

Tibetan Inscriptions on Ancient silver and gold Vessels and Artefacts

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Prior to 1970, only two ancient silver artefacts discovered in Lhasa were known to scholars. These objects, each of exceptional quality and refined workmanship, were the sole tangible artefacts reflecting literary and historical records from the period of the Spu rgyal dynasty (7th- mid-9th century). Records from this time repeatedly describe silver and gold objects from Tibet, many shaped like animals or birds.¹ The first of these earlier known artefacts, a Greco-Bactrian silver bowl decorated with fishes, trees and human figures, had been treasured as a family heirloom since generations by Lhasa aristocrats, and presented to Professor David Snellgrove after 1950 (Snellgrove & Richardson 1968: 50-51, 256; Denwood 1973: 121-127). The second, observed in-situ in Lhasa by Hugh Richardson, was described as "a round-bellied silver wine jar with a long neck surmounted by a stylized horse's head", had been re-dedicated in 1946 according to its inscription, and was "...reputed to go back to the times of the *chos rgyal*" (Richardson 1998[1963]: 228, 1977[1998]: 254).² Indeed, deploring the lack of such Tibetan artefacts, the Tang historian Edward Schafer wrote in 1963:

Though Iran may have been the ultimate source of the art of beating golden vessels and the ultimate inspiration of many of the designs worked on them by the artisans of the Tang, it appears that Tibet must also be given an important place among the nations whose craftsmen contributed to the culture of Tang. To judge by records of tribute and gifts from Tibet to Tang, which over and over again list large objects of gold, remarkable for their beauty and rarity and

¹ A silver saddle, gold hair ornaments, a stone lion sculpture and some garments were found in caves near the Dulan tombs ca. 1930; these artefacts were first described, but not photographed, nor collected, by Filchner (1938: 102-103). In 1902-1906, Grünwedel made a line drawing of a mural painting in the Idikut Palace where ancient ewers and flasks, all probably manufactured in silver, were represented with Uighur aristocrats (cf. Grünwedel 1912: 334, fig. 665 and see below, figure 3)

² Richardson did not mention that the ewer was partially gilded (cf. Heller 2002, 2003).

excellent workmanship, the Tibetan goldsmiths were the wonder of the medieval world. Let us...hope that future archaeologists will discover actual examples of Tibetan or Tibetan-inspired Tang goldwork in the soil of China. (Schafer 1963: 253-254)

In the past twenty years, systematic archaeological investigations of Tibetan tombs and chance finds have yielded a range of jewellery, vessels and artefacts in gold and silver, both cast and *repoussé*, as well as silk textiles with similar design motifs. The workmanship of these artefacts spans across Central Asia from Sogdiana to Tibet to China, a reflection of the complex dynamics of extensive commercial and cultural exchange during the expansion of the Tibetan empire along the vast network of the Silk Routes. The easily portable nature of such artefacts renders their provenance virtually impossible to determine in the majority of cases. While their manufacture may have occurred in one region, they were easily transported and used in other regions, and offered as tribute in yet other regions still.³

Even so, during the Spu rgyal dynasty, Tibetan usage of such articles is documented in mural paintings at Dunhuang which portray the *btsan po* Tibetan Emperor raising a silver cup with small handle and lotus base towards one of his attendants, (see figure 1, detail of the *btsan po* and his silver cup, Dunhuang cave 159, ca. 800-825 C.E.). Other excavated painted coffin panels depict scenes of banquets where Tibetan women and men adorned with turquoise and gold jewelry, hold silver cups, ewers and platters (Tong & Wertmann 2010; Heller, in press). Lamellar armour is worn by warriors and horses painted on these coffins which also portray mounted archers aiming at their prey, their quivers and bow-cases visible on the flank of their horses as they engage in the ritual hunt of yak and deer.⁴ Archaeological excavations of tombs of the Spu rgyal dynasty have revealed fragmentary silver sword handles as well

³ Due to repeated plunder of the tombs over time, it is problematic to establish accurate stratification of the tombs during the recent excavations; one must also bear in mind the long history of the commercial networks along the Silk Routes, and their modern version, i.e. the antiquities trade which account for the broad dispersal of artefacts.

⁴ The leather backing of a segment of silver lamellar armour in the collection of Robert Tsao, Taipei, has been subjected to radiocarbon analysis, yielding a chronology of mid-seventh to mid-eighth century.. I thank Robert Tsao for communicating to me this radiocarbon calibration report and authorizing publication of this analysis by Rafter Radiocarbon Laboratory, National Isotope Centre, Institute of Geological and Nuclear Science, New Zealand 23.11.2006: Conventional radiocarbon age 1319 +/- 25 years; calibrated age in terms of confidence intervals:

2 sigma interval is 655 AD to 718 AD (1295 BP to 1232 BP, 74% of area)

plus 743 AD to 769 AD (1207 BP to 1181 BP, 19% of area)

1 sigma interval is 663 AD to 687 AC (1287 BP to 1263 BP, 47.3% of area).

as other Tibetan accoutrements for war or hunting such as armour and horse trappings made of iron, lacquered leather, silver and gold.⁵



Figure 1. Dunhuang cave 159, btsan po holding silver cup

We will study here a few examples of such artefacts in silver and gold - one gold cup, two silver cups, two platters, a flask, a belt buckle, a personal seal and a segment of

⁵ Xu Xinguo, former Director of Qinghai Archaeological Institute has published numerous articles describing the architecture of the mid-8th century tombs at Dulan, their excavations and artefacts, with meticulous drawings. See translations of his articles by Bruce Doar (1996) and Xu (2006). For photographs of the silver sword handle (width 4.6 cm x 2.2 thick) and parcel gilt-silver knife handle excavated near the principal tomb at Dulan, see *Tibetan Tombs at Dulan*, Beijing University and Qinghai Archeological Institute, 2004: 99 DRN M1:14 (plate 9) and 99 DRN M3: 6 (plate 23). Twenty-one segments (2.5 x 2. 1 x 0.4 thick) of small hammered gold sheet rectangular plaques, probably for lamellar armour, were also excavated, of which similar artefacts are illustrated in *ibid* 2004: 99 DRNM3:1, 99 DRN M3:2 (plate 23).

a bow case - all of which bear inscriptions in Tibetan language.⁶ The interpretation of these inscriptions remains problematic due to the paucity of examples. While four have been previously published, it is useful to re-assess their content in the light of subsequent research.⁷ Comparisons with contemporaneous inscribed stone stele in central and western Tibet and Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang and Mazar Tagh indicate that the inscriptions on these silver and gold artefacts conform to the Old Tibetan conventions of punctuation and spelling as well as morphology of certain letters (cf. Dalton et al. 2007). It appears that the inscriptions consist primarily of names of people, some of whom may belong to clans named in the stone stele and manuscripts. The individuals' names are sometimes complemented by phrases indicative of the weight of the artefact as well as phrases which may relate to their functional usage in a funerary or ritual context.⁸ In addition to the Tibetan names and words, sometimes the inscriptions comprise patterns of non-decorative lines and circles found on the base of the artefacts. Comparison with similar inscriptions on contemporaneous Sogdian silver bowls indicates that these marks may refer to the weight of the object.⁹

The historical context.

Before examining these artefacts and their Tibetan inscriptions, a brief review of their historical context is warranted to understand how such objects were described in contemporaneous literary sources.

⁶ It is important to note that at present, very few archeological artefacts inscribed in Tibetan are known. In addition to the artefacts with inscriptions studied here, there are a few seal imprints among the Dunhuang and Mazar Tagh Tibetan manuscripts, but the actual seals have not been discovered. The repeated plunder of tombs over the centuries and the fragmentary nature of many artefacts may account for the lack of inscribed artefacts; were systematic, stratigraphic excavations to be undertaken, perhaps more inscribed artefacts would be recovered.

⁷ For the inscription on the silver cup now in Cleveland Museum of Art see Czuma (1993), Carter (1998). For the platter in Miho Museum see Marshak (1996: 80-83); Heller (2002) for the Cleveland silver cup (fig 34); the silver cup of Metropolitan Museum (fig 42) and the vase now in the Pritzker collection (fig 35); for further research on this vase see Heller (2003: 55-64, figs . 16a-16d).

⁸ Such as the inscription written on a textile which indicates its placement in a burial chamber (*spur khang nang dzong*, "treasure of the chamber of the corpse". This silk samit textile is now conserved in the Abegg Foundation, Riggisberg, Switzerland (Heller 1998a).

⁹ Characteristic inscriptions on Sogdian silver bowls include Sogdian personal names, for which no satisfactory etymology, as well as meaningful marks such as incised parallel lines which appear to indicate units of some kind of weight measure. This same system appears on the base of the silver platter now conserved in the Shumei Family collection, Miho Museum (see below). For explanation and illustration of this system of numbering, see, for example, the silver bowl now conserved in the Freer Gallery of Art (accession number F 1997.13) discussed by Marshak (1999: 103-110).

Prior to the recent excavations, our knowledge of Tibetan archaeological artefacts was essentially limited to literary accounts from Tibetan and Chinese historical records. It is helpful to examine these references in chronological order. The earliest source is *The Old Tibetan Annals*, a year-by-year account spanning ca. 650-764, a text composed largely contemporaneously with the events it describes (cf. Dotson 2009: 10, 12-15, 74-75). In this invaluable historical resource, unfortunately, there is no narrative discussion of burial of artefacts; the mentions of gold and silver refer to descriptions of insignia of rank in the Tibetan administration. These ranks are elucidated thanks to Dotson's careful explanation, where turquoise rank highest, followed by gold, then *phra men* which Dotson interprets as "gold inlaid silver, silver-gold alloy", followed by silver, brass and copper (2009: 60-63, 259).¹⁰ In the light of the artefacts examined here, we propose to understand the term *phra men* as "parcel gilt silver" i.e. gilded silver, silver on which gold has been applied to the surface. There are traces of gilding on the two silver platters and cup; and on the silver beaker or vase all the hybrid creatures are gilded. Two distinct processes of gilding have been identified in technical studies of similar artefacts.¹¹ The Sogdian craftsmen practiced the technique of gilding by cladding, the fusion of gold foil to the silver surface using mechanical pressure while the metal was heated without mercury. This technique has been documented on a gilt silver reliquary attributed to Sogdian workmanship, mid-8th century, which was excavated from the sacrificial horse trenches in front of the principal tomb at Dulan, Qinghai (Xu 1996: 45). The technique of fire-gilding (Tibetan: *tsha gser*), in which an amalgam of mercury and gold was applied to a clean silver surface and heated to remove the excess mercury (Meyers 1981: 150), was known in Tibet by the 9th century according to the Tibetan historian Padma dkar po (1527-1592).¹²

¹⁰ Dotson (2009: 45) refers to the translation by Demiéville (1952[1987]: 284 note 2) who translated the third rank insignia according to the Chinese rank with the term "argent doré (vermeil)", although rendering the Tibetan equivalent rank as "joyau" (jewel). Vermeil is technically a thick coat of gold, yellow or white, applied to silver. The gilding on these early artefacts from Tibet is not necessarily as thick as vermeil, nor uniformly coating the entire object.

¹¹ Among the numerous studies by Paul Jett, Emeritus Head of Conservation and Scientific Research, Freer and Sackler Galleries, see his discussion on the evolution of gilding techniques in Jett (1992: 49-60).

¹² There are no ancient Tibetan literary descriptions of goldsmiths, but craftsmen work in gold since antiquity because it is the most malleable and ductile of all metals; a single gram can be beaten into a sheet of 1 square meter, or an ounce into 300 square feet. Gold leaf can be beaten thin enough to become transparent. Gold was applied to silver to enhance the beauty and value, but also as a practical means to hide tarnish. On smelting of gold in antiquity see Réunion des Musées Nationaux, *Le livre de l'Or*, Paris 1998. For the citation of Padma dkar po see Lo Bue (1981: 58, and pp. 52-58 on silver and gold).

The *Old Tibetan Chronicle* is also a contemporaneous historical narrative of the Spu rgyal dynasty. This text stipulates the use of gold spear tips in a unique strategy of assassination: the first emperor is killed in the haze of a battle where two hundred golden spear tips are affixed to the horns of one hundred oxen who stampede, thus raising an enormous cloud of dust in the midst of which the emperor is assassinated.¹³ Thereupon, his corpse is placed inside a copper vessel, not vessels in silver or gold, and then immersed in a riverbed.¹⁴ In the *Annals of the 'A zha*, the Tuyuhun kingdom in the vicinity of Lake Kokonor subjugated by the Tibetans in mid-7th century, according to their yearly records for the early 8th century, "upon the celebration of a great feast, the daughter of the lord of the 'A zha received 5 pieces of ancestral silver and great presents" (line 4: *pha 'babs dgnul lnga dang bya dga'* ... cf. Thomas, vol. 2, 1951: 8 and 10).¹⁵ However there is no description of these ancestral silver objects.

While these three sources are the only extant historical sources (albeit incomplete) on Tibet composed during the Spu rgyal dynasty, the *Chronicle of Dba' (Dba' bzhed)* is a Tibetan royal narrative of the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet, a compilation in several versions, of which certain portions have been attributed to the 9th and 10th centuries (van Schaik & Iwao 2008; van Schaik & Doney 2009). One version describes a silver vase or beaker *dngul gyi bya bum*, which may be interpreted to mean "a silver vase shaped like a bird" (Wangdu & Diemberger 2000: 56 note 166), or possibly "a silver vase decorated with (designs of) bird(s)". A more recent version, the *Annotated Chronicle of Sba (Sba bzhed zhabs btags ma)* describes *dngul bya 'khum bu can*, as a 'silver bird' having/attached to a 'khum bu, which is an enigmatic term.¹⁶ It may reflect scribal error. Perhaps, instead of *dngul bya 'khum bu can*, the reading should be rectified as

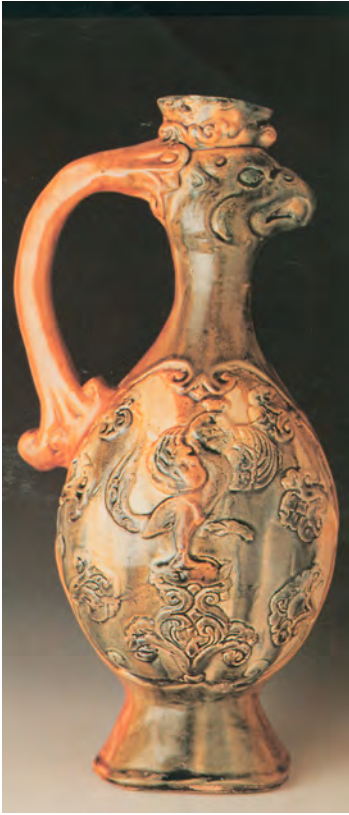
¹³ Pelliot *Tibétain* 1287 (16) // *'ung nas lo gnam gyIs glang po brgya'la/ gser gyI mdung rtse nyis brgya' rvala btags te /* (Bacot et al. 1940: 124; Hill 2006: 92; Zeisler 2011: 105). See also the artefacts excavated near Nankartse, central Tibet which include a gold helmet finial, gold spear tips and four small horse plaques 4.4 x 2.4 cm made of beaten gold with granulation intentionally arranged to show bridle, saddle, and saddle trappings: Tibetan Cultural Relics Office/Shannan district, "Excavation of a tomb at Chajiagou in Nagarze, Tibet" *Kaogu* 2001/6: 45-47 and Heller (2003: 55-56, fig. 1). Horse plaques from Nankartse and fig. 2. Earrings from Nankartse.

¹⁴ Later descriptions (14th century) instead relate that the corpse of a *btsan po* was placed in a great copper vessel filled with vermilion, subsequently coated with gold; smaller copper vessels were filled with gold dust. See Haarh (1969: 349-350).

¹⁵ Thomas dated this account 635-648 C.E. however subsequent research (Uray 1978: 545-6) firmly dated this description to events of 706-714 C.E.

¹⁶ See Wangdu & Diemberger (xiv-xv,11-14) for discussion of dating the different versions of this account. In the *Sba bzhed*, this passage is also found: *sku gsung thugs kyi rten zhengs su gsol ba/ sku'i rten bcom ldan 'das khar sar pa ni gsungs gi rten khri phyed gsum stong ba/ thugs kyi rten dngul bya 'khum bu can/ nye gnas kha phye (>che) utpa las/ dngul gyi byams pa bzhengs nas dgunng dus kyi mchod pa btsugs/* (Stein 1961: 78).

ngul bya bum bu can, "a silver bird attached to a small water pot".¹⁷ The *Sba bzhed* also refers to an auspicious vase made of gold, without description of its shape (*bkra shis kyi bum pa gser las byas pa gcig*/ *Sba bzhed* 1961: 24).



While the precise interpretation of these two early Tibetan expressions in the *Sba bzhed* remains elusive, to better understand the context of decorations on the inscribed silver and gold artefacts, two roughly contemporary examples help to elucidate potential meanings: (fig 2, left) a small Chinese ceramic pitcher with a phoenix head spout and a standing phoenix design on the body of the pitcher, attributed to the Tang period and (fig 3) a grandiose round-bellied ewer with elongated neck and a bird head finial used as a ceremonial vessel, illustrated in a line drawing by German archeologist Alfred Grünwedel of the ca. 9th century mural painting he observed in the Uighur palace at Gaochang (Turfan). This ewer was possibly manufactured in silver as a ceramic vessel would be far too heavy to lift in this size.

In contrast with the sparse and laconic descriptions of these early Tibetan historical sources, two versions of the *Tang Annals* (compiled mid-10th-mid 11th century, cf. Horlemann, in press), repeatedly describe sumptuous presents in gold from Tibet to the Tang court: 634 C.E.: a suit of golden armor; 645 C.E.: a gold vessel in the shape of a goose, capacity 60 litres of wine; 658 C.E.: a large bowl or basin of gold; 727/736 C.E.: several hundred precious silver and gold vessels and objects to be exhibited outside the imperial palace in Chang'an; 728 C.E.: a gold vase, a gold bowl, a duck of gold; 824 C.E.: a yak, a sheep, a bull and a rhinoceros of silver.¹⁸

¹⁷ My thanks to Michael Oppitz, ethno-historian of the Solo Khumbu region, who confirmed that the only current meaning of the term *'khum bu* is the proper name of this region in northern Nepal. He concurred with my suggestion of *'khum bu > bum bu* in this case.

¹⁸ These dates and objects are quoted from the translation by Pelliot of the *Jiu Tang shu* compiled in 945 (1961: 1-78), complemented by the *Xin Tang shu* completed in 1060 (1961: 79-144, thus p. 83 (gold armour); 5, 6, 84 (goose); 85 a large bowl or basin in gold; 20 (730) gold vase *hou*, gold platter, gold bowl, a golden duck ; p. 23 as year 736 and p.103 as year 727 "hundreds of silver and gold objects to be exhibited" (it is obviously the same tribute); 824 p. 76 silver yak, rhinoceros, sheep, bull; p. 132 gold platters, silver rhinoceros and silver deer as well as (live) yaks as tribute. Pelliot explained that his translation was undertaken to correct the translation by Bushell which he qualified as "a



Figure 3 Detail of Mural in Idikut Palace, Birdhead ewer and Qilin (celestial deer) ewer, Gaochang, as drawn by Alfred Grünwedel, ca. 1906 (Altebuddhische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan, abb. 665)

presents " as funerary offerings to the deceased emperor Taizong (Pelliot 1961: 6, 84).

Despite these numerous descriptions of fabulous objects in gold and silver given as tribute from Tibet to China, and the record that such objects served as funerary offerings, there is a gap in subsequent Tibetan literary accounts over the centuries, almost as if there were no longer any traces in Tibet of such objects. A 12th century account of the history of Buddhism in Tibet describes the Tibetan *btsan po* sending an incense burner in the shape of a *glang po* (probably a bull)²⁰ to Li yul, referring to Khotan,²¹ with a request to send craftsmen, threatening attack unless the king of Li yul

great feat for its time (1880) but which nonetheless had numerous errors and inexact translations as well as lacunae ". Paul Demiéville refers to Bushell, re-translated some passages as well as additional sources (1952: 203). Schafer (1963: 253-255) reviews additional passages of the Tang Annals and cites Demiéville; Heather Karmay (1975: 3 note 22) cites Bushell and Demiéville.

¹⁹ Demiéville [1952], n. 1 page 7, quoting the dowry figures from the Bushell translation as well as two other Tang histories; "1000 horses and 2000 ounces of gold" (Pelliot 1961: 12).

²⁰ *glang* is the typical Tibetan word for 'ox, bull', or *ba glang*. *glang po* can be synonym for *glang* or a short form of *glang po che*, 'elephant.'

²¹ See Vitali (1990: 53) for the potential conflation of Khotan and Central Asia in post-dynastic Tibetan historic accounts of the Spu rgyal dynasty.

mandated artisans to work in Tibet.²² The same source later evokes the gold fields of central Tibet and western Tibet.²³ Later sources describe the gold of western Tibet to be used as payment, whether as a present to entice Buddhist teachers from India to teach in the harsh desert climate of western Tibet, or gold as payment of ransom for a Tibetan king, where the equivalent of his body weight in gold is to be donated for Buddhist teachings, as well as the creation of stupa in gold, a statue in gold as large as a hand.^{24 25}

That gold was found in abundance in Tibet was constantly repeated. In a 14th century historical work, the *Rgyal po bka' thang* by O rgyan gling pa (b. 1323), compiled in the context of a revival of interest in the ancient *btsan po* and their rituals, there are elaborate and sometimes fanciful descriptions of burials and tomb contents purported to rely on ancient sources although the royal necropolis in Central Tibet had been plundered in the aftermath of the downfall of the dynasty.²⁶ Still there may be inklings of genuine historical artefacts, such as the *Rgyal po bka' thang* description of silver vessels (recipients *snod*) for grain alcohol and wine with heads of either horse, camel or duck, which may well correspond to the gilt silver ewer with animal head now conserved in the Lhasa gtsug lha khang, initially described by Richardson (cf *supra*).²⁷

²² An incense burner in the shape of a bull is reminiscent of the many ceramic statues of hybrid fantastic creatures which were essential guardians of Chinese and Central Asian tombs during the Tang period. For the citation of Nyang Ral, *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*, Lhasa reprint (1988: 418-419) *bod kyi btsan po'i spos kyi glang po yin pas 'di bzhes la li yul spyod pa'i rgyal po zhes bya ba bzo bo mkhas pa gcig yod zer bas/ de bod kyi btsan po'i thugs dam lha khang gi bzo bo byed pa la gnang bar zhu bya ba dang/ de ma gnang na rgyal po thugs khros nas dmag 'dren no bya ba'i bka' shog gi sgrom bu bskur nas pho nya ba btang/ pho nya bas li rje la bka' shog (la phul)...nga'i bu gsum btsan po'i phyag tu 'bu lo zhes pas...bu li gser gzung/ gser 'od/ gser thogs gsum ni lha bzo ba'i mkhas pa'i mchog yin pas bod du bzo byed du rdzongs//* See Karmay (1975: 5) for a slightly different version of this account, having a musk deer rather than a bull as a threat, quoted from the *Sba bzhed* (Stein 1961: 71-72).

²³ Nyang Ral (*ibid.* 1988: 461) describes the gold fields of Dong rtse wang, where abundant gold was mined to build temples of Khojarnath, Tabo, Nyarma and Tholing. See Pritzker (2008: 103) for location of gold fields near Tholing.

²⁴ Vitali (1996: 115) gold for the ransom of 'Od lde, and (1996: 116-117): statue in gold the size of a hand and several golden stūpa; the rich gold mines of Dbus and invitations to Atiśa, with nuggets of gold, gold dust and a golden mandala of 300 *srang*.

²⁵ Vitali (1996: 115) gold for the ransom of 'Od lde, and (1996: 116-117): statue in gold the size of a hand and several golden stūpa; the rich gold mines of Dbus and invitations to Atiśa, with nuggets of gold, gold dust and a golden mandala of 300 *srang*.

²⁶ Haarh (1969: 350-360 *passim*, description of the rituals continues to p. 373).

²⁷ Vitali (1990: note 4, p. 84) has drawn attention to the passage describing Srong brtsan sgam po's hiding of camel and bird head jugs in the *Rgyal po bka' thang*, reprint: 157: '*bras chang dang rgun chang dang go la'i snod/ dngul rkyen rnga mong gi mgo can gsum dang/ ngang pa'i mgo can bdun te bcu yod do//*. Earlier in the same chapter of the *Rgyal po bka' thang*, discussion of the royal ancestors' possession of three horse-head silver flasks. This recalls the context of the Fifth Dalai Lama's assessment that the silver ewer of the Lhasa gtsug lag khang has a horse-head finial, see Richardson's comments above. *Rgyal po bka' thang* (1997: 154) *dkor cha rin po che dngul gyi bum pa rta mgo can gsum /*.

The inscribed artefacts

1) **Two platters**, gilt silver, 29 cm diameter, height 3cm, weight approximately 935 gr., attributed to Tibet, 8th-9th century C.E.²⁸ (Figure 4: front view of platter; figure 5: reverse of platter, Shumei Family Collection/ possible detail view fig. 6):

According to the remarks of Boris Marshak, in the catalogue of the Shumei Family Collection,



Figure 4 Ceremonial Platter. Miho Museum, Japan. Inscribed in Tibetan intermixed with Chinese characters on reverse. 29.2 cm. Tooled silver with foil gilding. Weight: 935grams.

“...the low relief design in the *champlevé* technique was popular with Iranian silver-smiths during the Sasanian period as well as from 8th to 10th century, but the foil gilding and the rough and uneven hammering of the rim tend to indicate that it was made outside the lands of Iran and Central Asia. The centaur at center and the pairs of standing confronted winged animals are typical of the silverware of various Central Asian silver workshops but the specific motifs and their treatment here are distinctive.”

Marshak concluded, "Due to the Tibetan inscriptions and the aesthetic and technical distinctions, this is a fine example of early Tibetan silver."²⁹

See Heller (2002) for the full citations of the Fifth Dalai Lama's description, as well as the descriptions of the pilgrimage guides by Mkhyen brtse and Si tu Panchen, all of whom describe the silver ewer of the Lhasa gtsug lag khang.

²⁸ Shumei collection, Miho Museum and private collection, London, studied courtesy of John Eskenazi Gallery.

²⁹ Boris Marshak, no. 33, Plate (1996: 80-83). In the same volume see also the technical report by Pieter Meyers (Appendix: 194) which stipulates that the composition of the silver is consistent with objects from Central Asia; the foil gilding and cutting away of the silver are techniques reminiscent of Sasanian period; the iconography and shape

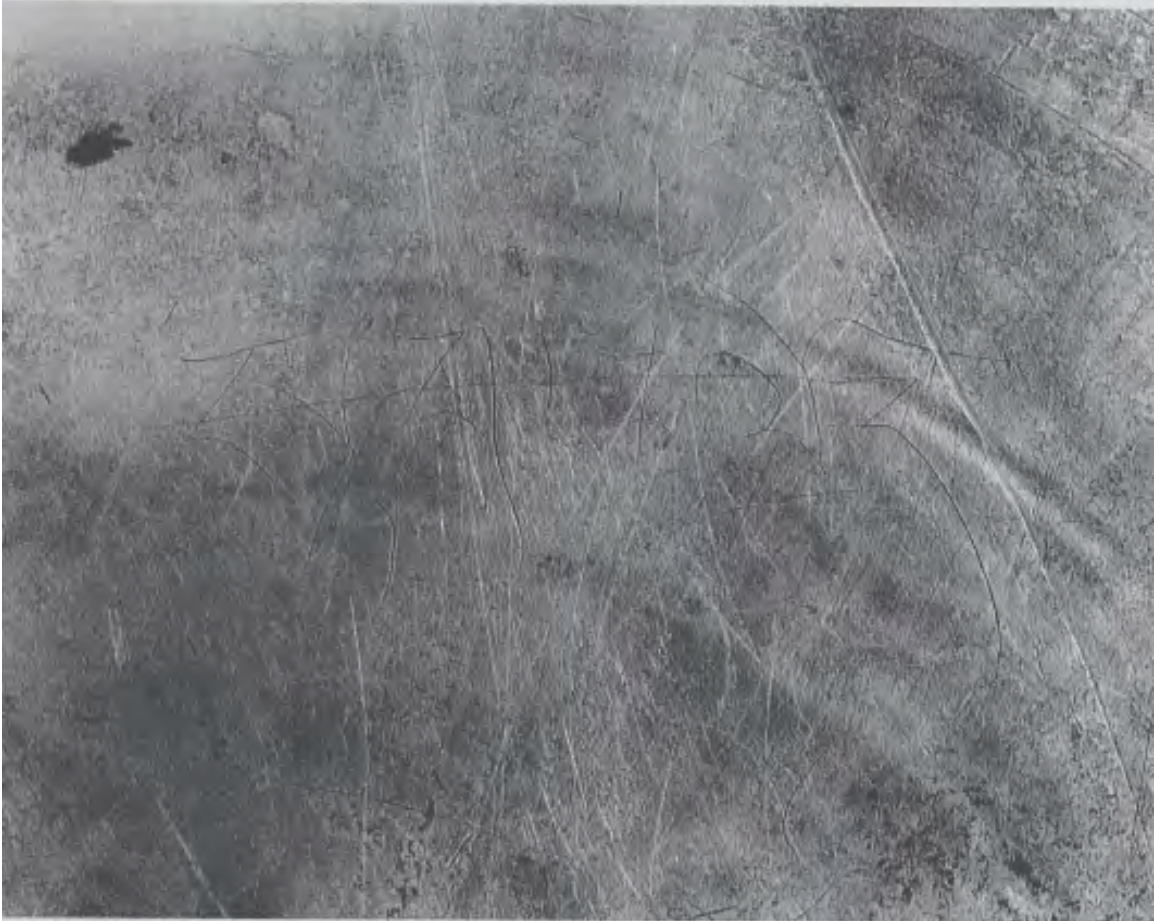


Figure 5 Stag ben log (ལྷག་བེན་ལོག་) characters

On the base of the platters, there is an inscription in Tibetan and Chinese, initially studied by Leonard van der Kuijp. There are three aligned circles on the Shumei Family platter, and five circles, non-aligned, on the London platter. The letters of the inscription are scratched on the Shumei Family Collection platter, and the same three phrases are incised on the platter in the London collection:

stag (ben) lod lha 'tsho kram nya SA (sa /very large and written side-ways)
bzang

(lacking a foot) are "unique". These factors as well as the Tibetan inscription indicate Tibetan provenance. Meyers further states that the uncorroded condition of the plate indicates it was never buried.



Figure 6 Shumei Collection with characters *kra zang* (ཀྲ་ཟང་) and three circles

The following reading and translation/interpretation was proposed by Leonard van der Kuijp in 1996:

Stag (ben) lod: at the centre, Chinese words can be identified between two Tibetan words: *stag (ben) lod*: *stag* means tiger, Chinese *ben* has a number of meanings, including root, origin or book; and *lod* signifies "relaxation" or "relaxed". *lha 'tsho*: the words at center may be identified as *lha 'tsho*, if *'tsho* is not a "miscarving" for *tshogs* these are homophones in some dialects - then the phrase would read something like *divine assembly.* Otherwise, it might mean "divine life" or "divine life span."

kram bzang nya sa: the words and graphs identifiable at the center are: *kram nya*, below which is (?b) *zang*; a larger *sa* is written sideways at a little remove from *nya* cabbage, fish, good, earth (van der Kuijp 1996: 82-83).

Subsequently, Philip Denwood studied the inscriptions of the London platter. His initial reading corresponds to the reading by van der Kuijp,³⁰ but rather than literal interpretation of the phrases.

Denwood concluded: "The Tibetan inscriptions are personal names of a type common in the Yarlung dynasty period (7th-9th century C.E.). Having read the inscriptions on the Tibetan silver dish in the Miho Museum I can certify that they are identical to those on your dish. Presumably this means the two dishes were a pair."

In the intervening years since the 1996 reading, van der Kuijp has revised his interpretation and fully concurs that these are very likely to be names.³¹ Moreover, Samten Karmay suggested that : *Lha 'tsho/mtsho* is a quite common name of women in Amdo. Other similar names, eg. *sgrol ma 'tsho*.³²

In view of the numerous Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts and inscribed stele whose texts are now accessible thanks to studies by participants in the Old Tibetan Documents On-line project, it is possible to re-examine these names. Indeed, the very nature of the platters as luxury objects makes it likely that they were made for or belonged to members of the Tibetan aristocracy.

Name 1: stag (ben) lod ----

There are 3 occurrences of names in texts and inscriptions wherein the elements Stag and Lod are both found in a name of a principal minister of ca. 750. Although the name is slightly different in each case, each examples contains several of the same elements, which compare thus:

PT 1287	blon che dba's stag sgra	khong lod (personal name)
Zhol rdo ring	blon	stag sgra klu khong
Dbal' bzhed		stag ra klu gong

The name *lod* is also found in at least two other members of the *Dbal's* family, *dba's mang rje lha lod* (PT 1287. 111) and *dba's btsan bzher mdo lod*, (PT 1287. 382), *stag* and *lod* are also found in other names of the period. At present there is not enough

³⁰ Philip Denwood, expertise for John Eskenazi Gallery (9 June 2009, unpublished), "Top right in photo: *lha 'tsho*. Left: *stag lod* (apparently interrupted by a Chinese character - perhaps 本 *ben*, "root"). Right: *kram nya bzang* (with some sort of mark to its right which doesn't seem either Tibetan or Chinese)."

³¹ Leonard van der Kuijp, personal communication, 10.01.2012.

³² Samten Karmay, personal communication, 09.12.2011.

evidence to indicate that Stag ben lod is the same person as the illustrious minister - there are not enough elements to fully support this conclusion. However, it is possible that the person Stag ben lod may well have been from the same clan/family.

Name 2: kram bzang nya or kram nya bzang ----

In the Lcang bu rdo ring inscription, the builder of the temple is named:

zhang tshes pong stag bzang nya sto (of Tshes spong clan)

Within the same *rdo ring* inscription he is referred to several times as zhang nya sto

In the *Dbā' bzhed*, among the ministers (*blon*) zhang nya bzang (fol. 6b, 8b, 17b). This refers all to one person, a member of sNa snam clan according to *Dbā' bzhed* (2000: n. 90 and n. 240)

Name 3: kram nya bzang lha 'tsho

(a woman of the family of Zhang nya bzang)

We tentatively consider that these fabulous platters might have been made for offerings at a wedding celebration, due to the decorative motifs of the male and female couples of standing winged creatures. If so, possibly this marriage was to be contracted between the two people named in the inscriptions, Stag ben lod and Kram bzang nya lha 'tsho, whose names indicate that they may have been related to eminent aristocratic families of central Tibet.

2) **Gold cup**, height 3.9 cm, diameter 9.5 cm, weight: 168 grams, private collection. (Figure 7, gold cup and figure 8, inscription on base of gold cup):



Figure 7 Gold cup with beading 3.9 height diameter 9.5 cm, 168 grammes. Private Collection.



Figure 8 Inscriptions in Tibetan. Circle marks are indicating weight. Private Collection

This gold cup is shaped with a low and relatively wide bowl, a very narrow brim, and a ring handle with a flat upper edge decorated in relief with a floral design. The base of the cup is decorated by beading. Cups of this shape were well known in Central Asia during the 7th to 8th centuries, and some silver cups of this shape have been identified as Tibetan cups due to their carved decoration of hybrid animals or lions on the bowl³³. The low beaded foot and the ring handle with lobed thumb rest are well documented in Sogdian silver attributed to the 8th century.³⁴ This cup has a perfectly plain bowl; the carved handle and beading on the base constitute its sole decoration.

The Tibetan *dbu can* inscription is scratched on the bottom of the cup. The inscription comprises one line of writing above which are five small circles, in horizontal alignment, all of the same diameter. These appear to be punched, rather than incised. The inter-syllabic punctuation is a single dot, and the right upper stem of each letter has a bead of granulated gold: 'o. rgyad. 'pan. lod

³³ See Carter (1998: 26) for Central Asian types of cups and Fig. 13a-b, Cup, Tibet, partially gilt silver, diameter 14 cm, lion cup; see Heller (2002: figures 40-43) for silver cups parcel gilt of this period.

³⁴ See Marshak (1971:T 46) and remarks on this cup by Melikian-Chirvani (2011: 99, plate 4.6).

This inscription again probably is a personal name of a Tibetan although the historic identification is undetermined at present.³⁵ The technique of granulated gold is known on horse medallions recovered from a Tibetan tomb of the dynastic period in central Tibet.³⁶

3) **Gilt silver flask**, height: 19 cm, weight: 437 grams, Pritzker collection. (Figure 9, flask and figure 10, inscription on base of flask):

This cast and chased ovoid flask with beaded edge on the lower rim, has raised designs of three panels of fabulous, hybrid animals in floral and leaf surrounds: a horse, a dragon and a feline creature. The choice of design reflects the importance of horses in Tibet, as a principle article of trade, and as a ritual animal in royal or aristocratic funerary rituals described in the Dunhuang manuscripts and confirmed by archaeological investigations throughout Tibet.³⁷ This hybrid horse has the tail of a bird. The dragon was a Chinese motif imported to Tibet in the dynastic period, as known from silks recovered from the excavations of Tibetan tombs at Dulan. The third hybrid creature has the head and paws of a feline and a similar wing structure to the horse as well as a bird's tail feathers. The gilding was formerly all over the body of the vase up to the neck, but now what little remains are retained in the interstices beside the raised elements. The shape of the flask follows a model found in two other examples, both of similar height and weight, which have been attributed to ca 8th - 9th century.³⁸

³⁵ In the Dunhuang manuscript Pelliot Tibétain 1060, line 55, o rgyad appears as a region name. I thank Charles Ramble for the information that 'o rgyad appears as part of the name of a figure from Mustang around the early 13th century.

³⁶ See note 20 *supra* on the horse plaques from Nankartse, Tibet, 7-9th century, and discussion of horses in Heller (2003: 55-64).

³⁷ For ritual importance of the horse, see Stein (1971) for discussion of horse sacrifice in Tibetan funerary rituals see *Southern Ethnology and Archeology*, "A briefing of the old graves at Lhatse and Tingri", Chengdu University, 1991: 105-125, Xu Xinguo (1996, 2006), and Heller (2006).

³⁸ The flask conserved in the Cleveland Museum of Art has a now illegible Tibetan inscription on the upper rim, h. 22.9 cm, (see Carter 1998: 23). The flask now conserved in the Ashmolean Museum has no inscription: EA 1999.98 h. 17 cm, weight 454.7 gr., see Heller (2007: 74-75).



Figure 9. Gilt silver flask. Pritzker Collection.



Transliteration of the inscription: g-yung drung brtan ba'i
dkor ya re la srang bcu bzhi ||

Figure 10. Inscription at the bottom of the silver flask of
the Pritzker Collection

Inside the base of the vase a Tibetan inscription is incised in *dbu can* letters:

: G.yung .drung. brtan. pa'i. dkor.ya. re. la. srang. bcu. bzhi /:/

From the treasury of G.yung drung brtan pa, 14 srang was spent to make this
one (of a pair).

The term *dkor* refers specifically to the possessions of a monk/ monastery. The term *srang* is found as an official measurement term in ancient Tibetan chronicles and in Tibetan contracts from the Dunhuang manuscripts (Imaeda & Takeuchi 1990: 980/ PT 1287, 0454; Takeuchi 1995: 314). The identification of G.yung drung brtan pa is problematic. As far as I have been able to determine, this name has not been recorded in royal genealogies nor lists of ministers of the ancient Tibetan kingdom, but these lists are not complete. In modern times, G.yung drung brtan pa is a common personal name among practitioners of Bon religion. However, during the Spu rgyal dynasty, in

historic decrees the term *g.yung drung* meant “in perpetuity” without reference to Bon religion, thus *G.yung drung brtan pa* (to protect in perpetuity) might have been a name either of a person or possibly the name of a fortress or Buddhist monastery.³⁹

H.E. Richardson was categorical in his opinion that the handwriting and punctuation indicate a date of no later than the 9th century.⁴⁰ Indeed, similar punctuation, shape of letters and the spelling 'a with an additional stroke at the upper right curve are distinctive and correspond to the punctuation alternation of single and double tsheg (: .) (positioned in mid-letter : . (in middle especially for the letters *nga* and *da*) and the same shape 'a as carved in the Bsam yas pillar which is dated around 764 A.D (cf. Richardson 1985: 2).

4) **Gilt silver Cup**, height 10.2 cm, diameter 10.2 cm; Cleveland Museum of Art, Severance and Greta Milliken Purchase Fund, 1998.67.2 (figure 11, cup and figure 12, inscription on base of cup):

This is a flat-bottomed cup made of partially gilt silver with exterior decorations carved into the metal while the interior is left smooth. There is a double ring handle and a band of beading soldered on to the cup. Two standing lions and a feline creature with horns are represented amidst floral and vine scrolls on the cup (Carter 1998: 24).

³⁹ Samten Karmay, "*G.yung drung brtan pa* is apparently a name, not known to me; *dkor* does refer to possessions of a monk/monastery" (personal communication 28.02.2000). Dan Martin (personal communication 27.10.2011) concurred with this interpretation as did Charles Ramble (personal communication 29.09.11) who suggested that *G.yung drung brtan pa* here might well be the name of a Buddhist monastery. In this period, *g.yung drung* signifies "unchanging, enduring like the swastika" and "in perpetuity;" it is a frequent term in stele inscriptions referring to Buddhism (see Richardson 1985: 176, and Sam van Schaik's article in the present volume, for discussion of IOL 1746 where the expression *g.yung drung gi chos* is translated as "eternal Dharma".)

⁴⁰ H. E. Richardson, personal interview in St. Andrews, April 2000.



Figure 11. Cleveland Museum of Art

There is a one-line inscription on the base of the cup, incised in *dbu can*, and beneath the inscription, there are three circle marks, and three lines.

/:/phan: shIng: gong: skyes: gyi: sug: byad: //

This inscription was first studied by Heather Karmay who transcribed the last syllable as *byang* or *byad*, and translated the inscription, "personal possessions of the high born princess", this designation interpreted as an honorific title of Wen cheng, the Chinese bride of Srong brtsan sgam po, the first historic *btsan po*.⁴¹ Her remarks were quoted by Martha Carter, although Carter noted H.E. Richardson's objections to identifying the owner of the cup as Wen cheng, due to the spelling of her name in Tibetan as Mun sheng or Mun shang, not phan shing. Richardson also suggested that this might be a place name rather than that of a person.

In the opinion of Tsuguhito Takeuchi, *phan shing gong skyes* is most likely to be taken as a personal name, whoever it is and whatever it means.

⁴¹ Heather Karmay, private expertise, cited by Carter (1998: 23). In my previous study of this inscription (Heller 2002) following the methodology of van der Kuijp 1996, I proposed a literal translation, however I now concur that *phan shing gong skyes* is a name, and not to be interpreted literally.

He concurred with Richardson's objections to the identification of the Chinese princess Wen cheng, and noted that *gong skyes* "high born" might refer to someone of noble birth, but it could be taken as a common personal name like other similar names



Figure 12. Bottom of the cup. Cleveland Museum of Art.
Transliteration: Phan shing gong skyes gyi sug byad

(e.g. *lha skyes*). It would be a bit too far to consider this as a mixture of phonetic transcription and *calque* translation of Chinese *gong-jo*.⁴²

The identification of the owner of this cup remains elusive to the present. The three circles underneath the inscribed letters are now understood to be analogous to those on the silver platter discussed above; the three lines may be yet another way

of indicating weight, insofar as three horizontal lines constitute the Chinese numeral "three".

5) **Large Cup with Ring Handle**, h. 4.4 cm, width at handle 14.9 cm. diameter of foot, 6 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Pat and Johan Rosenwald and The Dillon Fund Gifts, and Rogers and Louis V. Bell Funds, 2001.628. (Figure 13, cup profile view, figure 14, handle, and inscription):



Figure 13. gilt silver cup, Metropolitan Museum of Art, h. 4.4 cm

This cup in parcel gilt silver has exterior decorations representing stylized honeysuckle leaves, vines and flowers. The ring handle with flat thumb rest decorated with a rampant lion and beading have been soldered on to the cup. Footed silver cups with ring handles were well known in Central Asia at the time of the Tibetan empire (see figure 1, Tibetan *btsan po* holding ring cup, *supra*) and were common in Sogdian silverwork of the period (Marshak 1971, plates T 12, T 28, T42, T

⁴² Personal communications from Tsughuito Takeuchi, April 12, 1997, 2002 and 2006.

45).



Figure 14. Inside of Figure 13. Metropolitan Museum of Art

The inscription consists of one Tibetan letter in *dbu can*, *ka*, scratched into the bowl of the cup, which is otherwise plain. It is clear that this is not a name, but possibly a method of numbering, *ka* being the first letter of the Tibetan alphabet. Or this may be an abbreviation for a personal name or a place name which is as yet unidentified.⁴³

6) **Belt segments**, hammered gold, 69 m x 42mm, 35 mm x 27 mm (2) 25 mm diameter. Private collection: Memhet Hassan Asian Art. (figure 15, 16, front of segments, and figure 16, 17, reverse of segments with inscription):

⁴³ In the 2004 report on the excavations of Dulan published by Beijing University and Qinghai Archaeological Institute, a stone section of a *rdo ring* was excavated, with a single syllable on each side of the stone: *blon khri sha'u ka*. The word *blon* "minister" is understood to be the first word, but the order of three phonemes of his name is not yet determined, nor is the identification of this person. Even so, one may note that one syllable is the letter *ka*, as in the inscription of this cup (see *Tibetan tombs at Dulan Qinghai*, 2005: 109).



Figure 15. Belt segments 69 mm x 42mm, 35 mm x 27 mm (2) 25 mm dia. Mehmet Hassan Asian Art, Bangkok.



Figure 16. Belt segments 69 mm x 42mm, 35 mm x 27 mm (2) 25 mm dia. Mehmet Hassan Asian Art, Bangkok.



Figure 17 Fragment of gold saddle, 30 x 10 cm.

This belt buckle and segments made of hammered gold all present raised decoration representing stylized vines and leaves. On the reverse of the belt buckle, a single Tibetan letter was scratched, and 5 aligned small circles in a row, adjacent to a large circle comprising ten small circles. These are analogous to the five circles on the gold cup (cf. *supra*) and are again understood to be an indication of weight.

The inscribed letter is very faintly scratched and is tentatively read *gya*. The inscription is too fragmentary to interpret at this time, as possibly there are additional letters which have now been effaced.

7) **Fragment of gold saddle**, hammered gold sheet, turquoise and agate, length approximately 30 cm, width 7 to 10 cm. (figure 18, saddle fragment, figure 19, inscription on saddle):



Figure 18 Fragment of gold saddle, 30 x 10 cm.

This fragment of a saddle is similar to excavated fragmentary examples of Tibetan and Central Asian saddles, with their distinctive decoration of dynamic animals, such as this hybrid creature with the head of a dragon, the paws and body of a

feline and wings, depicted within a surround of floral and vine decoration.⁴⁴ The inscription is incised letters *dbu can* along the lower edge of the saddle. Due the fragmentary nature of the artefact, the inscription is incomplete; there is no name and the inscription provides detail of the weight of two objects:

Siddham single, plain,//// sga: gser gyi :zhu : lub: srang 'sum: cu: rtsa: lnga'
dang_zho' nyis/ spang: rgyan: da: a: long gyI: dngul: srang pyad: dang bcu gcig

This may be interpreted as follows: Altogether for the golden saddle, 35 *srang* and 2 *zho* of gold, and for the (ear)ring with floral decoration in silver, one half- *srang* and 11 (... smaller units of silver).

In regard to the punctuation, clearly several times the: mark is used rather than the single point; there is the initial punctuation of the siddham; the lack of final punctuation implies that the inscription is interrupted due to breakage. For the letter *nga*, the single *tsheg* is positioned in the middle of the letter, following the convention of the lettering observed on the Zhol rdo ring and the silver beaker (Fig. 10 supra).⁴⁵ The inscription is understood to refer to an inventory of contents, such as written on the wooden slips recovered from the excavations of the Dulan tombs.⁴⁶

8) **Seal** (fig. 19), silver, copper, gold and nickel alloy, 2 cm square, Zou Xicheng Collection:

This seal shows a male rider mounted on a horse, holding the reins and what appears to be a whip towards the haunch of the horse.

There is an inscription carved in incised letters: *Mang zigs rgya*.

This seal has been studied by Chinese scholars, who formulated the hypothesis that in the inscription, *rgya* signifies the seal and *mang zigs* would be the post station to which this seal was affiliated (Chen Qingying & Zou Xicheng 2008: 203-206).

⁴⁴ For similar saddles in gilt silver now conserved in the Pritzker collection see Heller (2003).

⁴⁵ It is to be noted that the numbering does not use the system of phonetic alliteration, ie. sum cu so lnga, but rather sum cu rtsa lnga. This may also be observed in Pt 0016, drug cu rtsa gnyIs, Pt 0239, gsum cu rtsa gnyIs, Pt 0999 sum cu rtsa lnga, Pt 1111 drug cu rtsa phyedang, bdun cu rtsa gchig, dgu bcu rtsa phyedang, brgyad cu rtsa lnga, Pt 1120 sum cu rtsa phyed, Pt 2204c brgyad cu rtsa...and ITJ 0733 bdun cu rtsa gnyis.

⁴⁶ See Heller (1998b: 84-92, fig. 4) for the Dulan wooden slip with partial inventory of the tomb.



Figure 19. Flying horse herald, Zou Xicheng Collection

In the light of the research of Sam van Schaik on the letters of Mazar Tagh presented in this volume, N 873 is a small rectangular piece of wood (10.5 x 2.2. width, 0.4 thick) on which the names of two people are written: Blon Mang gzigz and Blon mDo bzung. Insofar as

the seal reads "Mang zigz" and the name of the minister is Blon Mang gzigz, it is proposed to identify this seal as the personal seal of the minister Blon Mang gzigz.

III. A non-inscribed gold cup attributed to the Tibetan Empire in Central Asia cup . This stem cup is decorated with the twelve animals of the zodiac in the upper register. The bowl of the cup has hybrid fantastic creatures - a feline with horn, a horse with wings and paws, or a dragon with tailfeathers, as well as the recumbent deer - all very similar to those observed on the silver beaker and golden saddle with Tibetan inscriptions. The exquisitely detailed carving of such vivacious, roaring creatures does not correspond to the typical taste of the Tang court, thus it is proposed that this cup is a commission for Tibetan aristocracy.



Figure 20. Gold cup attributed to Tibetan Empire in Central Asia, Stem Cup China (Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Central Asia), Period of Tibetan Empire, 7th–9th century Gold with repoussé decoration H. 3 ½ in. (8.9 cm); Diam. of mouth 2 ¾ in. (7 cm) Purchase, 2001 Benefit Fund, 2002 Metropolitan Museum of Art

III. Weight marks

In terms of the weight marks, we have observed different systems in the artefacts so labelled. The gold belt segment and the gold cup in the private collection both have five small circles aligned in a row, punched, while the use of three lines and three circles of the cup in the Cleveland Museum of Art is analogous to the inscription on the silver platter of the Shumei Family collection, which also has three aligned circles. The three parallel-incised lines have also been observed as an indication of a unit of measure or weight on Sogdian silver.⁴⁷ These are two examples of weight marks but there may also be other systems of indicating weight.

⁴⁷ See Boris Marshak, Fig. 7, photograph of the base of a Sogdian bowl with "three parallel lines incised on base resembling Chinese number 3 might indicate three units of some kind of weight measure" (A Sogdian Silver bowl in the Freer Gallery of Art) *Ars Orientalis* xxix: 102-110.

Conclusion

These silver and gold artefacts reflect Tibetan participation in flourishing international commerce along the Silk Routes. Due to their decorative motifs of confronting or addorsed fantastic hybrid creatures, the distinctive gold cladding and metallurgical techniques and the inscribed indicators of weight, these objects are concrete proof for the particular high esteem of the aesthetics and skills of Sogdian metalwork in early Tibet. The Tibetan inscriptions indicate possession of these artefacts by Tibetan people and their eventual provenance from Tibetan tombs.⁴⁸ Still, at present we cannot yet determine who were the craftsmen, nor where were their ateliers - perhaps itinerant encampments of Sogdian and Tibetan artisans following the pattern of mobility of the Tibetan *btsan po* and his entourage and the movements of troops of Tibetan armies throughout the territories of the Tibetan empire.⁴⁹ This study of these inscriptions is a limited corpus, certainly not exhaustive, but it indicates that the majority of the inscriptions do refer to personal names, mostly of Tibetan people but possibly also of places. It remains to be determined to whom these artefacts belonged. In the context of Tibetan funerary customs of the *Spu rgyal* dynastic period, where the *btsan po* and aristocrats were buried in tombs replete with all the goods needed for their well-being in the "afterlife", it may be suggested that some of these artefacts were produced for burial, and that possibly the Tibetan personal names on the artefacts reflect identifications of the people with whom the artefacts were buried.

⁴⁸ Although Meyers' technical study (note 27 *supra*) on the plate in the Shumei Family Collection stated that its uncorroded state indicated that it had never been buried, i.e. it had not been in contact with earth, it may have been buried inside a container in a chamber of a rapidly plundered tomb. The impeccable condition, e.g. total lack of wear, tends to suggest it was produced and intended for burial, then subsequently conserved above ground, similar to the silver saddle and artefacts observed in a cave near the Dulan tombs by Filchner (cf. note 3 *supra*) and the large parcel-gilt silver ewer in Lhasa.

⁴⁹ Itinerant metalworkers were travellers with the Tibetan troops for repairs of the armour and horse trappings. Goldsmiths and silversmiths could be itinerant insofar as the techniques for beating and hammering gold and silver do not require large high temperature kilns or elaborate apparatus. Sogdian migrants (merchants, craftsmen in metal and textiles) who subsequently established colonies in Dunhuang, Chang'an, Chengdu and other regions of China have been the subject of numerous studies. See for example de la Vaissière & Trombert (2005).

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