

## Notes on Csoma de Kőrös's Translation of a Tibetan Passport

TURRELL V. WYLIE†

In 1833, Kőrösi Csoma Sándor published a two-page article in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, entitled "Translation of a Tibetan Passport, dated A.D. 1688."<sup>1</sup> The basis of this article was an engraving of a document found in Thomas Hyde's *Historia Religionis Veterum Persarum*, first published in the year 1700.<sup>2</sup> Regarding this document, Csoma noted that ". . . at the time of its publication, no European was able to decipher the characters."<sup>3</sup> Csoma found that the document was written in ". . . the small running-hand of the Tibetans . . .";<sup>4</sup> that is to say, the cursive (*dbu-med*) script. Csoma's article gives his transcription of the entire text, together with his footnoted translation of it. Perhaps prompted by the scarcity of Thomas Hyde's work even in his own time, Csoma, in his two-page article, quoted entirely the 13 lines of information about this document found in that work.<sup>5</sup> Curiously however, as will be seen in the course of this paper, even though Csoma quoted Hyde verbatim, he apparently chose to ignore what Thomas Hyde had to say about the document itself.

Turning to the transcription of the engraving given by Csoma in his article, only in one place did he question the orthography of the original text. He transcribed that entry as *stahur-gyi*; but, immediately after that Csoma inserted the following: "(? Lhahur-gyi)."<sup>6</sup> The lack of any graphic similarity in cursive Tibetan between the writing of *stahur* and *Lhahur* piqued my curiosity regarding the actual appearance of the original graphs, and particularly as to why Csoma would choose to substitute *Lhahur-gyi*, which he translated as "*Lhahori . . .*", for *stahur-gyi*, which he did not mention in his translation or footnotes at all.

Fortunately for my curiosity and the purpose of this paper, the microfilm collection in the main library of the University of Washington contains a copy of the first edition of *Historia Religionis Veterum Persarum* by Thomas Hyde,

† This article is the last publication by Professor Wylie, as it was also the last paper he read at a conference. He passed away before being able to complete the revision and annotation. Professor Roy Andrew Miller kindly located the manuscript, and sent it, along with an explanation of the sad circumstances (for which see the Notes to this paper), to the editor for inclusion in the present volume.

---

S.T.D.<sup>7</sup> Thanks to modern technology, it has been possible for me to have made a photocopy, as well as a 35mm slide, of the original document in Hyde's work.

A comparison of Csoma's transcription of the text with the actual engraved inscription revealed that he misread the orthography of the original document eight times. Six of his misreadings are of minor importance since the correct reading would only enhance the quality of the translation without changing it substantively. The remaining two misreadings are of crucial importance since they relate to the identity of the person to whom the passport was issued.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, such emendations to Csoma's transcription will necessitate revision of his translation of the passages in question. However, rather than discuss these separately and out of context now, they will be dealt with in an appropriate place in the course of this paper.

On the other hand, since the time of Kőrösi Csoma Sándor, much has been published about Tibetan official documents in general, and official seals and inscriptions in particular.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, there are places in which Csoma's transcription of the original text is correct; but, his translation of it needs to be updated in the light of such documentary studies. Due to space restrictions on the text of this paper, a complete translation of the original passport inscription, with all revisions noted, is relegated to a footnote. Only those important and interesting revisions of the translation, whether based on updated data or on emendations of Csoma's transcription, will be noted here.

The opening phrase of the inscription, *chos 'khor dpal gyi lha sa nas!*, is repeated almost verbatim in the closing line of the main text; that is to say: *chos 'khor chen po dpal gyi lha sa nas bris!*. Csoma's translation of these two phrases is curious. He wrote: "From the noble (city) Lhasa, the circumambulating race of religion.", and "Thus has been written from the noble Lhasa, the great religious race . . ."<sup>10</sup> His "circumambulating race of religion" and "the great religious race" are Csoma's equivalents for *chos 'khor* and *chos 'khor chen po*; but, these are simply direct Tibetan translations of the Sanskrit *dharmacakra* and *mahādharmacakra*. The opening phrase of this passport, dated in 1688, is identical to the opening phrase of another passport, dated in August, 1732. In that case, the phrase was translated by Professor Luciano Petech by: "Dalla nobile Lhasa Ruota della Legge . . ."<sup>11</sup> which he footnoted with the explanation that: "Ruota della legge (*dharmacakra*) ha qui il significato di perimetro sacro."<sup>12</sup> It would appear the "Noble Lhasa, the Wheel of the Law" had become a common epithet in official documents about the turn of the 18th century.<sup>13</sup>

The first emendation to Csoma's reading of the inscription would change his transcription of "drag, zhan Lhahi mi-rje" to read: *drag zhan lha sde mi sde*. His translation of "noble, ignoble lords (or masters) of men; . . ."

would then be revised to read: “. . . noble, ignoble [i.e., strong, weak]<sup>14</sup>, monastic communities, lay communities;”

Csoma’s somewhat verbose rendering of the term *hBrog* as “. . . dwellers in tents in the desert;” can be simplified to “Nomads.”<sup>15</sup> His translation “. . . collectively, charged to perform some business of small or great importance:” should be revised to read: [elders], “. . . subjects, all those charged with the responsibility of civil and military affairs . . .”<sup>16</sup>

The second emendation of Csoma’s transcription is one of the most significant points in this paper. Csoma misread *i wang na can* of the original document and transcribed it as “It’hang-na-chan.” Such a misreading brings under question his translation of that entire passage which reads: *lha sa phun tshogs lcang lo can gyi ’gron po mgo dkar i wang na can mi bzhi*. Csoma’s translation of this passage reads: “These four foreign (or travelling) persons residing at Lhasa, *lchang-lo-chan*, Mohammedans of It’hang-na . . .”<sup>17</sup>

Putting aside his “Mohammedans of It’hang-na” for the moment, the rest of Csoma’s translation is not only uninformative, it violates a cardinal rule of Tibetan grammar. The lengthy discussion to justify this statement must be relegated to a footnote; suffice it to say here that the *Lcang-lo-can* family was very powerful and politically involved in Tibetan history at the time this passport was issued.<sup>18</sup> A more correct translation of this passage would read: “These four, guests of Phun-tshogs *Lcang-lo-can* (in) Lhasa . . .”<sup>19</sup>

Let us return now to Csoma’s “Mohammedans of It’hang-na.” As noted earlier in this paper, Csoma quoted verbatim all that Thomas Hyde said about the passport in question; however, Csoma then chose to ignore what Hyde actually said about the document itself. Perhaps Csoma rejected Hyde’s information as being incorrect on the grounds that Hyde had proved his ignorance of the Tibetan language by saying that it was read from right to left.<sup>20</sup> Csoma bluntly refuted that statement in a footnote, saying: “This is of course a mistake . . .”<sup>21</sup> However, it appears that what Thomas Hyde said about the document was based upon reliable, albeit secondary, sources of information.

For example, although Csoma refers to the document only as a “passport”, Hyde precisely notes that it was a passport or a letter of safe-conduct.<sup>22</sup> The document in question was indeed a ‘letter of safe-conduct.’ As has been shown elsewhere, a Tibetan *lam-yig* was not in any sense of the geo-political use of the word a ‘passport.’<sup>23</sup>

Thomas Hyde, S.T.D., explained that he obtained the original document from a friend, John Evans, S.T.D., who had returned in recent years from India.<sup>24</sup> Presumably John Evans was as ignorant of the language of the passport, otherwise he could have told Thomas Hyde that one read it from left to right. It seems logical, therefore, that whatever Hyde wrote about the document in question, he based it upon information he obtained from his friend, John Ev-

ans, who in turn got not only his information, but the document in question itself, directly or indirectly from the very person to whom it was issued.

If this assumption is valid, then the identity of the person to whom the passport was issued can now be discussed. Hyde states that the passport, or letter of safe-conduct, was given in recent years to one “. . . *Chogja Ouanni* (i.e., *Domino Joanni*), mercatori Armeno . . .”<sup>25</sup> Hyde parenthetically equated *Chogja Ouanni* with *Domino Joanni*, that is to say “Master John.” This name corresponds to the *I-wang-na* of the Tibetan document. The vowel *i* in the Latin form of the name is a sign of the dative case: dative because the document had been given *to* the merchant named John.<sup>26</sup>

According to Hyde, the name *Ouanni* (= *Joanni*) was preceded by another term of reference, which he latinized as *Chogja* and defined in Latin as *Domino*. In the original Tibetan document there is also a term of reference preceding the name *I-wang-na* (= *John*); but that term of reference is *mgo-dkar*, a proper Tibetan compound.

In his transcription (not in his translation), Csoma footnoted this term as follows: “The name *mGo-dkar* (properly white-headed, but rendered by me, above, by Mohammedans) formerly was applied in Tibet both to the Mohammedans of India and to the Europeans. But of late the Tibetans have commenced calling the Europeans by the name of Philing-pa . . .”<sup>27</sup> The problem of the ethnic and cultural reference of the term *mgo-dkar* has been mentioned in various studies.<sup>28</sup> Suffice it to say here that Csoma’s assumption that the term referred to “Mohammedans” in this Tibetan passport is not valid.

There is ample evidence in Tibetan official documents, dated a half-century after the passport in question here, that the term *mgo-dkar* (‘white-headed’) was not used for “Mohammedans”, but for Europeans of a different religious persuasion. As just one example, in a letter dated 1741 and attributed to the great Pho-lha-nas,<sup>29</sup> it states (in part): *btsun pa’i rigs kyi ga bu ji ni zhes pa’am mgo dkar bla ma ’di rnams . . .*<sup>30</sup> Professor Luciano Petech translated this as: “. . . detti Cappuccini dell’ordine monastico oppure Lama teste-bianche . . .”<sup>31</sup> Such documentary evidence that *mgo-dkar* was used to identify European fathers of the Catholic faith justifies our setting aside Csoma’s wrong assumption that the term referred to “Mohammedans” in the passport.

Let us now turn to the term of reference given by Thomas Hyde preceding the name *Ouanni*; that is to say, the term *Chogja*. Thanks to my colleague Professor Michael Loraine, the Persian scholar, I learned that the title, latinized by Hyde as *Chogja*, but pronounced *Hoja*, is an old loan-word into Armenian from the Persian *Khwāja*, a secular title signifying someone of prominence, that is to say a “lord” or “master.”<sup>32</sup> Again, Thomas Hyde must have relied on verbal information from his friend, John Evans, that the

Armenian merchant was called *Chogja* (=Hoja), since the passport itself refers to the merchant as *Mgo-dkar* ("white-headed"), or a European Christian.<sup>33</sup> The use of the title *Chogja* (=Hoja) for an Armenian merchant of the Christian faith must not be confused in this case with the use of the same title, *Khōjā*, from the Persian, to identify a caste of Indians converted in the 14th century to Islām from Hinduism, most of whom in time became Muslim followers of the Aga Khan.<sup>34</sup>

Although he was incorrect, Csoma's assumption that the passport in question was issued to "Mohammedans of It'hang-na" helps explain his interpolation of the text when he misread the original as being "stahur-gyi." As noted earlier, this is the second of the two misreadings by Csoma of basic importance to this paper. Since his misreading meant nothing to him, Csoma suggested it be emended to (?Lhahur-gyi), which he then translated as the name Lahore in the genitive case. Since Csoma was convinced that the merchants involved were Muslims, it would be logical that they had a connection with Lahore, then the capital of the Punjab, the Muslim region of India in the time of Kōrōsi Csoma.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Csoma's translation: ". . . having nothing for their defence except some Lahori-weapons . . ." cannot be accepted as correct.

The original text reads (in part): *rta'ur gyi* [= *rta'ul gyis*]<sup>36</sup> *mtshon gang spyi'i sar rog rtan du gang'gro las*. (Two additional emendations to Csoma's transcription are included in this passage: *sar* for his *par*; *rtan* for his *nyan*.) A more correct translation of this passage would read: ". . . wherever they go, always assist them there with whatever [they need], with compulsory horse [transport] as the [principal] example."<sup>37</sup>

The final emendations to Csoma's transcription noted in Appendix C are of minor importance and will be dealt with only in a footnote here.<sup>38</sup>

Before putting Csoma's translation of the Tibetan passport behind us, his translation of the term *mdun-sa* as "the senate-house" raises a question. In translating *mdun-sa*, literally "place in front," as "the senate-house", Csoma seems to be unaware of the political circumstances prevailing in Lhasa in the year 1688. The passport in question was issued during the period between 1682 when the 5th Dalai Lama died, and 1697 when the 6th Dalai Lama was publicly enthroned in the Potala palace. During this period, Sangsrgyas rgya-mtsho was the Regent (*sde-srid*) and in charge of governmental affairs.<sup>39</sup> There was no "senate-house." Here, *mdun-sa*, the "place in front," might be translated as the "secretariat."

In closing this preliminary paper there is just time to mention that mysterious aspect of Csoma's translation of the so-called "passport," that is to say, the black square-figures at the end of both the transcription and the translation which bear the simple legends: "A square seal." It was my curiosity about the nature of that seal which originally prompted me to undertake the writing

of this paper. When I began, I had no idea that I would find far more to research and write about than just the square seal at the end of Csoma's contribution. Csoma himself made no comment on the seal nor did he indicate whether or not it even contained an inscription.

As can be seen from the photo reproduction of the passport itself, the seal was not imprinted on the document in the proper, vertical position. The columns have been impressed horizontally on the passport so that the top of the seal actually faces to the right. I have no explanation for this apparent mistake in applying the seal.

Moreover, as can be seen from the photographic enlargement of the seal (see Appendix B), the inscription appears, at least at first glance, to be written in the traditional 'Phags-pa Script.<sup>40</sup> However, upon closer examination, one sees that the vertical blank spaces that separate the columns of a 'Phags-pa inscription are broken by various lines that cross over the blank space and hook onto letters in the next column. Moreover, except for a few, none of the letters in this seal inscription actually resembles traditional 'Phags-pa letters, whether in the documentary or monumental form.<sup>41</sup>

Unable to decipher the seal inscription whatsoever, I consulted my old friend, Professor Emeritus Nicholas N. Poppe, who, after carefully examining the photo enlargement of the seal, informed me that the script was *not* 'Phags-pa Script, in spite of its general appearance to be so; and that the inscription was neither in Mongolian nor Manchu.<sup>42</sup>

Needless to say, much time has been spent trying to make sense out of this seal. Time permits me only to note briefly here what is discussed at some length in footnotes; that is to say, that this seal (along with its four columns of mysterious inscription) is not unique among Tibetan seals. In 1915, E.H. Walsh published a photo reproduction of a seal, with an inscription in five columns, which he described as being the "Larger seal of the Regent of Lhasa on a permit granted to the Capuchin Monks at Lhasa in the year A.D. 1741."<sup>43</sup> Unable to decipher the inscription of that seal, Walsh noted that "It appears to be in old Mongolian seal character, or an imitation of it."<sup>44</sup>

That same seal is reproduced in *Il Nuovo Ramusio* and Professor Luciano Petech said that he had been unable to decipher the inscription. He noted that Professor Paul Demiéville had excluded it as being in Chinese, and that Dr. Walter Fuchs had ruled out the possibility that it was in either Mongolian or Manchu.<sup>45</sup> Professor Petech concluded that footnote with the scholarly remark: "La questione rimane aperta."<sup>46</sup> I believe that the same remark might well serve as an open conclusion to this preliminary study of Kőrösi Csoma Sándor's translation of a Tibetan passport, dated A.D. 1688.

## NOTES

[Shortly after Turrell V. Wylie accepted his invitation to participate in the Bloomington Conference honoring the birth of Csoma, he learned, from a routine X-ray examination, that he suffered from an inoperable malignancy, for which, soon after the New Year's 1984, he began a grueling series of chemotherapy and neutron radiation treatments. As a consequence, virtually all the work that he was able to do on this paper was conducted despite enormous physical difficulties; and perhaps only those of us who were privileged to see Terry frequently during his last months knew how great an effort this work cost him, even while we also realized how much it meant to him to be able to continue with his Tibetan studies, particularly at such a time. It also required great physical courage for Terry to undertake the trip to Bloomington; but few of those present when he read his paper on the afternoon of April 18, 1984 probably even realized how much effort all this cost him; nor would he have wished them to.

At the Bloomington meetings Terry pointed out that he had not yet been able to write out the forty-six footnotes for which numbers appear in his text; these footnotes, he told us on several occasions, "would be much longer than the paper itself." He hoped to be able to complete these footnotes after he returned to Seattle. But tragically enough, this was not to be allowed him.

On June 18, 1984 Terry wrote Christopher Beckwith, explaining that his deteriorating physical condition had made it impossible for him even to look at the paper, and asking that he be given some extra time, if possible, in which to finish his contribution to the Conference volume. Characteristically, he added, in that last letter, "Never before have I had to ask for special consideration on such a deadline, but then I have never had cancer treatments before either." Terry undertook his final course of therapy on June 26, but between then and his death on August 25, 1984 he was never again strong enough to be able to return to his scholarly work.

The text of Terry's paper printed here is that of the typewritten draft that he prepared to read at Bloomington. Upon returning to Seattle he had placed it in a folder labelled "Passport", where it was found after his death. Into this same folder Terry had also meticulously placed copies of the correspondence concerning the Bloomington conference and his travel arrangements, together with several later letters dealing with the study; but there was no trace of the footnotes in the folder, nor has his wife Sharrie been able to locate them among Terry's other papers.


What a few of these notes might have consisted of may perhaps be conjectured. Note 1 probably would have given the further citation details of the *JASB* reference, Vol. II, 1833, pp. 201-202. Note 2 (or Note 7?) most likely would have cited the relevant section on the 1700 *Historia religionis veterum Persarum* of Thomas Hyde (1636-1703) from Michael Aris, "A Note on the Resources for Tibetan Studies at Oxford," *Bodleian Library Record* Vol. X, No. 6, May 1982, pp. 369-370; Terry had received a reprint of this article from Aris after returning to Seattle, and he had placed it in the same folder as his manuscript. In Note 32 I am certain that he had intended to cite, *inter alia*, Paul Pelliot, "Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain de l'Histoire des Ming," *TP*, Vol. XXXVIII, Livr. 2-5, 1948, 81-292, especially Pelliot's etymological epitome of the several forms going back to Pers. *ḥwājah* ("火者 *houo-tchō* est en chinois la transcription régulière du titre musulman de *ḥōja* < persan *خواجه ḥwājah*, „maître" (> malais *kōjah*); c'est aussi le „Coja" de Marco Polo, „coya" de Marignolli, *ghoya* en persan et *coia* en turc dans le *Codex Cumanicus* (éd. Kuun, 105; Grønbech, *Koman. Wörterbuch*, 198); cf. aussi Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*<sup>2</sup>, 234"); he and I had discussed this reference before we went to Bloomington, and it interested him particularly because the Tibetan version of the form in the passport text had escaped even Pelliot's far-reaching etymological net.

It is particularly unfortunate that Terry was never able to return to writing his footnotes, since his own complete retranslation of the passport was, as his text puts it, one of several things to be "relegated to a footnote." He had decided to do this in order to ensure that his oral presentation would not exceed the precise amount of time allowed him at the Bloomington meeting. Only

those of us who knew Terry well realized how carefully he always prepared the public reading of a paper, and especially how concerned he was never to run even a minute over the time allotted him on a program. Even in Bloomington, and as ill as he was, he had spent several hours the night before he gave his paper rehearsing and timing his presentation.

In the same folder, there were copies of two letters concerning the passport which Terry had received in May and June from Braham Norwick, who had also attended the Bloomington meetings. Since there seems to be little question but that some of the material in these letters would also eventually have found its way into the footnotes, I will cite two relevant passages here:

(1) In a letter of May 21, 1984 Norwick reported as follows on the views of Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, with whom he had, in the meantime, discussed Terry's paper: "Tsepon said first 1) there is no meaning for the seal stamped sidewise, except that it was an error made by the attendant who stamped it. 2) the seal is Gyurme Namgyal's, who was the chief administrator of Tibet during the seventh Dalai Lama. This of course cannot be the case, since the document was published prior to that period. What it means to me is that the official seal of that post did not change much if at all with the change of the person in charge."

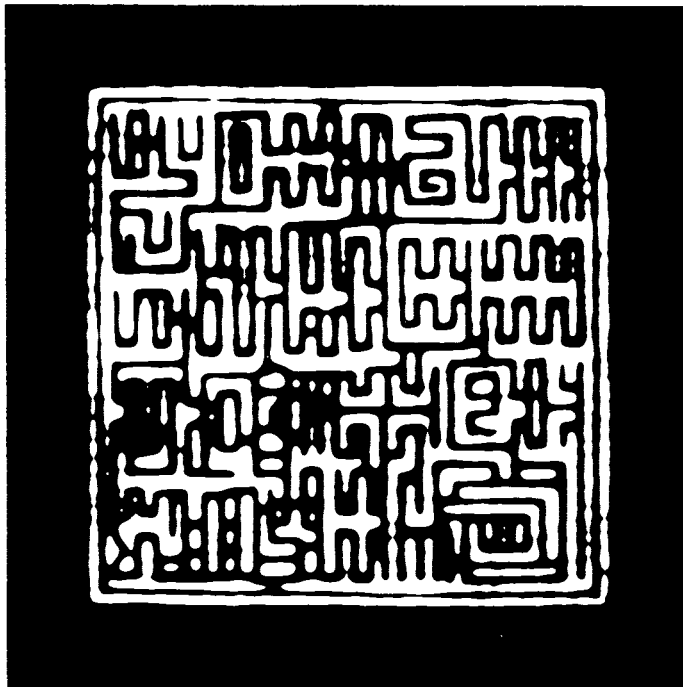
(2) In a letter of June 5, 1984 Norwick again wrote, as follows: "Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa has just written to me to clarify the identification of the permit, so I hasten to quote the pertinent material for you. The travellers were residing at Changlochan. Earth Dragon year coincides with the western year of 1688 as the latest year it could be, in order to be published in 1700. The seal, on closer examination, is that of Sdesrid Sangsrgyas-Rgyamtsho. He has a record of that seal in his home in Kalimpong. The lettering on the seal is not Mongolian. It contains the letter  which is definite proof that the seal belonged to Sdesrid Sangsrgyas Rgyamtsho."

Under these circumstances, it has seemed best to publish Terry's last paper just as he was forced to leave it, tragically *inachevé*. Its incomplete form cannot but continue to serve as a vivid reminder of how much we all lost when he was so suddenly taken away; but it will also always remind us of the strength and determination, combined with his customary and constant concern for the feelings of others, with which he persevered in his Tibetan studies until the very end.  
RAM]

---







## APPENDIX C

The eight misreadings of the Tibetan cursive inscription by Csoma de Kőrös and their emendations are charted below. Note that the first column gives the number of the line in the original document in which the orthography in question is to be found. The second column gives the transcription by Csoma, using italics as he did to mark prefixed consonants. The third column gives the emended reading as per the orthography of the original document. [Note that these transcriptions are according to Turrell V. Wylie, "A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. 22 (1959): 261-7.] The readings given in the third column were independently corroborated by my Tibetan colleague, Geshe Nawang Nornang (University of Washington), who supplied the suggested emendations given in square brackets [ ] in the last column.

line 2	Lhahi mi-rje	lha sde mi sde	
line 4	It'hang-na-chan	i wang na can	
line 5	stahur-gyi (? Lhahur-gyi)	rta'ur gyi	[ = rta 'ul gyis]
line 5	par rog nyan-du	sar rog rtan du	[rtan = gtan]
line 5	hgoI-du	'gal du	
line 6	nyan ma byed	rtan ma byed	[rtan = gtan]

The emended translation of these passages will be given in the appropriate places in the course of this paper.

## APPENDIX D

## Csoma de Kőrös's Translation of the Passport

“From the noble (city) Lhasa, **the circumambulating race of religion.** —To those that are on the road as far as *Arya Dêsa* or India, to clerical, laical, noble, ignoble lords (or masters) of men; to residents of forts, stewards, managers of affairs, to Mongols, Tibetans, Turks, and **to dwellers in tents in the desert;** to ex-chis (or el-chis, envoys, or public messengers, vakîls or ambassadors, &c.) going to and fro; to keepers and precluders of bye-ways (or short-cuts); to the old (or head) men, **collectively, charged to perform some business of small or great importance;** to all these is ordered (or is made known). These four **foreign (or travelling) persons residing at Lhasa, /chang-lo-chan, Mohammedans of It'hang-na,** after having exchanged their merchandize, going back to their country, having with them sixteen loads on beasts; having nothing for their defence except some Lhahori-weapons, — do nothing, rob, plunder, et cetera, them; but let them go to and fro in peace.

Thus has been written from the noble Lhasa, **the great religious race,** from **the senate-house** of both ecclesiastical and civil affairs, in *Sa-hbrug\** (in the year of T. ch. 1688). On the day of the month. (These dates are wanting.)

*Note.*—There is no Tibetan joined with them. They have about a man's load of victuals wrapped up in a bundle; with that there has been made an increase (of packages), but let them go in peace.”

A square seal.

[Note: In this reprinting of Csoma's translation, bold-face type indicates Csoma read the Tibetan correctly, but the translation needs updating or revising; wide-spaced type indicates those places where Csoma misread the original Tibetan cursive inscription and the translation must be changed.—TVW]

---