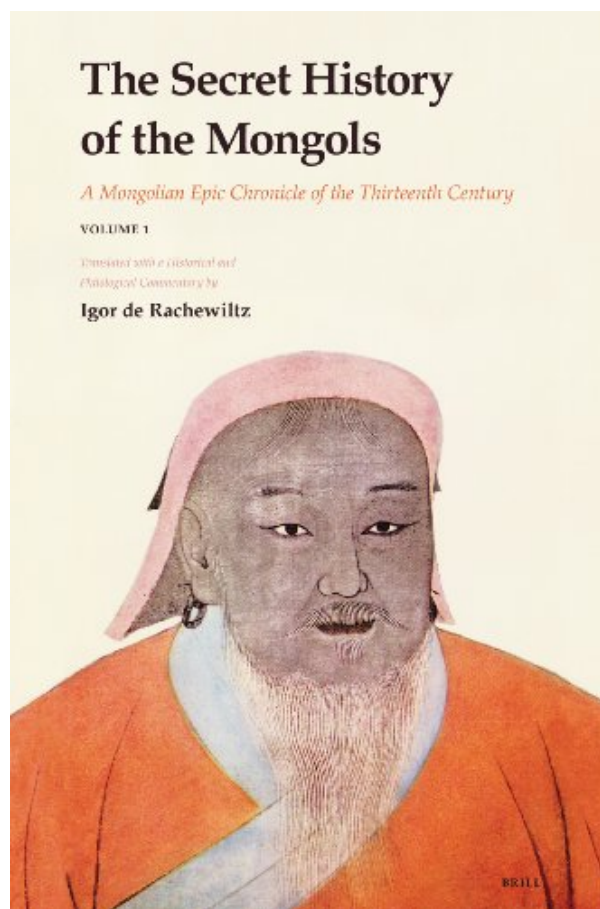


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# The Secret History of the Mongols

*A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*

VOLUME 1

*Translated with a historical and  
Etymological Commentary by*

**Igor de Rachewiltz**



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## Review

" de Rachewiltz sweeps the board in a most convincing way." D.O. Morgan, "Social Anthropology," 2005."

## About the Author

Igor De Rachewiltz, Ph.D. (1961) in Chinese History, The Australian National University, has published extensively on the political and cultural history of China and Mongolia in the 12th-14th centuries, and on Sino-Mongolian philology. He is at present an Emeritus Fellow in the Pacific and Asian History Division of the ANU.

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a remarkable achievement and compelling read

By Paul Ruble

This two-book volume on the literary achievement known as the `Secret History of the Mongols' is a significant achievement in itself. It is the culmination of a life's work, a passionate dedication to helping understand the only Mongolian literary account of the life and times of the world's most prolific conqueror. The genuine passion of professor Rachewiltz to this subject is evident in his text. The effort taken to choose those words that can best distill and convey an understanding of words written centuries ago must have been a daunting task. The effort is evident because the text succeeds in conveying an immediate and amazingly clear understanding of a rather dense, albeit fascinating subject matter. Particularly one that has been, and

shall apparently remain the subject and effort of many others for years to come. It is truly a compelling read, and one that remains so no matter what page you open it to, and no matter how long you've had the volumes on your shelf. I am grateful to be able to read this work in my lifetime.

24 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

"At The Beginning There Was a Blue-Grey Wolf, Born with His Destiny Ordained by Heaven Above"

By Ronin

I apologize for the length of this review but there is no way around it given the size of these books, so please bear with me. My review title is the 1st sentence from this version, and you can compare it with Paul Kahn's *The Secret History* (TSH) title of my review there to see how they differ. First off, this is a serious scholarly book and is probably not the best choice if you want to enjoy your experience reading *The Secret History*. If you are passionate about Mongolian history and want to read the original story, then do yourself a favor and buy the Kahn version for a fraction of the price, and even your wrists will thank you by the time you are done. If you are engaged in some academic or literary pursuit, then this version is undeniably your first choice to which you could add Professor Urgunge Onon's translation. If I had to choose Onon's translation or this one, there is significantly more value here however I believe some people would argue as to which is more correct. I personally don't care about that debate and I believe most people reading this review are best served by Kahn's version.

If we compare the IdR translation to Kahn's, the single biggest thing you will notice is the spelling of all things Mongol. Example, IdR spells Genghis Khan as Cinggis Qa'an while Kahn gives an acceptable Chingis Khan. Also be prepared for a million accents over letters, which adds to the challenge. Many character names are easy to connect, but this is an issue with place names, verbs, nouns, etc. It is challenging. Without choosing a tortuous example to make my point above, I will instead offer an example in translational difference that will hopefully give you a sense of what to expect:

IdR, p64 #144: "Buyirug Qan of the Naiman separated from the rest and went towards Uluk Taq on the southern side of the Altai Mountains. Qutu, the son of Toqto'a of the Merkit, went towards the Selenge River. Quduqa Beki of the Oyirat went towards the Sisingis River, making for the forest. A'ucu Ba'atur of the Tayici'ut went towards the Onan river."

Kahn, p55: "Buyirugh Khan left Jamugha and rode off for the Altai to the west. Khudu retreated with his people north to the Selenge River. Khudukha Beki ran back to the forests as far as the Shisgis. And Aguchu the Brave led the Tayichgud back to the Onan."

Naturally this is describing events just prior to Genghis being wounded in the neck and Jelme sucking the blood to save him, and it is obvious which is easy going and which one demands effort. No one will ever mistake this version of TSH as a lean-read: the two volumes weigh in at 1,349 pages. That's actually the easy part. The introduction alone is 50-pages followed by extensive notes. The twelve chapters run 220 pages. For comparison, the Kahn version is 176 pages using a much smaller font and no footnotes at the bottom. After the translation there is 421 pages of commentary focused verse by verse. Volume II starts on p643 with a continuation of commentary that lets up on page 1044. There are tons of interesting historical comments, but you should also be prepared to suffer serious debate on linguistics and the quality of other translations. I don't think most people will survive plowing through the comments, and I am going to offer two examples:

I chose comment #275 because I just finished Conn Iggulden's "Empire of Silver" and this may shed a little light on how far off he was in the relationship he portrayed between the Mongol princes on the Great Raid with Subodai: 'Refused to join the feast', lit. 'without feasting the feast.' The angry scathing remarks of Buri, Guyuk, and Harqasun call for comment. Buri first raises the point that Batu is not superior in rank to them and should not have drunk first. Secondly, he emphasizes that Batu is actually inferior to them as a man, and

is more like a woman, even though he has a beard, and carries a quiver (adds Guyuk). Buri goes on saying, contemptuously, that the way to treat such 'women' is to kick them and tread on them. Guyuk goes even further in vituperation and says that they should be whipped or hit with burning sticks - a form of punishment inflicted on female criminals, implying thereby that Batu not only lacks manliness but is also evil. Harqasun joins Buri and Guyuk in their tirade and suggests they should attach a tail to Batu - as a jibe - thus adding insult to injury.

There is a ton of fascinating info in the comments. There is also tonnage of stuff like this..."As in previous occurrences of this name, 'Uighurs' is written Ui'ut, the plural of Ui'ur < Uiqur (=Uiyr)." If you are not trying to unravel the proper linguistics of TSH, this stuff is either going to kill you or wickedly sharpen your skimming skills.

After the commentary ends on p1044, there is an appendix to p1080. There is a chronology of Genghis's campaigns from 1204-1219 (nice that he includes the Chinese year as in Pig, Rat, etc). The bibliography runs from 1081-1194, followed by an index from 1195-1314. Grammar and Lexis runs from 1315 to 1342 with the last 147 pages being fine print, and the book ends with 6-pages of Additions & Corrections. Added to all this, thankfully, is 12 photos/illustrations, maps of Mongolia in 1200 and Eurasia in 1210, and a genealogy of Temujin and the origin of the Mongol clans.

I'm very happy to have purchased Igor de Rachewiltz's study of TSH and will likely use the book for the rest of my life. If you're still reading this review, then this version may indeed be for you.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

**EXCELLENT**

By Bruno Marquez Brazao

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