

A TIBETAN ANTIQUARIAN IN THE XVIIIITH CENTURY

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It is a common place that Tibetan historians after the re-establishment of Buddhism in Central Tibet in the Xth century gave little space to events before that time which did not have an obvious religious significance. Nevertheless, several of them can be seen to have had some acquaintance with the early inscriptions, which existed in front of their eyes, and with records in monastery archives. For example, 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba, the author of the careful and invaluable "Blue Annals", quotes the 5th and 6th lines of the inscription on the east face of the Lhasa Treaty pillar of 821/822 (vol.nya. f 108 a.) He also states (vol. ga f.40 b) that he has seen a letter on blue silk recording the grant of property to Myang Ting-nge-'dzin bzang-po, but he makes no mention of two inscriptions on stone pillars at Zhwa'i Lha-khang which still survive as witness of that fact.

The Lhasa Treaty Inscription was also known to the author of the rGyal-rabs gsal-ba'i me-long who picks out words and phrases as though from a hazy and inaccurate recollection of its contents (f. 92 a) and recommends his readers to study the inscription if they want fuller information.

The comparatively recent discovery in the Chos-byung of dPa'-bo gtsug-lag 'phreng-ba (1565) of an exception to this sketchy approach to ancient documents was, therefore, a welcome event. A manuscript copy of this work was lent to me at Lhasa in 1947; and it appears that Professor Tucci saw a printed copy on his visit to Tibet about the same time. After widespread enquiry I succeeded in locating the blocks at the Lha-lung monastery in Lho-brag and it was possible to arrange for a number of copies to be printed, some of which were sent to scholars in Europe. At that time the book was known to few Tibetans at Lhasa, probably because it had been mentioned unfavourably by the Vth Dalai Lama who may have been inspired in part by the fact that the Karmapa school, to which dPa'-bo gtsug-lag belonged, had been his principal opponents when, with the support of Gushri Khan, he had invaded Tibet and defeated the gTsang king in 1642. In fact, where he criticizes dPa'-bo gtsug-lag, it is the Dalai Lama who appears to be mistaken; but his disapproval was enough to remove the work from the libraries of the Lhasa intellegentsia.

In that history is found, for the first time, the careful quotation of a complete VIIIth century inscription—that at bSam-yas. The author mentions the inscribed pillars at Zhwa'i Lha-khang (f108). There is also a passing reference to the Lhasa Treaty pillar and short quotations from its east face (Ja f. 132). In addition to this evidence of familiarity

with ancient inscriptions there is the unique contribution of what appears to be verbatim quotation from the archives of some monastery, probably bSam-yas, of two Edicts of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan and one of Khri-LDe-srong-brtsan. These remarkable documents are authenticated by the survival on a stone pillar near Lhasa of an inscription recording an edict which is clearly the counterpart of the Edict of Khri lDe-srong-brtsan. The inscription has been published by me in JRASB 1949 and has been examined more fully by Professor Tucci in his edition of it in *Tombs of the Tibetan Kings*, Rome, 1950.

Much of the other material in this history has the appearance of being drawn from ancient sources but it cannot be so clearly linked to its originals as can be the passage mentioned above.

From the foregoing examples it can be seen that Tibetan scholars had acquaintance, in differing degrees, with ancient documents although the fact that detailed reference rarely found their way into the surviving histories suggests that such documents were not regarded as of prime importance. It was, therefore, an unexpected thrill to be presented not long ago through the kindness of Athing Densapa of Barmiak, with a photograph of a collection of copies of early inscriptions which had recently come into his possession. These were stated to be the personal papers of the Ka:thog Lama, Rig-'dzin tshe-bdang nor-bu who lived in the XVIIIth century and they show that at the time of the Age of Reason in Europe and the scholarly researches of Sir William Jones in India, there was a Lama in Tibet who had taken pains to collect and to annotate the text of many important inscriptions of the VIIIth and IXth centuries.

One of these inscriptions was hitherto unknown because the lettering on the pillar which contained it had become illegible through time. It dates from the reign of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan and has now been edited by me in JRAS 1964. The other inscriptions are: that at the tomb of Khri lDe-srong-brtsan at 'Phyong-rgyas, which has been published by Professor Tucci in *Tombs of the Tibetan Kings*; the inscription from rKong-po published by me in JRAS 1954; the so-called sKar-cung inscription published by me in JRASB 1949 and by Professor Tucci in *Tombs of the Tibetan kings*; and two of the four inscriptions on the Lhasa Treaty Pillar which are known from the editions of Professor Li Fang-kuei, Bisashi Sato and myself.

Missing are what is probably the oldest of such documents—that from the *Zhol rdo-rings* at Lhasa (c.764) which does not appear to be mentioned by any historian although the conquest of the Chinese capital which is described there is known to them. Perhaps the tradition that this pillar was erected by a lay minister who was hostile to Buddhism led to it being ignored. Other inscriptions missing from the collection

are those at Zhwa'i Lha-khang and at mTshur-phu, both of which relates to Buddhist foundations.

What is in the collection is, nevertheless, of great importance especially when it is seen that some of the material which the Lama acquired in the XVIIIth century may have been either originals or, more likely copies made as much as 250 years before his lifetime. This appears from a note at the end of his copy of the Lhasa Treaty Inscriptions to the effect that the copy was made in a water-tiger year 599 years after the water-hare year in which the pillar was set up. That is known to have been 823. It may be necessary to allow for a confusion in Tibetan chronology which has affected much of their dating from that period by the apparent omission of a cycle of sixty years; but, even so, the date of the copies is put firmly in the XVth century. Further, a note, perhaps made by the Lama himself, on the copy of the rKong-po inscription indicates that when the text was checked on the spot with the original, about six and a half lines of the inscription were buried under sand. His copy was, therefore, taken some time before it came into his possession.

I am gradually making new editions of the inscriptions in the light of the Lama's texts. Although comparison with photographs etc., showing the state of the inscriptions as they were some 20 years ago, discloses many inaccuracies in the Lama's copies, these are largely orthographic and his contribution provides much new information of real value. It is not my intention to discuss that aspect here; but I should like to attempt a short sketch of Lama's life in the hope that others with better source at their disposal may be inclined to enlarge upon it. In a recent article "Nouveaux Documents Tibétains sur le Mi Nyag Si Hia" in *Mélanges de Sinologie offerts à Monsieur Paul Demieville*, published by the Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1966, Professor R.A. Stein mentions two biographies of Rig'dzin tshe-dbang nor-bu which he saw at Gangtok. I have not had access to those works and have drawn only on the *Rin-chen gter-mdzod* and on verbal and written information from the present Ka:thog dBon sPrul-sku and the Sa-skyapa Lama, sDe-gzhung Rim'oché,.

Tshe-dbang nor-bu was born in 1698 in the Sa-ngan region of East Tibet and was soon recognized as the reincarnation of one Grub-dbang Padma nor-bu who carried on the spiritual line of gNubs Nam-mkha'i snying-po a teacher at the time of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan. The boy was ordained by the rGyalsras Rimpoche of Ka:thog the famous rNying-ma-pa monastery some 40 miles S.E. of sDe-dge, founded in 1099 by Lama Dam-pa De-bshegs sand which takes its name from a hill, on the slopes of which the monastery lies, bearing near its summit marks resembling the letter Ka. Tshe-dbang nor-bu studied with the leading rNying-ma-pa teachers and also with those of the Karmapa with whom Ka:thog had

a close connection. One of his contemporaries and friends was Karmapa Si-tu Chos-kyi byung-gnas, a famous XVIIIth century scholar; and, later, Tshe-dbang nor-bu became the tutor of the XIIIth Karmapa Zhwa-nag incarnation, bDud-'dul rdo-rje.

From Kham he went to Central Tibet where he received instruction in the Jo-nang-pa doctrines. Among the skills he developed was that of *gtar-ston*, discoverer of religious texts and objects believed to have been concealed in the remote past. He travelled widely and his activities included the founding or repairing of monasteries in Western Tibet and in Sikkim, and the repair of *mchod-rten* (stupas) in Nepal. He was greatly revered by Pho-lha-nams stobs-rgyas, the ruler of Tibet; and in 1751/52 when trouble arose between the princes of upper and lower Ladakh and there was danger of interference by the Dzungar masters of Kashgaria, Pho-lha and the VIIth Dalai Lama commissioned him to restore peace. That incident was referred to recently by the Chinese Government in their frontier dispute with India as evidence that Ladakh was at that time under the authority of Lhasa. In spite of complimentary remarks in Tibetan sources, it seems that his efforts did not bear lasting fruit. From Ladakh he went to Nepal and not long after, in about 1755 he died at sKyid-grong where there is a *mchod-rten* containing his relics.

The Lama is brought vividly to life by a passage in the biography of the 'Brug-pa Lama Yon-tan mtha'yas which shows his active personal interest in verifying his antiquarian material. Yon-tan mtha'yas describes how when he was at Lhasa about 1744 he met Ka:thog Rig-'dzin chen-po Tshe-dbang nor-bu sitting by the *rdo-ring* outside the gTug-lag-khang and reading the inscription on it. A copy of that inscription is, as mentioned above, included in the collection now in Athing Barmiak's possession and it may well be that the notes and corrections on it were being made at that very time by the Lama himself.