



DOERFER, GERHARD

DOERFER, GERHARD (b. Königsberg, 8 March 1920; d. Göttingen, 27 December 2003), German scholar of Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungus languages.

LIFE

Life and academic career. [Gerhard Doerfer](#) was born to Franz and Adina Doerfer, in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) in East Prussia. He attended the primary school in Königsberg until 1928, when his father, a postal official, was transferred to Berlin. Already during his childhood in Königsberg, Doerfer was interested in the various languages (Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, and Kashubian) spoken in that area. He continued his primary education in Berlin and then, from 1930 to 1938, attended the Berlin comprehensive secondary school (Realgymnasium Reinickendorf-Ost). In 1938 he was forced by the authorities to leave school without a certificate because of his opposition to the prevailing ideology (Knüppel, 2005a, p. 2). He became unemployed and was recruited to compulsory service to the state (Reichsarbeitsdienst) and military service from 1938 to 1945, until he finally became a prisoner of war. During his military service he used his free times to study Polynesian languages from books he had with him, especially dealing with the Samoan language. He returned to Berlin in spring 1946 and started working at various jobs. He attended evening classes after work and passed the matriculation examination with honors on 24 March 1949.

Doerfer studied at the Humboldt University in Berlin from winter 1949-50 until summer 1951, attending courses of Romance Languages and Literature



(with Victor Klemperer and Kurt Baldinger), English (with Martin Lehnert), and Islamic Studies (with Richard Hartmann). His stepfather's financial difficulties forced him to interrupt his studies for one semester in order to support his family. He was able to continue his studies, initially as a working student and later as a scholarship holder, at the Free University (Freie Universität) of Berlin, from summer semester of 1952 until summer semester of 1954. Here he took Turkic and Altaic Studies (with Karl Heinrich Menges), Islamic Studies (with Walther Braune), Iranian Studies (with Olaf Hansen), and Philology and Philosophy (with Michael Landmann). He received his Ph.D. degree in Turkic and Altaic Studies on 29 July 1954, having presented a doctoral thesis entitled "Zur Syntax der Geheimen Geschichte der Mongolen" (On the syntax of the Secret History of the Mongols). His subsidiary subjects were Islamic Studies and Iranian Studies. His dissertation was entitled "Zur Syntax der Geheimen Geschichte der Mongolen," which has remained unpublished, apart from some excerpts that he later revised and published in two articles.

After graduation, in the face of the widespread unemployment prevalent in Berlin in the early 1950s, he was at first able to find only temporary positions. He worked as a research assistant at the Academy of Sciences and Literature in Mainz from October 1955 until the spring of 1957, and he revised the first volume of *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta* (Wiesbaden, 1959), to which he contributed four articles: "Das Gagausische," "Das Krimosmanische," "Das Aserbeidschanische," and "Das Krimtatarische." He also wrote the foreword to the map of the Turkic linguistic areas and tried to devise a uniform transcription and grammatical arrangement in this work.

With financial support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Association), he worked on his postdoctoral habilitation thesis on the subject of "Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen" and, at the same time, lectured at the Georg-August-University in Göttingen, although he was still living in Mainz. He successfully qualified in the field of Turcology at the University of Göttingen with his habilitation thesis in December 1960. He moved to Göttingen in 1961. His license to teach university course (*venia legendi*) was expanded to Turkic and Altaic Studies in February 1963, and in April 1966 he was finally appointed non-tenured professor.

In May 1966, Doerfer was invited to Indiana University at Bloomington as visiting scholar and professor, where he lectured on Turkic and Altaic Studies in the years 1966-68. His invitation was renewed in September 1968 and lasted



till 1969.

A crowning point in his research work evolved in 1967, when he was collecting material for a study of the Turkic languages of Iran and Afghanistan. This was the rediscovery of *Ḳalaj* (*Khalaj*), which was first studied by Vladimir Minorsky and briefly surveyed by Moḥammad Moqaddam. *Khalaj* is a Turkic language with archaic features widely divergent from other adjacent Turkic languages. This led to a series of expeditions to Iran in 1968, 1969, and 1973 (Tezcan, 1990, pp. 74-76). Doerfer did not take part in the first expedition, although he had participated in its preparations. During the third journey, which was to Khorasan, a previously unknown variety of Turkic was researched. The original plan to include Afghanistan could not be carried out, due to the coup d'état of 1973 against King Moḥammed Zāher Shah (r. 1953-73). The extensive material collected provided the basis for numerous works on the Turkic languages of Iran.

In November 1970, Doerfer was appointed professor to the newly instituted chair of Turkic and Altaic Studies at the Georg-August University in Göttingen. The professorship was finally given the status of a department in 1982. In his application for the change to departmental status, Doerfer proposed that it should be named Seminar für Turkologie und Zentralasienkunde, evincing a further dissociation in the years between 1970 and 1980 from the “Altaic Theory,” the hypothesis of common ancestry of the Altaic languages (see below).

In the winter semester of 1975-76, Doerfer gave lectures as a visiting professor at the University of Istanbul. At that time, however, all academic activities were overshadowed by the political unrest in Turkey. From 1975 to 1979 he served as the executive president of the Societas Uralo-Altaica, and until 1990 as the president of the Deutsch-Türkische Gesellschaft in Göttingen. Doerfer retired as professor emeritus in 1988, but continued his research activities in several fields of his long-time studies, such as comparative Altaistics, Turcology, Mongolian studies, and especially Tungusology. He also taught in the Department of Turcology and Central Asian Studies.

MAJOR WORKS

Philological and linguistic works in the Turcological field. Doerfer's Turcological researches had two main categories: the influence of Turkic languages on Iranian languages (Persian and Northern Tajik) and the Turkic languages of



Iran and Afghanistan (*Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, 1963-67; *Türkische Lehnwörter im Tadschikischen*, 1975). Accordingly, among his Turcological works the most significant have been his *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* and his numerous works on Khalaj and Khorasan-Turkic (e.g., *Das Chaladsch; Khalaj Materials*; see below).

In the first category, he divided the Turkic elements in Persian into three larger layers: (1) an older, “pure” Turkic layer, which consists of southern and eastern Turkic elements; (2) a Middle Mongolian and Turkic layer, which includes Mongolian and southern and eastern Turkic elements; and (3) a later, “pure” Turkic layer, which comprises southern Turkic elements only (Doerfer, 1959, pp. 11-13). Often the Mongolian elements in Persian were also of Turkic origin. In his major work, Doerfer followed the model of systematic grouping proposed by Artturi Kannisto (Kannisto, pp. 237-40) and divided the Turkic elements in Persian into twelve semantic groups: (1) terms for body parts, sensory perception, movement, sickness, death, etc.; (2) animals, stockbreeding, hunting, etc.; (3) plants, agricultural terms, etc.; (4) terms for different terrains, minerals, weather conditions, etc.; (5) daily life, dwelling, clothing, food, festivities, games, business, trade, etc.; (6) terms of relationship; (7) the state, government, judgement, law, administration, etc.; (8) the sphere of war; (9) the sphere of religion; (10) mathematics, space and time, chronology, religious holidays, etc.; (11) terms for colors and other adjectives; and (12) miscellaneous.

In the second category, he described the phonology, grammar, distribution, position, and lexicon, as well as the archaic features, of Khalaj and the exact position, phonology, and grammar of Khorasan-Turkic fields of research, to which he contributed a number of articles and miscellanea. In addition to this, Doerfer and his collaborators collected and edited a number of Khalaj and Oghus folktales from Iran (Doerfer, Hesche, and Ravanyar, 1998; Doerfer and Tezcan, 1994; Doerfer and Hesche, 1998).

Philological and linguistic works in Mongolistics. Starting from his earliest studies, the Mongolian languages and cultures formed one of the main fields of Doerfer’s research activities, including his doctoral dissertation: “Zur Syntax der Geheimen Geschichte der Mongolen.” The chronicle of the “Secret History of the Mongols” preoccupied him until his death; he even planned a re-edition of his doctoral dissertation in 2001/02, but it did not materialize. Another topic of interest in his field of research was Turkic-Mongolian language contacts, as well as Mongolian loanwords in Persian, not to mention



the history of [Il-khanid](#) rule in Iran.

Linguistic studies in Tungusology. Another main subject of his researches was his Tungusological studies, which had already become the focal point of one of his first monographs, *Der Numerus im Mandschu* (1963). Starting from 1972, the project “Nordasiatische Kulturgeschichte” was managed under the guidance of Doerfer at the University of Göttingen (Knüppel, 2010). In the course of these endeavors, the largest collection of Tungusica outside the Soviet Union was gathered, and a rich collection on Tungus languages, folktales, riddles, etc. was brought together. In 1978 Doerfer and his collaborators (Doerfer, Hesche, and Scheinhardt) put forth a new series of monographs dealing with Tungusological and related topics, and in 1980 they published a comprehensive dictionary of the Lamut (Èven) language. Doerfer himself was working in this project on classification of Tungus languages and solved the problems relating to the position of Arman, Kili, and Kur-Urmiyan within the Tungus family (Doerfer, 1973, 1975, 1984; Dorfer and Knüppel, 2013). As the first scholar to focus of this subject, he described the Birarčen dialect of Èvenki (Doerfer, 1983) and presented a number of works on Tungus languages and cultures. Some further extensive works, such as the Arman dictionary, the edition of Sergei M. Shirokogoroff’s “Tungus Dictionary,” and a collection of Lamut folktales, were planned and partially started, but never finished. The project “Nordasiatische Kulturgeschichte” lasted till 1985, but his own studies in this field continued until his death in 2003.

Studies in Altaistics. As a student of the Altaicist scholar Karl Heinrich Menges, Doerfer was a supporter of the so-called “Altaic thesis,” the idea of a common origin of Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungus languages in a genetic sense. While working on his habilitation thesis, he radically changed his position about this idea and became a vehement critic of the Altaic thesis. He favored the view that the common features in these language families were the results of long-time contacts and borrowings from each other. In the first volume of his major work *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* (1963), he distanced himself from the “family tree” model for the relationship of the Altaic languages and clearly differentiated between Turkic and Mongolian loanwords in New Persian. From this time on, the University of Göttingen became a center of Alatic studies and the epicenter of the Altaic controversy. In a number of works Doerfer explained his point of view, which was considered anti-Altaistic by his opponents (e.g., Miller, 1971; idem, 1976; Doerfer, 1971; idem 1976). Doerfer’s main argument was that Turkic and



Mongolian languages have some common features and so do Mongolian and Tungus languages, while there are no such common features between Turkic and Tungus languages.

Unfinished and posthumous works. In the last years of his life, Doerfer turned his attention back to some of his previous unfinished projects, which mostly were of Tungusological nature. One of them was his *Etymologisch-ethnologisches Wörterbuch tungusischer Dialekte*, which in its core is an edition of the *Tungus Dictionary* of Sergei Shirokogoroff as well as a critical analysis of the materials contained there. The *Tungus Dictionary*, which had been published in manuscript format in Japan, was not suitable for use until Doerfer's edition became available. Even its previous editor Shinobu Iwamura, as well as Doerfer's teacher, Karl Heinrich Menges, had considered the manuscript "not editable" (Doyerfer, 1999). The etymological-ethnographical dictionary was his most extensive work next to the Lamut dictionary (Doyerfer, Hesché, and Scheinhardt) and his study on Turkic and Mongolian elements in Persian. Unfortunately, Doerfer, who finished working on it in summer 2003, passed away a few months before it was published in spring 2004.

After Doerfer's death, Michael Knüppel, being in charge of his estate, published and completed some of the projects that Doerfer had planned or started, mostly in the frame of his mentioned endeavor: *Nordasiatische Kulturgeschichte*. One of these projects was the collection of Lamut (Éven) folktales (*Lamutische Märchen*), gathered in the 1970s and 1980s by Doerfer and his collaborators (Doyerfer, 2011); another is the *Armanisches Wörterbuch* (2013).

Gerhard Doerfer was the recipient of numerous honors. He became an honorary member of the *Türk Dil Kurumu* in the year 1978, of the *Türkisch-deutscher Freundeskreis* in Wolfsburg in 1981, of the *Csoma de Kőrös Society* in 1987, and of the *Societas Uralo-Altaica* in 1988 in which he served as the executive president for several years. He also received the Atatürk Medal in 1981 and an honorary doctorate from the University of Szeged in Hungary in 1992. He was honored with festschrifts on the occasions of his 65th, 70th, and 75th birthdays and, after his death, the substantial significance of his lifelong scholarship in several fields of study was honored in numerous obituary notices.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

A comprehensive list of Doerfer's scholarly works presents more than 500 titles (books, articles, miscellanea, reviews); for these, see his bio-bibliography by Knüppel (2000), as well as some addenda by the same author.

Select list of Doerfer's works.

“Prolegomena zu einer Untersuchung der altaischen Lehnwörter im Neupersischen,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 5/1, 1959, pp. 1-26.

Der Numerus im Mandschu, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur 1962, no. 4, Wiesbaden, 1963.

Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung älterer neupersischer Geschichtsquellen, vor allem der Mongolen- und Timuridenzeit I: Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen Türkische Elemente im Neupersischen: alif bis tā Türkische Elemente im Neupersischen: gim bis kāf Türkische Elemente im Neupersischen (Schluß) und Register zur Gesamtarbeit, Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission 16 and 19-21, Wiesbaden, 1963-75.

Ältere westeuropäische Quellen zur kalmückischen Sprachgeschichte (Witsen 1692 bis Zwick 1827), Asiatische Forschungen 18, Wiesbaden, 1965.

Türkische Lehnwörter im Tadschikischen, Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 37/3, Wiesbaden 1967.

“Das Chaladsch: Eine archaische Türksprache in Zentralpersien,” *ZDMG* 118, 1968, pp. 79-112.

Anatomie der Syntax, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Series 1, LXXXVIII, Bern and Frankfurt am Main, 1973.

Lautgesetz und Zufall: Betrachtungen zum Omnicomparatismus, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft 10, Innsbruck, 1973.



“Das Kur-Urmiische und seine Verwandten,” *Zentralasiatische Studien* 7, 1973, pp. 567-99.

“Ist das Japanische mit den altaischen Sprachen verwandt?” *ZDMG* 124/1, 1974, pp. 103-42.

“Ist Kur-Urmiisch ein nanaischer Dialekt,” *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 47, 1975, pp. 51-63.

“A Reply to Miller’s Reply,” *ZDMG* 126/2, 1976, pp. 76-77.

Tungusen und Jakuten, Sibirische Märchen 2, Düsseldorf, 1983.

“Das Birare,” *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne* 78, 1983, pp. 1-19.

“Die Körperteilbezeichnungen des Kili,” *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények* 86, 1984, pp. 238-46.

Mongolo-Tungusica, *Tungusica* 3, Wiesbaden, 1985.

Zum Vokalismus nichtester Silben in altosmanischen Originaltexten, Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission 37, Stuttgart, 1985.

Lexik und Sprachgeographie des Chaladsch, 2 vols., Wiesbaden, 1987.

Grammatik des Chaladsch, *Turcologica* 4, Wiesbaden, 1988.

Grundwort und Sprachmischung: Eine Untersuchung anhand von Körperteilbezeichnungen, Münchener Ostasiatische Studien 47, Stuttgart, 1988.

Mongolische Kasus als Klassensuffixe, *Innsbrucker Studien zur Ural-Altaiistik* 1, Innsbruck, 1988.

Versuch einer linguistischen Datierung älterer osttürkischer Texte, *Turcologica* 14, Wiesbaden, 1993.

Formen der älteren türkischen Lyrik, *Studia Uralo-Altaica* 37, Szeged, 1996.

“Eine vorläufige Auswertung von Shirokogoroff: A Tungus Dictionary,” in Cornelius Hasselblatt and Paula Jääsalmi-Krüger, eds., *Europa et Sibiria: Beiträge zur Sprache und Kultur der kleineren finnougriischen, samojedischen und paläosibirischen Völker: Gedenkband für Wolfgang Veenker*, Wiesbaden 1999, pp. 107-116.



Gerhard Doerfer, Wolfram Hesse, Hartwig Scheinhardt, Semih Tezcan, *Khalaj materials*, Uralic and Altaic series 115, Bloomington, 1971.

Gerhard Doerfer and Michael Weiers, *Beiträge zur Nordasiatischen Kulturgeschichte*, Tungusica 1, Wiesbaden, 1978.

Gerhard Doerfer and Semih Tezcan, *Wörterbuch des Chaladsch (Dialekt von Charrāb)*, Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica 26, Budapest, 1980.

Gerhard Doerfer, Wolfram Hesse, and Hartwig Scheinhardt, *Lamutisches Wörterbuch*, Wiesbaden, 1980.

Gerhard Doerfer and Wolfram Hesse, *Südoghische Materialien aus Afghanistan und Iran*, Wiesbaden 1989.

Gerhard Doerfer, Wolfram Hesse, and Jamshid Ravanyar, *Oghusica aus Iran*, Wiesbaden, 1990.

Gerhard Doerfer and Wolfram Hesse, *Chorasantürkisch: Wörterlisten, Kurzgrammatiken, Indices*, Turcologica 16, Wiesbaden, 1993.

Gerhard Doerfer and Semih Tezcan, *Folklore-Texte der Chaladsch*, Turcologica 19, Wiesbaden, 1994.

Gerhard Doerfer and Wolfram Hesse, *Türkische Folklore-Texte aus Chorasán*, Turcologica 38, Wiesbaden, 1998.

Gerhard Doerfer and Michael Knüppel, *Etymologisch-Ethnologisches Wörterbuch tungusischer Dialekte (vornehmlich der Mandschurei)*, Hildesheim and New York, 2004.

Gerhard Doerfer and Michael Knüppel, *Lamutische Märchen und Erzählungen*, Tunguso-Sibirica 30, 2 vols., Wiesbaden, 2011.

Gerhard Doerfer and Michael Knüppel, *Armanisches Wörterbuch*, Nordhausen, 2013.

Translations by Doerfer.

Aleksandr Belenickij, *Zentralasien*, Archaeologia Mundi, Munich, 1968.

Boris B. Pjotrowski, *Urartu*, Archaeologia Mundi, Munich, 1969.



Works on G. Doerfer.

Anonymus, "Gerhard Doerfer," in John Richrd Krueger, ed., *The Uralic and Altaic Series. An Analytical Index, Including A Complete Index to Keleti Szemle*, Bloomington and The Hague, 1970, p. 76;

"Mitteilungen: Personalia: 65 Jahre," *Materialia Turcica* 11, 1985, pp. 167-68.

"Doerfer, Gerhard," in Wilfried Kürschner, ed., *Linguisten Handbuch : Biographische und bibliographische Daten deutschsprachiger Sprachwissenschaftlerinnen und Sprachwissenschaftler der Gegenwart I*, Tübingen, 1994, p. 160.

Hasan Eren, "Doerfer, Gerhard," *Türk Ansiklopedisi XIII*, 1966, pp. 410-11.

Idem, "Doerfer, Gerhard," in idem, *Türklük Bilimi Sözlüğü I: Yabancı Türkologlar*, Ankara 1998, pp. 141-47.

Gerhard Doerfer Festschrift. Essays presented to Gerhard Doerfer on His Seventieth Birthday by His Colleagues and Students, Journal of Turkish Studies 13, Harvard University, 1989, pp. V-VII.

Gerhard Doerfer, "Eine autobiographische Skizze," *Göttinger Beiträge zur Asienforschung* 1, 2001, pp. 227-30.

Lars Johanson, "Gerhard Doerfer (1920-2003)," *Turkic Languages* 8. 2004, pp. 3-6.

Michael Knüppel, *Schriftenverzeichnis Gerhard Doerfer*, Materialia Turcica Beiheft 13, Göttingen, 2000.

Idem, "Zum 80. Geburtstag von Gerhard Doerfer," *Materialia Turcica* 21, Göttingen, 2000, pp. 163-66.

Idem, "Gerhard Doerfer (8. März 1920 – 27. Dezember 2003), Ein Nachruf," *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher*, N.S. 19, 2005, pp. 1-7.

Idem, "In Memoriam Gerhard Doerfer (8.III.1920-27.XII.2003)," *Materialia Turcica* 25, 2005, pp. 352-58.

Idem, "Schriftenverzeichnis Gerhard Doerfer (Corrigenda und Nachträge)," *Materialia Turcica* 25, 2005, pp. 359-72.



Idem, "Drei Briefe Johannes Rahders an Gerhard Doerfer," *Journal of Oriental and African Studies* 16, 2007, pp. 229-34.

Idem, "Schriftenverzeichnis Gerhard Doerfer (Corrigenda et Addenda II)," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 39, 2010, pp. 165-70.

Klaus Kreiser, "Bibliographie der deutschen Turkologie (1975-1993)," *Turcica* 36, 1994, pp. 271-376.

Ilse Laude-Cirtautas, "Schriftenverzeichnis Gerhard Doerfer," *Central Asiatic Journal* 29, 1985, pp. 1-24.

Carsten Näher, "Gerhard Doerfer in memoriam," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 33, 2004, pp. VII-X.

Mehmed Ölmez, "Gerhard Doerfer'in ardından," *Türk Dili* 87, no. 626, 2004, pp. 175-76.

Johannes Reckel, "Nachruf auf Gerhard Doerfer (8.2.1920-27.12.2003)," *Central Asiatic Journal* 48/2, 2004, pp. 308-9.

Ingeborg, Hauenschild, "Schriftenverzeichnis Gerhard Doerfer 1989-1994," in Marcel Erdal and Smih Tezcan, eds., *Beläk Bitig: Sprachstudien für Gerhard Doerfer zum 75 Geburtstag*, Turcologica 23, Wiesbaden, 1995, pp. XI-XIV.

Sources referred to in the text.

Artturi Kannisto, "Die tatarischen Lehnwörter im Wogulischen," *Finnisch-ugrische Forschungen* 17, 1925, pp. 1-264.

Michael Knüppel, "Stand und Bedürfnisse der tungusischen Etymologie in Deutschland," *Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia* 15, 2010, pp. 25-36.

Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogoroff, *A Tungus Dictionary: Tungus-Russian and Russian Tungus*, ed., Shinobu Iwamura, Photogravured from the manuscripts, Tokyo, 1944; 1953.

Roy Andrew Miller, *Japanese and the Other Altaic Languages*, Chicago, London 1971.

Idem, "A Reply to Doerfer," *ZDMG* 126/2, 1976, pp. 53-76.



Vladimir Minorsky, "The Turkish Dialect of Khalaj," *BSOAS* 10, 1940, pp. 417-37.

Moḥammad Moqaddam, "Guyešhā-ye Vafs wa Āštiān wa Tafreš," *Irānkuda*, no. 11, 1939, pp. 1-184.

Semih Tezcan, "Über die Chaladsch Forschung," *Forschungs-Forum: Berichte aus der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg* 2, 1990, pp. 74-76.