field, I thought for ever, and returned to the Turkish studies on which my interests are now concentrated. I have returned momentarily to this subject only because I am perhaps the only survivor from an earlier and less scientific age, and felt it my duty to put my own experience at the disposal of the new and vigorous generation of young students of this fascinating language before it is too late...

This note gives the impression that Clauson felt that his linguistic capacities were inadequate for pursuing the study of Tangut at the level he aspired to. Yet his Tangut notes and dictionary at the SOAS Archives by far surpasses contemporary scholarship, with perhaps the sole exception of the results of Nevsky. Along the same line of thought there is no question that the linguistic requirements Clauson mentioned in his “swan song” are hard to meet for anyone. A “profound” knowledge of Chinese, Tibetan and other Xifan languages is simply not that common. In fact, the lack of a good knowledge of Tibetan on the part of researchers working on Tangut today is widely recognised as a problem in the field, which is heavily dominated by a Sino-centric approach. In any case, Clauson’s reasons for withdrawing from active research may reflect his perfectionism, rather than his actual standing and potential in the field.

3. The *Skeleton Dictionary*

The catalogue of the SOAS Archives describes Clauson’s Tangut material with the following words:

Papers of Sir Gerard Leslie Makins Clauson, comprising preliminary studies in the decipherment of the Hsi-hsia language, a skeleton dictionary and other manuscripts concerned with Hsi-hsia studies. 7 folders and an envelope containing miscellaneous manuscripts. (MS. 84335).³¹

The same description also appears as typewritten notes glued onto the inner cover of each large volume. In reality, the material is larger because in addition to the seven relatively well organised large volumes, which contain the dictionary and research notes, there are several

³⁰ Clauson 1964, 77.

³¹ This entry matches verbatim the description in Matthews and Wainwright 1977, 83.

smaller notebooks with miscellaneous materials, including numerous word lists and incomplete notes. There are also envelopes which contain four letters from F. W. Thomas and one from the French Tibetologist Marcelle Lalou (1890–1967), all written during the period of 1935–1938.

The seven thick manuscript volumes contain more organised material. All volumes are titled “Hsi-hsia language”, two of them also carrying the subtitles “Dictionary Part I” and “Dictionary Part II.” The material in the volumes is diverse and includes linguistic notes on the language, lists of transliterations, summaries of secondary literature (e.g. Luo Fuchang’s introduction to the Tangut language). The dictionary has a note added in 1963, claiming that Clauson began working on it in 1938.³² The two volumes of the dictionary represent a monumental work that would have made a significant impact on Tangut studies had he decided to publish it. In terms of their breadth and erudition, the dictionary and the accompanying studies could only be compared with Nevsky’s *Tangutskaya Filologiya*. In a way, Clauson’s seven unpublished volumes parallel Nevsky’s opus which was published posthumously by later scholars who edited his papers following his rehabilitation in 1957. Yet even in its current unauthorised form, *Tangutskaya Filologiya* became a milestone in the history of Tangut studies, inspiring a new generation of scholars and laying down the foundations for an entire field.

At the beginning of the first volume (i.e. Part I) of the *Skeleton Dictionary* we find a leaf inserted subsequently, probably when Clauson deposited the material in the Library of SOAS. This leaf contains a short description of the conventions of the dictionary, with the aim to elucidate for future users the notation and the principles of arrangement:

Skeleton Tangut (Hsi Hsia) dictionary in two volumes, by Sir Gerard Clauson.

The arrangement of the characters is based on the assumption that each character can be analyzed either as a “component”, that is a fixed pattern of strokes, or as a combination of a component and a “sub-component”, that is a stroke or combination of strokes placed above a component and forming an integral whole with it, or as a combination of two or more components, each with or without sub-components attached. The analysis starts at the top left hand corner, and moves downwards and to the right.

[...] ³³

References in Roman and Latin numbers, e.g. I.1. are to Chapters and sections in the *Homophones*, i.e. Part I of each Chapter, references like IA₁ are to the “unique sounds” in the second part of each Chapter.

References starting with B. are to the special volume of the *Bulletin of the National Library at Peiping* (or some such title) devoted to Hsi Hsia. References starting with W. are to Wang’s *Hsia Hsia Studies* (3 volumes). CCC is the

³² Elsewhere he claims that he began compiling the dictionary in 1937–1938 (Clauson 1964, 55).

³³ Here comes a list of sub-components and components. The components are arranged into five classes: (i) covers; (ii) verticals; (iii) rectangles; (iv) curves; and (v) miscellaneous.

Chinese-Tangut handbook “The Handful of Pearls”. X means the Tangut explanation just quoted.

(Note added on 29/7/63)

Gerard Clauson

My copies of B, W and CCC are now in the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies

Right at the beginning of the main text of the dictionary a short note says that it was begun in October 1938. At the very end of the second volume, after the last character another note says that it was finished on 27 March, 1939, which is followed by a line of text added in different ink, claiming that the cross references were completed in 14 September, 1946. Accordingly, Clauson compiled the dictionary itself in 1938–1939 in about six months time but made corrections to it later on, on several occasions. This is also seen from the fact that although the main body of the dictionary is written in the same black (slightly faded) ink, there are additions and notes in different shades of blue and in pencil. Sporadic references in blue ink signify page numbers in Nevsky’s *Tangutskaya Filologiya* (1960), which show that Clauson continued adding notes to the dictionary as late as the 1960s.

The dictionary consists of a total of 441 numbered folios, divided equally between the two volumes (1–221 and 222–441, respectively), with pagination running continuously. The folios are written on one side only but many of the empty pages contain supplementary notes with reference to entries on facing pages. As a result, the dictionary is in reality larger than the total count of folios indicates. Each page is divided into two columns, thereby forming a traditional dictionary layout. The characters are numbered from 1 to 5,724, which represents the total number of main entries in the dictionary.³⁴

In terms of its source material, the dictionary heavily relies on the monolingual Tangut dictionary *Homophones* and the Tangut-Chinese glossary *Handful of Pearls*. Each entry has references to these sources, showing that Clauson was largely working from lexicographic sources, rather than actual texts. Of course, this is understandable because only a few texts had been published by 1938 and he could only rely on the material available to him. To illustrate the form and composition of individual entries in the dictionary, let us look at two sample entries, selected randomly. The first is No. 78 with the word *yji* 𐰇𐰏 (“diamond”).³⁵

78. 𐰇𐰏 <i>yji</i> VIII 6 𐰇𐰏	637
(a) I 6 ditto	
(b) IX 48 𐰇𐰏 “stone”	0601
(i) 𐰇𐰏 C.C.C. 21 ^a W. L. 208 ^{II} 218 ^I	
金剛 <i>rdo.rje</i> “diamond”.	

³⁴ In reality, Clauson (1964, 75) mentions that there are some added characters and a small number of repeated ones and thus the entries in the dictionary need to be re-numbered.

³⁵ V. 1, p. 7. In order to maintain a consistency of notation, I added quotation marks to those English definitions which did not have these. This is surely in accord with the author’s intent because in most cases he supplies the quotation marks.

The vertical line next to Tangut characters (|) stands for the main character in the entry, similar to the tilde (~) used in modern dictionaries. The numbers on the far right are the cross-references with other entries in the same dictionary (added to the entries subsequently), which greatly facilitate using it. We can see that under this entry Clauson lists different compound words and gives the meaning for these: 纒 (“stone”); 纒 (“diamond”); 纒 (“crystal”). In addition to the Chinese words adopted from the *Homophones* and the *Handful of Pearls*, whenever attested, he also includes Tibetan equivalents.

The same Tangut word appears in Kychanov’s dictionary (4347-0) with definitions in three languages (i.e. Russian, English and Chinese) as follows:³⁶

“алмаз; ваджра (санск.)”
 “diamond; vajra (Skt.)”
 “金剛; 金剛石”

While the Russian and English match each other, the Chinese is slightly different. Considering that the focus of the dictionary is on Tangut and the other three languages are meant to define the meaning of the Tangut word, we would expect that all three modern languages say the same thing. Accordingly, the English word “diamond” should match the Chinese 金剛, and “vajra” (unitalicised) in the English should match 金剛石 in the Chinese definition. This, however, is not entirely so and the paranthetical indication that *vajra* comes from Sanskrit (present in both the English and Chinese definition) is omitted. In fact, the first word in the Chinese definition (i.e. 金剛) would be a better match for Sanskrit *vajra*,³⁷ whereas the standard word for “diamond”—at least in modern Chinese—is *zuanshi* 鑽石. There is no question that the editors used Chinese 金剛 because it matches the word commonly translated from Chinese Buddhist texts into Tangut with the Tangut word in question, yet the hybrid use of classical vs. modern Chinese definitions creates an occasional mismatch with the two other modern languages of the dictionary.

In terms of compound words under the same head entry, Kychanov’s dictionary has the following items:³⁸

纒 “ваджра (санск.)”, “vajra (Skt.)”, “金剛”.
 纒 “бudd. жезл ваджра”, “Budd. vajra pest”, “〈佛〉金剛杵”.

³⁶ Kychanov 2006, 613. In this place I only use the dictionaries of Kychanov and Li Fanwen for the sake of comparison, as these are the ones that have been published specifically as separate dictionaries. There are, however, several other, less comprehensive, Tangut dictionaries and vocabularies, which form part of larger works (e.g. Nevsky 1960, Nishida 1964–1966, Sofronov 1968, Grinstead 1972).

³⁷ Indeed, the editors of the dictionary apparently were of the same opinion because they translate the first compound word 纒 as “vadzhra (sansk.)”, “vajra (Skt.)”, “金剛.”

³⁸ In this place I refrain from analysing the phonetic reconstructions of the words in question and limit myself to comparing their lexical meaning.

譚齋薈	“каменные изваяния животных у могил”, “stone animals near the tomb”, “獸像”.
譚諫	“алмаз; руда”, “diamond; ore”, “金剛石 ; 礦石”.
譚瓚	“руда”, “ore”, “瓦礫”.

Once again, we have some problems with the modern definitions of the items in three different languages. Just to note the more serious issues, the phrase “vajra pest” (!) is an obvious mistake for the technical term “vajra pestle”, as it is clear from the Russian and Chinese definitions. A more standard way to call the “stone animals near the tomb” would have been “tomb guardian animals” or *zhenmushou* 鎮墓獸 in Chinese. Finally, the Chinese word *wali* 瓦礫 means “debris, gravel,” rather than “ore” as listed in the English and Russian definitions.

In comparison, Clauson’s dictionary has fewer examples of compound words but it is certainly more precise in its definitions. Whenever it provides Chinese or Tibetan terms, it is clear that these are not meant as modern definitions but contemporary equivalents used in parallel texts or identical context. In addition, it includes not only compound words which begin with the head entry but also some where the word is in second or third place, which is of obvious benefit for the user.

The other Tangut dictionary compiled relatively recently is Li Fanwen’s 李範文 Tangut-Chinese dictionary, which came out in print in 1997.³⁹ This is essentially a bilingual dictionary but the head word usually has an English gloss, even if this is often imprecise. The advantage of the dictionary, in contrast with Kychanov’s is that gives the source for its examples, enabling the user to track down the example or at least ascertain whether it comes from a medieval dictionary, a Buddhist text or a translation of a secular work. In fact, this dictionary is more like an index because the definitions are either adopted from surviving Tangut lexicographic works or consist of words that correspond to the Tangut word in parallel texts. Thus under the entry for the word 譚 (“diamond”), we first find the following list of glosses:⁴⁰

礦、金剛、石、琉璃、明、瓦也。(名)
Ore, diamond, stone, crystal, bright, clay tile. (noun)

While the inclusion of the part of speech in parantheses at the end of the line is useful, the definitions contain the word *ming* 明 “bright, wise” which is not a noun. We could of course translate it as “brightness, wisdom” but that would not match the example given further below where it occurs in the name of Bodhisattva Mingwangshou 明王手菩薩 and has an adjectival use. As for the definitions, they are not based on a linguistic understanding of the Tangut word but are extracted from the examples listed underneath and show the variety of Chinese words this Tangut word was used to translate.

³⁹ Li 1997.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

To compare another word appearing in Clauson’s dictionary, let us look at the verb *tjwi* 𪔵 (“to beat”), which is listed in the *Skeleton Dictionary* under entry No. 3812:⁴¹

3812. 𪔵 IIIA76 𪔵	x(3778), 1954
(a) III 72 ditto	
(b) I 33 𪔵	5550
(c) I 139 𪔵	4711
(d) VII 22 𪔵	1801

This word means broadly “to strike”, but represents various Chinese words

- (i) By itself C.C.C.32^a W.I.136¹⁸
W.I.138² 侵 “to invade”
- (ii) (b) above W.I.134¹⁶ 打撲 “hit, squash” (flies)
- (iii) | 𪔵 C.C.C.31^{a2} 打拷 “to beat & strike”

On the facing page on the left side, we find a supplementary note attached to this entry, most likely added at a later time. The note contains the cross-reference numbers (which also occur to the right side of the original entry) and two additional Chinese meanings with their English translations:

3812.
1954-3778
1501
4711
5550

- (b)
W.I.136^{6?} 掠打 “plunder & beat”
打擲 “beat & throw down”

In Kychanov’s dictionary, the same word appears as No. 3168, and has the following trilingual definitions:⁴²

𪔵 “бить”, “beat”, “打”.

In this case, the Chinese definition matches perfectly well the meaning of the Russian and English definitions. Under the same head entry, Kychanov cites the following compound words:

𪔵 𪔵 “прихлопнуть; придавить; бросать; метать”, “slap; hold down; throw; cast”, “撲打; 擲”.
𪔵 𪔵 “бить; пытать”, “beat, torture”, “拷打”.

⁴¹ V. 2, 292.

⁴² Kychanov 2006, 465.

𪗇𪗇	“ковать железо”, “forge”, “打鐵”.
𪗇𪗇𪗇𪗇	“драка”, “fight; brave”, “毆”.
𪗇𪗇	“ковать (железо)”, “forge iron”, “打鐵”.
𪗇𪗇	“хлестать плетью; избивать”, “lash, whip”, “捶打”.

Once again, there is some inconsistency between the definitions in the different languages. This is especially true for the entry 𪗇𪗇𪗇𪗇, which is explained in Russian as “драка” (“a brawl, fight”) and *ou* 毆 (“to beat, hit”) in Chinese. The fact that the Russian word is a noun and the Chinese a verb is reflected in the English definition (i.e. “fight; brave”) which seems to consist of a noun and an adjective. In either case, the meaning of “brave” does not appear in Russian and Chinese. In comparison, Clauson also lists the meaning “to invade,” which is absent from Kychanov’s dictionary.

Turning to Li Fanwen’s dictionary, the entry begins with the English gloss “flog; beat.”⁴³ But then we have two main definitions:

1. 打、拷、撻也 (動)
to beat, flog/torture, flog (verb)
2. 築也
to build/construct

While the second definition is based on a single reference, there are quite a few examples for the first one, coming from various sources, including lexicographic works and Buddhist texts. As mentioned before, the definitions are merely extracts from the examples and the reason why several close synonyms are listed as glosses is because the Tangut word in question is used in context for all of them.

These two examples show the basic format of Clauson’s *Skeleton Dictionary*. The fact that the definitions are in English is useful not only because this way the dictionary can be used by scholars who do not read Chinese but are nevertheless interested in Tangut but also because English offers a linguistic system independent of the complex system of Tangut translating and glossing the languages of China and Tibet. With a modern Tangut-Chinese dictionary there is inevitably the difficulty of separating modern definitions from medieval glosses and word-to-word correspondences, which also tends to bring about the confusion of classical Chinese with the language of today’s China. Despite all of these advantages of the *Skeleton Dictionary*, we should note that there are entries which do not have definitions but are included nonetheless because they form part of the overall system. It is this system that most interested Clauson, as the numerous draft word lists among his Tangut material reveal. He believed that he succeeded in devising a logical system that was superior to that of others, including Nevsky’s dictionary arrangement. In fact, although he valued Nevsky’s dictionary greatly and considered it “full of valuable information,” he thought that it was “better compared to a gold mine rich in precious

⁴³ Li 1997, 683–684.

nuggets than to a finished product of the goldsmith's art."⁴⁴ In the same place, he explains the merits of his own dictionary the following way:

Before I began to write it [i.e. the dictionary] out in October 1938, by an odd coincidence at about the date of Nevsky's death, I had carried out a detailed analysis of the structure of Tangut characters and compiled a list of the components and sub-components which seem to have been used in building up the individual characters. I had arranged these in a logical order starting with the simplest and most regular and proceeding from them to the more complicated and irregular. My arrangement of the characters was based on the assumption that every character could be regarded either as itself a component (few are), or as having been built up of a series of sub-components and components, and that the predetermined order of these sub-components and components could be used to determine the order of characters in the dictionary. It may not be the best arrangement which could be devised, but it has at any rate stood the test of time to the extent that, coming back to my Tangut studies after an interval of nearly twenty-seven years, I found no difficulty in locating a character in the dictionary in a very brief space of time. It is not of course in its present state suitable for use as more than a working dictionary; like Nevsky's it is a mine not a finished product.⁴⁵

These words show his pride in devising a logical order for the characters, which made it possible to look up characters with relative ease. He considered it the best available system and hoped that others would adopt it when compiling new dictionaries.⁴⁶ Despite his confidence in the arrangement of characters, Clauson was obviously dissatisfied with the dictionary itself, which was the reason why he did not try to publish it. He felt that he could not complete the dictionary without having access to more texts and at the time when he gave up the project, it was very improbable that new texts would become accessible. Surely, access to Tangut translations of Chinese and Tibetan works would have provided enough linguistic data to fill the structural framework of the dictionary with concrete examples, thereby adding substance to the "skeleton." This would have enabled him to complete the work and have it published. Yet by the time such texts started to become available, he was engaged in research on Turkish languages and did not have time to resume work on Tangut. Still, he felt that the dictionary had a sound framework and wanted to make it accessible to others working on the language. With this view in mind, he deposited it at the SOAS Archives where it was indeed consulted by several researchers working on Tangut.

In fact, Grinstead compiled an index to Clauson's dictionary, the sole copy of which is now held at the Oriental Reading Room of the British Library. The list includes the Tangut characters, the entry number in Clauson's dictionary, the number in Nevsky's dictionary and in the *Homophones* dictionary, followed by an English gloss. When Grinstead published his monograph on the Tangut script, he incorporated this index with the English glosses into the

⁴⁴ Clauson 1964, 75.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

book.⁴⁷ But the compilation of the original index shows that he used Clauson's dictionary on a regular basis and wanted to make it more accessible to others.

4. Conclusions

Since the 1960s, there have been significant advances in the study of Tangut and today we know much more about the language and the script than in Clauson's time. We now have access to a great variety of Tangut texts, partly because of new archaeological discoveries and partly due to the publication of photographic reproductions of existing collections. In addition, most of the major texts written in Tangut have been transcribed, edited, translated and published so that they are readily available in a conveniently annotated form. Thanks to the work of scholars such as Nishida, Sofronov and Kepping, we today have a much better grasp of Tangut grammar and lexicon than a few decades earlier. There are also several Tangut dictionaries in existence, which raises the question whether Clauson's *Skeleton Dictionary* is of any practical use today, or is it merely a memento of the extraordinary efforts of a great scholar and a reminder of what Tangut studies in Britain could have become, had the dictionary been published sometime in the late 1930s.

In Clauson's view, the dictionary to a significant extent comprised a skeleton structure, that is, a framework which still awaited to be populated by lexicographic data extracted from real texts. Yet it is important to point out that it was not entirely true because a substantial amount of lexical information is already in place. The two sample entries shown above are not exceptional but representative of a significant portion of the total number of entries. In other words, the dictionary is perfectly usable in its current form, even though there are some entries that do not have semantic glosses assigned to them. The data already in place was primarily derived from native Tangut dictionaries and essentially originated from the same sources Nevsky used for his dictionary. Clauson considered the task of populating the dictionary with lexical data "simply a matter of sheer hard work."⁴⁸ In contrast with this relatively uninteresting task, what he took pride in was the structure and arrangement of the dictionary, as well as the ability to design a lookup method which allowed finding characters with ease. In this regard he considered his system superior to those of others, not only in the 1930s but even in the 1960s, when he briefly returned to working on it. Indeed, Clauson had a great interest in lexicography and it is also clear that he had an unusual talent for it. In 1960 he published a facsimile edition of an eighteenth-century Persian dictionary of Chagatai Turkish, prefixed with a critical introduction and indices.⁴⁹ But most important in this respect is his *Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*, published in 1972. In effect, the vast amount of research invested in the Tangut dictionary was eventually put to good use when compiling the *Etymological Dictionary*. It is no coincidence that this dictionary, like the Tangut one, also has a unique arrangement and lookup system designed specifically for a language and dialects which came down to us in manuscripts written in several different alphabets. In order to avoid the hassle of looking up the same word in several different places (depending on how it is spelled in different scripts) and to circumvent the necessity of double or multiple entries, Clauson designed a completely new arrangement based

⁴⁷ Grinstead 1972, 70–151. In this version, however, Grinstead omitted the reference numbers to the three dictionaries (i.e. Clauson, Nevsky and the *Homophones*).

⁴⁸ Clauson 1964, 76.

⁴⁹ Clauson 1960.

on focussing on the “significant sounds” in a word, forming a system in which, despite its initial unfamiliarity, the user “needed only a few minutes to find his way about.”⁵⁰

Similarly, Clauson arranged the Tangut dictionary using a novel system which he designed on the basis of his analysis of the graphical composition of characters. Today, we have several Tangut dictionaries at our disposal and their lookup systems can be learned relatively quickly, regardless whether they are based on the left or right component, or use the four-corner system. As a result, looking up characters does not pose a major challenge to users anymore, even if most researchers have their own preferences. What makes Clauson’s dictionary unique is its general framework and structure, which was the result of a careful arrangement and referencing of the material available to him. On the most basic level, it represents an only partially filled shell of a potentially comprehensive dictionary which could not be completed with the material available to him in 1938. This shell or, as he called it himself, “skeleton,” was constructed with extreme care and accuracy and seems superior to all other Tangut dictionaries available today. This echoes the minimalist approach seen in Clauson’s Turkish dictionary, where entries and glosses are carefully referenced and double-checked, and doubtful items are either not included or explicitly marked as such.

In this respect, the *Skeleton Dictionary* has not lost its pertinence and applicability and is a perfectly useful tool for reading Tangut texts. Its accuracy and reliability makes it especially useful today, when scholars are increasingly trying to leave behind the obsolete method of mechanically transcribing Tangut with Chinese characters on the basis of parallel texts and are willing to understand the language itself. In addition, because of the presence of precise and consistent English glosses, the dictionary can be consulted for researchers who work on Tibeto-Burman or other languages but do not read Chinese. Considering the wealth of Tangut texts that have become available during the past decades, it would be suitable to update the entries and populate them with additional layers of lexical data derived from these texts, thereby completing the work envisaged by Clauson.

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⁵⁰ Lewis 1973, 171.

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+ 2

13A 𪔐 V 31 x of 𪔐 | 1427
 13B 𪔐 V 31 x of 𪔐 | ?
 13. 𪔐 VII 59-60 (c) I 50 1385
 (a) VII 18 𪔐 | v. 1797
 (b) VII 76 𪔐 | v. 2190 ? meaning.
 W. I. 132¹⁴ II 20⁴ 將; W. II. 6⁶ 70⁴ 導 19. 𪔐 Kwa V 77 | 𪔐
 "to lead, leader." B 246⁹ 𪔐 v. (a) IX 79 ditto
 W. I. 146¹⁷ 𪔐 | = 將衆 ? meaning.

"Universal leader." Name of Buddha
 14. 𪔐 ... VA 29 𪔐 | "confused"
 (a) V 34 ditto x. 270
 (b) IA 91 𪔐 | v. 1915
 (c) VII 61 | 𪔐 "to stand upon end (of hair)." 0822 0761

Actual word not traced, but general meaning clear.
 14A v. 1479
 15. 𪔐 V 66 | 𪔐 ? 90921
 (a) II 6 ditto
 (b) IX 84 | 𪔐 x of 𪔐 1316
 ? meaning

16. 𪔐 Kwa II 20 | 𪔐 18
 (b) VII 99 | 𪔐 17
 (a) IX A 59 ditto vol. 1 (1) 22

(and meaning) 𪔐 𪔐 17, 18
 17. 𪔐 ... VII 99 𪔐 | 16
 ? meaning see 16.

18. 𪔐 ... IX A 59 𪔐 | 16
 (a) II 20 ditto

(b) VI 57 | 𪔐 ?
 (c) IX A 48 | 𪔐 ?
 (d) VII 22 | 𪔐 "5 cross in eye" v. 1393
 B. 168⁴ 𪔐 及 𪔐, 𪔐

21. 𪔐 Č'a VII 12 | 𪔐 its make
 ?

22. 𪔐 mo I. 116 𪔐 | 𪔐
 (a) IA 93 ditto
 (b) II 1 | 𪔐 "dragon" x
 (c) III 57 | 𪔐 ?
 (d) V. 157 𪔐 x by 𪔐 𪔐
 CCC. 6⁶ 16^a W. I. 208¹⁸ 𪔐 𪔐
 "snake, serpent."
 CCC. 10^a P. 6th 𪔐 character.

23. 𪔐 I 138 | 𪔐
 (a) VI 74 | 𪔐 ditto 𪔐
 ?

Fig. 1. A page from Clauson's *Skeleton Dictionary*. (SOAS Archives, MS 84335)