

EARLY TIBETAN INSCRIPTIONS: SOME RECENT DISCOVERIES

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Inscriptions on stone from the eighth and ninth centuries are among the best sources of information about the early history, social conditions and religion of the Tibetans and also about the state of the language at that time. Not long after I had completed an edition of all those I was able to collect in Central Tibet two hitherto unrecorded inscriptions and additional material on one other have come to light. One of the new discoveries was made by Geshe Pema Tshering of Bomn on a visit to his homeland in East Tibet. On a free-standing pinnacle of rock, known as Brag Lhamo, in the district of Ldan-khog he discovered a short inscription of obvious antiquity with a group of Buddhist images in low relief alongside it. He has referred to his discovery briefly in *Zentralasiatische Studien* of the University of Bonn, vol. 16, where there is also an illustration of the rock; and in collaboration with Dr. Helmut Eimer he is preparing a full analysis and description which it is to be hoped will soon be published. In the meantime he has very kindly sent me a photograph of the inscription and valuable information about the site and has generously allowed me to mention it in advance of his detailed study.

From the photograph it can be seen that the inscription, though badly damaged, is of considerable interest not only for its contents but also as showing that such documents are still to be found. Tibetan writers in the past did not generally attach sufficient importance to these relics of their past to record them in full. Exceptions were the Karmapa historian Dpa'-bo Gsug-lag phreng-ba (1504-1566) and the great Ka-thog scholar Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1696-1755). The discovery of this inscription by Geshe Pema Tsering and of those at Lho-brag, to be mentioned later, shows that a new generation of Tibetan scholars is aware of the value of such documents; and it is to be hoped that the greater freedom of travel in Tibet may lead to further discoveries.

Previously known inscriptions from Central Tibet are carved on stately pillars of dressed stone but this one at Ldan-khog, like that from Rkong-po, is on a natural rock face, perhaps implying either an absence of suitable stone or a less affluent milieu; and owing to the nature of the surface the lettering lacks the precision and regularity of that on the stone pillars and tends more to the character of some of the eighth and ninth century manuscripts from Dunhuang.

What has survived places the inscription in the reign of Khri Srong-lde brtsan (755-c.800) and most probably within its last ten or fifteen years.

It is remarkable for its strong emphasis on the devotion of the *btsan-po* to Buddhism. Other inscribed pillars of his time and the Chronicle from Dunhuang certainly record his acceptance of the faith, his vow to maintain it, and the foundation by him of the great temple of Bsam-yas; but in the commemorative inscription near the royal burial mounds at 'Phyongs-rgyas he figures as combining devotion to Buddhism with responsibility and regard for the old religious practices. In the first part of that inscription he is described as maintaining the wisdom of the gods—*lha'i gtsug lag*—and acting in accordance with the religion of sky and earth—*gnam sa'i chos*—after the customs of his ancestors; at the end he is seen as a convert to Buddhism—*'jig-rten las 'das pa'i chos bzang-po brnyes nas*. But even in that last paragraph the title accorded to him—*'phrul-gyi lha byang chub chen po*, "Great enlightened supernaturally wise divinity"—brings together elements from both the old faith and the new.

By contrast, in the Brag Lhamo inscription Khri Srong-lde-brtsan is known from the start by the purely Buddhist epithet, *Byang-cub-sems-dpa'*, "of perfect spiritual enlightenment". In the damaged line that follows, it seems possible to detect references to the traditional qualities of royalty reflecting his glory, *byin*, and military might, *dbu-rmog brtsan*; but there does not seem to be any mention of the old religion; and the inscription is unique in referring to the correct translation of Mahāyāna sutras—(*theg-pa chen po mdo*) *sde mang-mo zhig gtan la bab par bsgyur to*. The text seems to go on to state that by that merit, the *Chos rgyal*—a title by which Khri Srong-lde-brtsan is designated in the 'Phyongs-rgyas inscription—and many hundreds of thousands of others entered into deliverance. He is credited also with the extensive foundation of temples. Certainty on these readings and interpretations must, however, await the result of Geshe Pema Tsering's study.

More substance is added to these significant passages by the edicts of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan preserved in vol *ja* of the *Chos-'byung* of Dpa'-bo gtsug-lag which I have described elsewhere as embodying the first Tibetan *Chos-'byung* and which can be dated between 779 and 782 A.D. They show that even at that time, generally regarded as the early years of the flowering of Buddhism in Tibet, there were centres of Buddhist practice not only at Lhasa, Bsam-yas and Khra-'brug but also in Bru-zha (Gilgit), Zhang-zhung territory in the north west, and Mdo-smad in East Tibet.

The inscription and group of Buddhist carvings at Brag Lhamo suggest that there was an early religious foundation in the vicinity, Teichman who visited "Dengko" in 1918 mentions "the celebrated Drolma Lhakhang" which had been seen earlier by A.K. that redoubtable pandit of the Survey of India. The temple is said to have contained a famous image of Drolma (Sgrol-ma) which is supposed to have flown there from Peking. Dr. Eimer has pointed out that the Sgrol-ma Lha-khang of Ldan-khog, not far from Brag Lhamo is claimed—in spite of differences in the orthography in several writers—to be one of the temples founded by Srong-brtsan sgam-po to

dominate the frontiers. The name might reflect some tradition about his Chinese bride who was deemed to be a goddess; but it cannot be overlooked that there is a possible later connection with A-phyi Chos kyi Sgrol-ma, the protecting deity of the 'Bri-khung sect whose founder came from the Skyu-ra Dru Rgyal family which was all powerful in that region.

Whatever may be made of these confused traditions, the inscription clearly shows the influence of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan in that region. Whether the Buddhist carvings are contemporary with the inscription is a matter for consideration. The Bodhisattva figure, the only one of which I have seen a photograph, appears to be the supporter on the left side of a central figure within a circular aureole in a group which Pema Tsering has identified as Amitāyus, Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāni. It recalls drawings in manuscripts of the eighth or ninth century from Dunhuang and some paintings in cave temples there of which the style seems to show more Central Asian than Chinese characteristics. Dr. Eimer has pointed out that an adjustment to the end of the first line of the text shows that the inscription was made after the carving; but the impression, to me, is that both are part of a single devotional exercise.

It would be tempting to see the carving as a rare example of early Tibetan art. Ldan-khog was former territory of the Sum-pa or Mi-nyag which was conquered by the Tibetans in stages between the seventh and early eighth centuries and there is no suggestion that the Chinese had any presence or influence there during the Tang dynasty. But especially after the Tibetan conquest of the border cities of China's north-west there was a good deal of coming and going between the two countries. Chinese religious teachers visited Central Tibet and a Chinese craftsman cast the great bell of Bsam-yas. Chinese workmen and artists are traditionally, and credibly, said to have taken part in the building of Bsam-yas; and it is possible that the carvings at Brag Lhamo were the work of the Chinese or of the non-Chinese people who, as documents from Dunhuang show, were employed in many capacities in that region.

Dr. Eimer has informed me of a short Chinese inscription at Ldan-khog which might have a bearing on the matter; it appears to refer to a "heavenly woman" or "women" but neither its meaning nor date is clear.

It may be remembered that Ldan-khog was among the many border territories conquered by Chao Erh-feng in 1908. He planned to establish a district headquarters there and, although his death and subsequent Tibetan successes frustrated that design, Teichman found a Chinese yamen there in 1918 and it continued side by side with a Tibetan official until at least 1932.

Elucidation of that and many other questions awaits Geshe Pema Tsering's forthcoming work. In the meantime I am grateful that he has permitted me to bring his important discovery and some of its problems and implications to the notice of students of Tibetan epigraphy and history.

The second discovery is described in Bod Ljongs Zhib 'Jug (2) 1982 in

two articles by Pa-sangs dbang-'dus, one in Tibetan, the other in Chinese. For an understanding of the latter I am greatly indebted to Professor South Coblin of the University of Iowa who has translated relevant passages and given me valuable advice.

It appears that there are two inscriptions, similar in meaning, on rock faces in Lho-brag near the headquarters town of Do-ba rdzong (Towa) now known as La cha. There is some confusion about the exact sites as the position of one of them is given in the Tibetan text as near the village of 'Dus-byung 50 *le-bar* to the west (*chu lha'i phyogs*) of the district town of Lho-brag Hsien, while the Chinese version indicates that the distance is 5 km. north-west of the same place. The position of the other is more easily determined being to the north-east (*dbang phyogs*) of the same place, at the junction of the Lho-brag nub-chu and the Sman-thang Chu. The Chinese version agrees generally except that it gives the direction as east of the country seat of Lo cha. The Sman-thang Chu can be identified with the Mandong Chu of the Survey of India map, 1925, which though approximate in that area, shows it a short distance to the east of Towa. If the two inscriptions are similar and relate to the estates and privileges of the same family it seems probable that they would not be very far apart and the distance of 5 km. for the 'Dus-byung site is the more acceptable. In the Tibetan text 50, *lnga-bcu* may be an error for *bco-linga*.

The Tibetan article (T.) states that out of more than 150 *tshig rkang*, only eighteen or nineteen survive in an obscure condition (*gsal la mi gsal*). Each article contains a copy of what can be read at one of the sites—it is not specified which. In each the number of syllables is about 140. According to Tibetan dictionaries *tshig rkang* means *śloka, gāthā*; but in the Chinese article (C.) it is rendered as "syllable or word"—i.e. a single Chinese character. In classical Tibetan usage, as I am informed by Mr. Ngawang Thondup Narkyid a scholar with a special interest in Tibetan linguistics, *tshig-'bru* is a syllable and *tshig* a complete word—e.g. *btsan* and *po* are *tshig-'bru* and *btsan-po* is a *tshig*; so it appears that Pa-sangs dbang-'dus has treated *tshig-rkang* as the equivalent of *tshig-'bru*. The number of lacunae is marked in T. as 18; in C. it is apparently 34. C. may have tried to show single effaced letters while in T. the same author may have estimated missing words.

Such differences and many other points could be elucidated if there were a photographic record but it appears there is none and it must be assumed that both copies come from field-notes of an eye-copy or eye-copies by the same person from the same original. It is, therefore, surprising that there are so many differences between the two versions and perhaps more surprising that in most instances the roman transcription in C is preferable to the Tibetan text in T. Some of the differences are in presentation: T shows the reversed *ki gu* and writes *dang*—rather badly—with the *d* above the *ng*. In C. a number of words are improbably run together, e.g. *nyenye*, *skudang* and so on; and there is no punctuation, which is indicated in a

few—probably by no means all—instances in T. These are of less significance than fifteen differences in the readings. In nine of these C is clearly preferable; and it is unacceptable in only two but there are also two omissions and one printer's error. One difference is debatable as will be mentioned later. In the last line of both T. and C. comparison with other inscriptions shows that *sgreng bu* is an error for *sgrom*.

Out of this careless confusion I have collated the following text: I have not inserted additional punctuation.

Btsan po lha sras gyi zha sngar lde sman lde'u cung / glo ba nye nye sku'-dang chab srid la dphen pha'i rje blas dka' ba bked byed nas bka's gngang lde'u cung gi pha¹ lo snang gi bu tsha pheld rgyud nam zhar srid g-yung drung dang mtshungs pha dang khol yul las stogs pha myi dbri myi snyung ba dang / lde'u cung gi mchad gyi/rim gro bla nas mdzadde nam cig dbon sras gang gi ring la ral yang / bla nas stong sdes brtsig phar gngang nge lde'u cung gi pha² lo snang gi bu tsha pheld rgyud x phu nu x x cig yang bka' gyod x gtsigs shan x x x x x x x dbu snyung gngang ba dang rkong kar po lha btsan x x sa x x x x blon po dang bu bzhi zhang lon gi bro bor ba'i gtsigs gyi sgrom³ bu ni phyag sbal du bzung ngo

- Notes: 1. T reads *kha lo snang*, this is discussed later
 2. C omits *kha lo snang gi*
 3. T and C read *sgreng*

A provisional translation follows:

"Whereas Lde Sman Lde'u cung has been very loyal to the *btsan-po*, the divine son, and has continuously taken trouble in performing the duty of *rje blas* to the benefit of our person and the state, it has been granted by order, that the status in perpetuity, the service tenure lands and so on, of the line of male descendants of Lo-s nang the father of Lde'u-cung shall never be decreased and never diminished, and that the rites for the tomb shall be performed by the higher authority and, for ever, in the time of all our descendants damage to it shall be repaired by the higher authority, the Stong-sde. And if older or younger brothers of the line of male descendants of Lo-s nang the father of Lde'u-cung are involved in an accusation, for one occasion a decree dismissing the imputation shall be given. This has been granted on oath and the casket containing the edict which has been sworn, as witnesses, by Rkong Kar-po Lha-btsan.....and the .. minister and the four Zhang-lon sons has been deposited in the archives".

The language regarding the grant of status and privileges is generally similar to that in the edicts on the north face of the *Zhol-rdo-rings* and those at Zhwa'i Lha-khang and De-mo in Rkong-po. The terms *rje-blas*, *khol-yul*, *dbon sras*, *phu nu* etc. have been studied by several scholars to whose work reference is made in my *Corpus of Early Tibetan Inscriptions*, Royal Asiatic Society, 1985. The passage about overlooking an accusation on one occasion is supplied on the basis of the west inscription at Zhwa'i Lha-khang, 1.40 and

the supposition that the lacuna after *shan* would contain some such word as *brtegs* implying an imputation against someone's character. As in other inscriptions leading persons in the state took part in the royal vow. The first named here is the feudatory ruler—*rgyal phran*—of Rkong-po or a member of his family; other names are lost in the effaced passage and the last—*bu bzhi zhang lon*—which I have taken to refer to four brothers, perhaps local, holding the rank of *zhang lon* which covered the main body of officials, might perhaps be understood as the Bu-bzhi minister although there is no instance of a family holding that name.

The most unusual part of the inscription relates to the provision that the burial rites of Lde'u-cung should be attended to by the Stong-sde, the Governor of the Thousand District, presumably of Lho-brag. The only other record of such a favour is the presentation by Srong-brtsan sgam-po of a stone, on which an oath had been sworn, to be the foundation of the tomb (*mchad*) of a noble minister of the Dba's clan (Dunhuang Chronicle f. 109).

The recipient of so signal a distinction must have been of very high standing; but there is no mention of Lde Sman Lde'u-cung or any similar name in the *mss* from Dunhuang or in the lists of witnesses to the edicts of Khri Srong Lde-brtsan and Khri Lde-srong-brtsan or to the Sino-Tibetan treaty of 821/822; nor is there any trace in later works which show some knowledge of early records, such as the Bka'-thang-sde-lnga and the Chos-'byung of Dpa'-bo gtsug-lag. The question may, therefore, be asked whether the name is that of an office or function and denotes the *Sman* of the royal family, whose patronymic was Lde. Lde'u-cung might imply a cadet member of that family.

Sman immediately suggests a physician and it may be significant that one of the memorials to Lde-sman Lde'u-cung is near Sman-thang—the plain of medicinal plants? There is an extensive later tradition about the introduction of medical science to Tibet which has been examined fully by Professor C. Beckwith in J.A.O.S. 1979. The account in Dpa'-bo gtsug-lag vol *tsa* tells how after a basic medical treatise was brought to Tibet in the seventh century by the Chinese bride of Srong-brtsan sgam-po physicians were invited from India, China and Khrom of Stag-gzigs—"Persian Rome" (Byzantium?). A century later more physicians came from other neighbouring countries, Kashmir, the Turkic lands, and Zhang zhung; and Tibetan physicians were trained, beginning with the famous Gyu-thog Yon-tan Mgon-po. The association of the name of Galenos, the second century Greek physician, with the first group of visitors shows that the tradition is overlaid with legend but that is not to deny that it has some historical basis; and there is evidence of the practice of medicine in the time of the Tibetan kingdom in at least three *mss* from Dunhuang. In one of them, Pelliot Tibetain 1044, the method is attributed to India and is linked with the name of the Lha'i Drang-srong 'Phrul-chan Ha ta na bye thag; another, Pell. T. 1057 is in similar language; and in another, Pell. T. 127 there are references to medical

knowledge from Ta-zig, Dru-gu (the Turks), and Zhang-zhung; but there is no definite mention of a Sman-pa in this connection unless perhaps in 1.160 of Pell. T. 127—*sman ba'i (sman pa'i) yon-tan*.

On the other hand there are numerous references, principally in works on divination, to *sman* of another sort—supramundane beings, many of them female such as the *mu-sman* and *mtsho sman*; others were *sman* of the earth, sky, water, mountains and so on. They have survived in the demonology of Tibetan Buddhism and of Bon as protectors of the faith. In the early times they were associated with other godlings and were especially concerned with the fortunes of the royal family and noble ministers about whose well-being or the opposite, they made prognostications. Many instances, described as *chu sman gyi mchid*, *mu sman gyi zhal nas*, etc. can be seen in *mss* from Dunhuang, e.g. Pell, T 1043 1.0.L. 740.

In order to communicate such messages a medium was needed. Madame A. Macdonald (Spanien) who has made a profound study of those divination *mss* in *Études Tibétaines*, 1971, notes that the *mu-sman* spoke through the mouth of an old woman. Perhaps the persons stated in Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents (F.W. Thomas) II pp. 394, 395 to have been appointed to serve, or petition, (*gsol*) various local deities had a similar function. Madame Macdonald also suggests that some of the beings connected with divination may have been part human and part divine; and it may be possible to see the Lde Sman Lde'u-cung as a forerunner of such present day spirit mediums as the State Oracle of Gnas-chung who in ordinary life is a human being but when possessed by his patron deity becomes a sort of god.

The reference to the performance of *rje blas* implies that the Lde Sman had some official status. Certainly, the art of astrology, closely allied to divination, had official recognition in the Rtsis-pa Chen-po who is named among the ministers who witnessed the Sino-Tibetan treaty; and the inscription at Skar-cung shows that there were persons who advised the ruler about dreams and omens. The second edict of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan in the Chos-'byung of Dpa'-bo gtsug-lag also refers to interpreters of signs and portents who exerted influence on the royal court.

The debatable reading where the Tibetan text of the inscription has *kha lo snang* and the Chinese has *pha la'o (lo) snang* might have a bearing on the matter. The Tibetan version would be quite out of keeping with normal usage by which either a personal or family name follows that of the clan or family without the particle *gi*, *gyi*, or *kyi*; so, if it is correct, there must be something unusual. *Kha-lo* means "guidance" and *Kha-lo-s nang* might mean a person who gave guidance, perhaps an interpreter of the sayings of a *sman*. But too many problems follow from the speculation and the general reliability of the version in the Chinese article makes the reading *Pha Lo-s nang* the more probable.

Whether Lde Sman Lde'u-cung was a physician or a spirit medium (or, indeed, neither) his services to the *brtsan-po* were such that the privileges

granted to him were extended to future generations of his family. Seemingly he had no son so the grant is made to the other male descendants of his father. Similar grants are seen in the north inscription on the Zhol *rdo-rings* where it is made not only for the direct descendants of Stag-sgra Klu-khong himself but also to other male descendants of his father; and in the Zhwa'i Lha-khang inscriptions where since Myang Ting-nge-'dzin was a celibate monk, his father received the favour.

The name of the *btsan-po* who gave the edict for Lde Sman Lde'u-cung has not survived so the regnal period of the inscription cannot be definitely determined. There is no evidence that the title Btsan-po Lha-sras was used in the time of Khri Lde-gtsug-brtsan but it is applied to Khri Srong-lde-brtsan, Khri Lde-srong-brtsan, and Khri Gtsug-lde-brtsan Ral-pa-can alike.

Orthography may provide the significant clue. The *da drag*, which is found in the Lho-brag inscription, appears in all other surviving inscriptions in varying numbers; but in its extensive use of the archaic *pha* for *pa* that at Lho-brag is comparable only with those on the Zhol *rdo-rings* which are the earliest known and can be dated c.764. In later inscriptions that usage is very rare. Another point in common between the Lho-brag and Zhol inscriptions is that in neither is there any trace of Buddhist influence. It is arguable that the latter date from a time when the revival of Buddhism in the twentieth year of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan—i.e. c.762 A.D. was in its very early stages. The possibility that the Lho-brag inscription reflects popular non-Buddhist religion is not necessarily convincing evidence that it antedates the Buddhist revival, for their memorial inscriptions show that both Khri Srong-lde-brtsan and Khri Lde-srong-brtsan combined respect for the old religion of the gods and worship of earth and heaven with their acceptance of Buddhism; but it certainly does not run counter to the early date suggested by the orthography and allows the Lho-brag inscription to be tentatively assigned to the early years of the reign of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan.

It is to be hoped that Pa-sangs dbang-'dus who has made this valuable discovery, can provide further information which might throw light on the many uncertainties, in particular details of the second inscription and, if possible, photographs or at least a sketch of the lay-out of the texts.

The third subject is some important new information about the inscription at the bang-so—the tumulus tomb—of Khri Lde-srong-brtsan at 'Phyongs-rgyas. When Professor Tucci and I visited the place in 1949 only the upper part of the pillar could be seen above ground; the rest was buried in a field-bank which had been built up over the centuries. Some twenty-two lines of the text were immediately visible but, with the help of the monk guardian, a local woman and boy were engaged to dig a narrow trench which allowed a further twenty-five lines to be seen with considerable difficulty and discomfort. Of most of these only fragmentary, and sometimes doubtful, readings could be recorded. My findings were published in J.R.A.S. 1969 (1).

Now the Chinese authorities have had the whole pillar excavated and

enclosed in a small building. Mrs. Tamara Hill of San Francisco, who was able to photograph the pillar, very kindly sent me some colour slides showing that it rests on a stone tortoise and has a carved decoration of snakes and dragons on its east face. It proves to be a monument of even more imposing dimensions than I had surmised.

Subsequently through the kindness of Professor South Coblin I have seen an article in Chinese by Bsod-nams dbang-'dus and Chang Chien-lin in *Wen-wu* 1985 (9) of which Dr. Roderick Whitfield, Professor of Chinese and East Asian Art at the University of London, has generously given me a summary. The article, which describes the excavated pillar is illustrated with rather poorly reproduced photographs and drawings of the remarkable reliefs on the side of the pillar and on the underside of the small stone canopy, also of the stone tortoise which is carved from the upper part of a block of dressed stone over one metre high. The pillar itself is said to be 5.6 metres in height and the monument overall from base to finial to be 7.18 metres.

The article includes twelve lines of the inscription in Tibetan letters with a transcription in roman. They are said to be the last of a total of fifty-nine lines and therefore appear to join up with the fragmentary readings in my article mentioned above. The text is too badly damaged to allow a continuous translation and some of the readings are dubious. For example *snga* has been read three times for what must be *dang* written with the letter *ng* subscribed under the *d* as is frequently seen in other inscriptions. *Srim* in 1.10 is highly improbable and *zhongs* in 1.11 is doubtful. Nevertheless enough survives to show that there are echoes of some passages in the first part of the inscription eulogizing the traditional attributes of royalty—*thugs-sgam bka-brtsan* (1.4)—and the martial prowess of the *btsan-po* in commanding the allegiance of neighbouring rulers (ls. 7 and 9) but what is important is the clear reference to the Buddhist faith which has not been mentioned earlier. That is not really surprising for Khri Lde-srong-brtsan's devotion to Buddhism is attested in his **Skar-cung** inscription and the related edict preserved in the history of Dpa'-bo gtsug-lag, also in the *Sgra-sbyor* of which fragmentary *mss* from Dunhuang survive. Although much damaged, the closing lines on the pillar appear to mention the death of the *btsan-po* and end by ascribing to his *bang-so* the name Rgyal-chen-'phrul by which it is known also to later historians.

The final burial rites of a *btsan-po* customarily took place about two years after his death in a tomb which had probably been prepared while he was still alive. The pillar can therefore be dated between 815, the year in which Khri Lde-srong-brtsan died, and 817 by when the burial would have taken place.

The decoration on the pillar, about which and connected matters I have had much valuable advice from Professor Roderick Whitfield and Mr. Wladimir Zwalf of the British Museum, combines Indian and Chinese motifs with the latter strongly predominating. On the east and west faces

elongated dragons appear to pursue each other in a scattering of Chinese "cloud-heads" above a group of writhing serpents. The cloud design also appears on the underside of the canopy together with flying apsaras or vidhyādhara figures at each corner and the sun in the centre of the east side and the moon on the west. The sun and moon are also carved at the head of the inscription on the pillar itself.

The whole is a substantial example of the progress of glyptic art in Tibet, the earliest survivals of which appear to be two carved doorways in the Jokhang of Lhasa which was founded in the seventh century (see *Liu I-ssu, Hsi-tsang fo-chiao i-shu*, pl. 3., and *Siś and Vaniš, Der Weg nach Lhasa* pl. 32). These resemble Licchavi work ascribed to the seventh century illustrated in pls. 13-15 of *The Arts of Nepal* by Pratapaditya Pal I, 1974. Their Indian lineage may be seen in many examples from the elaborate 5th century doorway at Deogarh (B. Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India*, 1967, pl. 77(B)) to Bodh Gaya in the early Pāla period (Asher, *The Art of Eastern India*, pl. 11, pl. 119). There are also in the Jokhang massive wooden pillars, probably of the same period, with carved capitals showing scrolling and flying figures (Liu I-ssu op. cit. pl. 6 and Jisl, *Siś and Vaniš, Tibetan Art* pl. 17). The antecedents of such work can be seen in carving at Cha Bahil in Nepal and Nālandā (Pal p. op. cit. pls. 79 and 157). The carved lions and grotesque human head on beam-ends in the Jokhang (Liu I-ssu op. cit. pl. 5) may also be from the seventh century but while there are similar figures of a later date—e.g. at Samada c.12th century (Tucci, *Transhimalaya*, 1973 pl. 126) there is a lack of earlier examples.

The next survivals are the rock carvings at Brag Lhamo. From the small part I have seen the iconography appears to be of Indian origin—perhaps modified by passage through Central Asia and executed by Chinese trained craftsmen as I have suggested above (p. 5). When a photograph of the whole group is available it may be possible to draw comparisons with groups of a central Buddha accompanied by supporting Bodhisattvas on either side, from Swat to Dunhuang.

Of the same reign are the dragon and lion figures on Khri Srong Lde-brtsan's commemorative pillar at 'Phyongs-rgyas (Richardson, *Early Burial Grounds in Tibet and Tibetan Decorative Art of the VIIIth and IXth Centuries*, C.A.J. 1963 pl. 15). The carving is badly effaced but the appearance of the quite freely drawn lion on the upper part of the pillar is generally similar to that of the lion supporting Manjusri in paintings from Dunhuang, while the traces of dragon figures on the lower part resemble the stylized carvings on the pillar of Khri Lde-srong-brtsan which are in a tradition that can be traced back to the Han dynasty. I have seen nothing closely comparable to the serpent design on the same pillar; it may be inspired by Indian mythology (see e.g. Pal op. cit. pls. 90 and 252). Sun and moon symbols like those on the Khri Lde-srong-brtsan pillar appear on a painting from Dunhuang of Akāśagarbha with an inscription in Tibetan (B.M. Stein 168). The tortoise base is a Chinese symbol of longevity.

Other examples from the reign of Khri Lde-srong-brtsan are the *rdo-rje* thunderbolt and swastika carved on the bases of the Zhwa'i Lha-khang pillars; the former is rather elaborate and not unlike the designs in the paintings from Dunhuang. Of the same reign is the base of the Skar-cung pillar with a bold pattern of mountains in Chinese style; the fluted canopy and elaborate finial also show Chinese influence.

The most notable survival from the reign of Khri Gtsug-Lde-brtsan Ral-pa-can is the rather battered stone lion on the tumulus at 'Phyongs-gyas. The treatment of the mane and the concealed ears resembles that of the hair of a Garuḍa image in Nepal (Pal op. cit. pl. 100) but there is also a Chinese feature in the depiction of a muscle on the foreleg rather like that in a well-known Tang marble lion (L. Sickman and A. Soper, *Art and Architecture of China*, p. 1. 61b); but the attitude of the latter is quite different. A pair of lion figures of the 8th century from Nepal are rather nearer (Pal, op. cit. pl. 163) but the closest similarity is a lion from Tumshuq illustrated in Von le Coq, Von Land und Leuten in Ost Turkestan) so the artistic origin of the figure is uncertain.

Another recent article in *Wenwu* shows that excavation of the base of the Sino-Tibetan Treaty pillar at the Jo-khang of Lhasa reveals that the pillar rests on a stone tortoise. Further, at 'U-shang (On-cang-do), where Khri Gtsug-lde-brtsan founded a temple, there is an eighteen-foot tall pillar of well dressed stone with an elegant stone capital, but uninscribed, which also stands on a stone tortoise. In the courtyard of the chapel which was said to have been completely restored by the late Dalai Lama, there is another pillar of reddish stone with a rather heavy capital; it is decorated on its sides with the *Bkra-shis rtags-brgyad* and other religious symbols. Although the pillar looks old, the carvings are in such good condition that I was doubtful whether they could be original; nevertheless these symbols are found in drawings from Dunhuang (e.g. *The Silk Route and Diamond Path*, UCLA Art Council 1982, p. 148).

Conclusions from a limited body of evidence are necessarily speculative. It is known from Chinese records that the Tibetans were highly skilled in fine metalwork and also that they decorated the tombs of their warriors by painting white tigers on them; but nothing of that survives and from the examples considered above it appears that after the initial influence of Indian models, probably by way of Nepal, Chinese influence prevailed. That is not really surprising for after the brief honeymoon period during the reigns of Srong-brtsan sgam-po and Tang Taizong hostilities, which were almost continuous, brought Tibetans into close contact with Chinese frontier towns. Moreover, there was rarely a complete interruption of diplomatic relations. Envoys from each side regularly visited the court of the other and for forty years from 641 to 681 and a further twenty-nine years from 710 to 739 a Chinese princess with her own ministers and retinue lived at the Tibetan capital. But a new closeness of relationship came with the establishment from the decade 776 to 786 of a Tibetan colonial regime in

the Chinese fortress cities of the north-west on the approaches to the Silk Route. There the Tibetans employed Chinese gentry as officials and other local people as translators, scribes and so on; and there they were in contact with Chinese teachers of Buddhism in a tradition which preceded their own conversion. Recent scholarship, notably that of Yoshiro Imaeda and R.A. Stein, has shown the extent to which Tibetan official thought and language were influenced by those of the Chinese classics. Chinese teachers and craftsmen made their appearance in Central Tibet in the later part of the reign of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan and the tradition that Chinese artists as well as Indian and Nepalese, took part in the decoration of Bsam-yas c.779 is not impossible to accept.

Lesser examples of monumental art in the capitals and finials of several inscribed pillars may support that trend. The earliest on the *rdo-rings* at Lhasa Zhol which dates from c.764 before the main influx of Chinese visitors, is small, simple and slightly upcurved; it is surmounted by two stone steps on which rests a small stone dome not unlike the drum of a stupa, crowned by a well-carved finial consisting of three circular ornaments enclosed in a scrolled border. Tibetan observers regarded it as the *Yid-bzhin nor-bu*, the *cintāmaṇi*; in this case perhaps three in one. The canopies of two other pillars of the same reign—that at Bsam-yas dating from c.779-782 and the memorial of the *bitsan-po* about twenty years later—are also plain; the former is surmounted by a gilded ornament symbolizing the sun resting on an upturned quarter moon and topped by a small knob; it can hardly be original and is not an integral part of the pillar. The other supports a dome-shaped stone, like that at Zhol, with a badly weathered cone-shaped finial, possibly a lotus.

Several of the capitals of the next reign beginning c.800, have a more marked Chinese appearance. The canopy of the Skar-cung pillar is handsomely fluted and is topped by an elaborate object which, again, Tibetans described as the *cintāmaṇi*.

The capitals at Zhwa'i lha-khang are absolutely plain and lack finials, having apparently been damaged when the pillars fell down some time after the tenth century. The carving on the underside of the canopy on the pillar at Khri-Lde-srong-brtsan's tomb has already been described; there is also a small scroll decoration round its edge; and the comparatively flat canopy is surmounted by a round lotus bud supported by a beaded collet. From a recent photograph there appears to be some cement at its base suggesting it had been knocked off and replaced since I saw it in 1949.

Of the pillars from the reign of Khri Lde-gtsug-brtsan (815—c.838) that at Lcang-bu has sharply upturned corners and the sides are decorated with a Chinese pattern of clouds. The canopy on the treaty pillar near the Jo-khang is simple and has a decoration of clouds. That on the unscribed pillar at 'U-shang is slightly upturned and has a simple decoration on its side. Those three and the small pillar in the courtyard at 'U-shang all have conical *cintāmaṇi* finials in slightly different forms and in varying states of preser-

vation. That on the Treaty Pillar is similar to the finials at Skar-cung.

The valuable contributions to the study of early Tibetan art as well as history, social conditions, and language in the three articles examined above give hope that the interest in such matters by Tibetan and Chinese scholars is only the beginning of a continuous search for survivals of Tibet's past. Apart from further possibilities in less well-known parts of central and south-east Tibet, it is probable that the Tibetan empire which extended from Hunza to the north-western frontier of China has left more traces than those discovered by Sir Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot. Wilhelm Filchner has mentioned in *A Scientist in Tartary*, 1939, p. 144, the finding of small lion figures of heavy stone and many other relics at the site of a Tibetan burial at Tsagan Usu some ninety miles south-west of the Kokonor. The Tibetan scholar Gedun Chopel notes in *The Blue Annals* (Roerich) I, p. 63 that there was near Xining an inscribed stone pillar mentioning the Three Learned Men of Tibet in the late ninth century; and Miss Mildred Cable recorded an old Tibetan temple in a thinly populated area near Dunhuang. The former fortress towns of the Chinese border from Liangzhou to Anxi where there were Tibetan administrative centres in the eighth and ninth centuries might be worth investigating; and so might Bla-brang Bkra-shis dkyil. Further, there are throughout Tibet large numbers of ancient burial mounds, often not recognized as such, and although Tibetan susceptibilities might be offended by the excavation of hallowed places like the bang-so of Srong-brtsan sgam-po, scientific exploration of lesser sites could yield much evidence of the past. There is a series of great conical mounds some 500 feet in circumference seen by the pandit A.K. near the monastery of Jador north of the Gnam-mtsho (Tengri Nor). In one of them there are open passages and nearby there is a large gateway in the rock through which the god Nyenchen Thanglha, the protecting deity of the Tibetan Kings, is said to pass.

Many remains may have been destroyed by time and by man but there is still a chance of some significant discoveries; and it is important that anyone fortunate enough to find some unknown monument, document or artifact should not fail to record it photographically.

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A note from the author is added on the following page.

NOTE

Reference page 11 line 22

Since completing the above I have seen in **The Religions of Tibet** by the late Professor Tucci, pp. 232 and 238, reference to the **lde'u** as a group of diviner-priests possessing a sacred character as protectors of society.

Dr. Michael Aris has drawn my attention to a tradition from Ngang in Bhutan that Khri Srong-lde brtsan had a "beloved natural son" (**thugs nye-ba'i sras zur-pa**) called Lde-chung Don-grub upon whom he conferred the province of Lho-brag. (Michael Aris, **Bhutan**, p. 138). Even though the tradition seems to be distorted it shows that the name of Lde-chung survived in the memories of the Bhutanese who had long connections with Lho-brag.

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