

Horse and Social Status or How to Assess the Quality of a Horse

Petra Maurer

(Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities, LMU Munich)

Introduction

The following paper introduces various kinds of social classes that humans assigned to animals, particularly horses.¹ The assignment of such classes to horses and other animals is not based on the idea of improving animals' lives but to qualify the animals in order to improve human lives.² Commonly, social class is a category that humans assign to themselves and to animals in order to structure their societies and organize their communal life. The focus of the paper is the analysis of aspects assigned to social class of horses. It will investigate the application of "social class" in other contexts aside from the Tibetan medical one, assessing any parallels in the neighbouring cultures of India and China that may have influenced the theoretical concepts in Tibet. The texts analysed consist of Old Tibetan manuscripts dateable to the 8th century, a Tanjur text translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan, and two 17th-century manuscripts found in Nepal. Tibetan manuscripts on hippology present various methods to categorise horses. These categories include the description of the horses' physical shape,³ their behaviour, and mental qualities.

Any reflections on a horse's social status should take into consideration the value of animals in traditional Tibetan culture. All kinds of cattle and other livestock such as yaks, *dri*, *mdzo* and *mdzo*

¹ I would like to thank Fernand Meyer for his comments on an earlier version of this paper and the editors for their suggestions.

² Multi-scientific research approaches such as anthrozoology or Human-Animal Studies, ethnobiology, and anthropology discuss the relationship between human and animal, and in the last three decades, a huge amount of literature was published on this field of studies. To underline that the use of the terms "human" and "animal" purports two mutually exclusive categories, expressions such as "human animals" and "non-human animals" were created. For a discussion of related questions, see for example Sax, DeLapp and Tonutti (2011). Despite my sympathy and consent with these reflections, I follow Ohnuma (2017: xix) and adhere to the conventional terminology.

³ Particularly in the Indian cultural context, the shape of horses, cows, elephants, and other animals is used for divination but also for assessing an animal's quality; see for example Bhat (1987, part II).

mo, cows, mules, horses, sheep, and goats played an enormous role in Tibet's agricultural and nomadic society and were indispensable to traditional life on the plateau: they provided food and drinks, wool for clothing and tents, and facilitated trade by transporting goods and people. The male *mdzo* was used for ploughing the fields and for threshing the grain. The bones and horns of cattle and other livestock had their place in rituals. Several animals' parts were utilised to manufacture daily objects: the skin of a goat or sheep—if not dried and used for clothes or warming seats—was occasionally turned into bellows, the stomach into a bag to keep grease, and the dung utilised as a fertilizer or dried and used to make fire. Traditional life without animals seemed unimaginable. The Tibetan terminology emphasises the value of these animals: the term *nor* translates to “wealth, property” and the word for “possessions” also means “cattle”;⁴ and *phyugs*, “cattle”, is presumably connected with *phyug* meaning “rich”.⁵ Although horses, a symbol of kingship, are not *nor phyugs*, they were and still are of an outstanding value among the animals living with men: for many centuries, they were means of transport and pack-animals. Their value shifted from that of a working animal to a status symbol; the animals for equestrian sports are still trade goods in their own right.



Fig. 1 — Decorated mule as working animal (photo: Petra Maurer)

⁴ Jäschke (1985: 307).

⁵ *ibid.*: 351.

The abundance of manuscripts on horses proves their value and their need for special care. All the manuscripts examined here—the Old Tibetan texts and those found in Nepal—contain two main subjects: hippiatry, that is, the medical treatment of horses, and hippology, a field of knowledge dealing with the horses' typology, their shape, anatomy, and physiology. Hippological and hippiatrical texts are also found in neighbouring countries such as India, Mongolia, and China.⁶ Tibetan literature includes three kinds of texts originating in different centuries that deal with hippology and hippiatry. These are:

- Indigenous Tibetan texts among the Old Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang such as Pelliot Tibétain 1061 to 1066.⁷ The authors were most likely practitioners who tried to write down their experience with the treatment of horse diseases. Only Pelliot Tibétain 1066 also treats hippological subjects. The horse experts (*rta mkhan*) named here also appear in the 17th-century manuscripts from Nepal.
- Texts translated from Indian sources such as the *Aśvāyurveda* ascribed to Śālihotra. This *śāstra*, titled in Tibetan *Rta yi tshe'i rigs byed*, entered the bsTan 'gyur as a translation from Sanskrit by the famous Rin chen bzang po (958–1055). It focuses on subjects related to hippology such as the horses' character (*rta'i rang bzhin*) and colour (*kha dog*), the examination of eyes (*mig brtag*), teeth (*so brtag*), and odour (*dri brtag*), the examination of voice (*skad gsang brtag*), the quality of gait (*'gros kyi bzang ngan*) and so on. Śālihotra dedicated several chapters to the four classes of horses (*rta'i rigs bzhi*), and to their medical treatment (*nad gso ba*),⁸ in particular the application of moxibustion and pharmacology. Contrary to Pelliot Tibétain, here the description of diseases follows the theoretical concepts given in the *Āyurveda*: the diseases are distinguished according to the three humours or pathogenic factors (*nyes pa gsum*), which are phlegm (*bad kan*), bile (*mkhris pa*), and wind (*rlung*).⁹

⁶ Other manuscripts for medical treatment of animals refer particularly to those applied in warfare, such as for example camels in China and elephants in India.

⁷ For the Tibetan text with translation, see Blondeau (1972: 174–327).

⁸ See Śālihotra (1987: 215–218).

⁹ Another source based on Indian knowledge goes back to Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor (1704–1788). He wrote the text titled "The fortunate examination of the horse in accordance with the Indian system" (*Rgya gar pa'i lugs bstun rta dpyad dpal g.yang*).

- Finally, there are manuscripts roughly dateable to the 17th century. These texts have been discovered in Nepal, and as they all lack a colophon, their authors are unknown. They equally treat hippiatric and hippological subjects and contain knowledge that can be traced back to Old Tibetan manuscripts and the *Śālihotraśāstra*.¹⁰

The hippiatric texts on the treatment of horses present the knowledge of practitioners who tried to preserve their experience in horse treating. They describe, and accordingly classify, the disease symptoms, assigning the ailment, for example, to an affected organ or a body part or explaining the assumed cause of a disease. These texts bear similarities to the horse manuscripts found in medieval Europe and known as “Rossarzneibücher”.¹¹ The hippological sections of these manuals on horse medicine also deal with the classification of horses based on the use humans made of them. A major scholar and author within this tradition is Albert Magnus (1200-1280). In book XII of his encyclopaedia *De animalibus*, he divides horses into four categories (*modi*): horses for warfare, horses for transport, those for breeding and for farm work.¹²

With their focus on hippology, the Indian texts emphasise the significance of assessing the horses’ quality in order to determine their use, deployment, and social status. Experts examined their shape and observed their behaviour, aiming to select the best specimen for the king and to find suitable horses for warfare:

With respect to elephants and horses, the special distinction comes from pedigree, breed, spirit, youth, stamina, height, speed, vigor, skill, steadfastness, stateliness, obedience, auspicious marks, and good conduct.¹³

The 17th-century horse manuscripts were written at a time when scientific knowledge in Tibet was restructured and rearranged. The texts combine the main subjects of the old Tibetan and Indian sources. Furthermore, they included knowledge based on human medicine such as anatomy and pulse diagnoses.

As the main subject of this paper is social status, I shall focus here

¹⁰ Most of the texts available to me have been filmed by the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP); see Maurer (2001: 39–109). A brief survey of the content offers Maurer and von den Driesch (2006).

¹¹ See Maurer (2001).

¹² Stadler (1916: 1378). For more information on the stable-master’s era, see von den Driesch and Peters (2003: 85–100).

¹³ Olivelle (2013: 384); see also Rangarajan (1992: 643).

on the hippological sections. There, horses are either directly assigned to a social class or indirectly linked to it. These horse texts present two methods to qualify the social status of a horse: an Indian and a Tibetan one.

The Indian horse classification

Traditionally, Indian hippology is ascribed to the famous Indian Śālihotra,¹⁴ a legendary figure regarded as the founder of Indian horse medicine. The *Mahābhārata* (II, 69) is the first source to mention his name.¹⁵ The discipline named after him is called *Śālihotraśāstra*. The text is included in the bsTan 'gyur, Peking Edition, V, 148 with the title *Rta'i tshe'i rig byed sha li ho tras bsdus pa*.¹⁶ Since the work was translated by a team of three translators—Śribhadra, Buddhaśrīśānti, and Rin chen bzang po—the Tibetan version can roughly be dated between 992 and 1042 CE. The *Śālihotraśāstra* spread throughout Arabic culture and was translated into Persian. We will encounter it again in one of its Persian versions titled *Tarjamah-i-Saalotar-i-asbaan*, translated into English by Joseph Earles and published under the title "A Treatise on Horses Entitled Saloter or, a Complete System of Indian Farriery".¹⁷ Bearing the title *Sha li ho tra'i mdo'i gnas las rta'i rigs bzhi*, chapter eight of the Tibetan version of the treatise classifies horses into four social classes. The Tibetan term used for "social class" is *rigs*, commonly translated into English as "family, lineage, extraction, birth, descent" but "in a special sense: caste, class in society, rank".¹⁸ Commonly, *rigs* is given as a translation of the Sanskrit *varṇa*.¹⁹ From the terminological aspect, the *Śālihotraśāstra* clearly divides the horses into four social classes, namely *brahmin* (*bram ze*), *kṣatriya* (*rgyal po*), *vaiśya* (*rje'u rigs*) and *sūdra* (*mi dmangs*). With regard to this classification, I will ask the following questions: What aspects, characteristics, and features are assigned to each class? Or, which characteristics qualify a horse as a member of a certain social class?

Chapter eight begins with listing several criteria applied for the

¹⁴ See Maurer (2001: 52, 55), also for the chapters on horse's hair-whirls.

¹⁵ See Buitenen (1975: 352).

¹⁶ See *mdo 'grel, ngo mtshar bstan bcos*. For the Tibetan translation, see Blondeau (1972: 11–13, 49–110).

¹⁷ According to Meulenbeld (2000, vol. II: 576), the horse book was also translated into Arabic and Hindi. Under the patronage of the Mughal emperor Shah-Jahan, the emir Abdullah Khan translated the text into Persian.

¹⁸ Jäschke (1985: 527).

¹⁹ Lokesh Chandra (1990: 1152).

assessment of horses' social status: type of birth (*skye gnas*), stature or physique (*gzugs byad*), conduct or behaviour (*tshul spyod*), discipline (*'dul ba*), tone of voice (*skad gdangs*), shape (*dbyibs*), colour (*kha dog*) and odour (*dri nyid*).²⁰ The first of these criteria, i.e. "type of birth" (*skye gnas*), is extensively treated in chapter seven: here the term *gnas* clearly refers to the "type" or "class" of birth rather than the "place" of origin. In other contexts, the term *gnas* may denote also a "degree", thus assuming a meaning closer to *rigs*, as it is used to classify the horse's birth into four apparently inconsistent categories, i.e. good (*bzang po*), bad (*dman pa*), herbivorous animal (*ri dwags*), and mixed (*'dres*).²¹

As for the other criteria mentioned above, the descriptions provided in chapter eight lack a systematic order, rather they jump from one feature to another, from physical shape to behaviour, from mental characteristics to colour, and so on.

In the following paragraphs, I will introduce the four classes of horses with the aspects and characteristics assigned them in the text. To present a survey on the characteristics of each class, I will summarize the content of the passages on the four horse classes by selecting the most significant features. These are the horses' shape, coat colour, preference of food—depending on the horse class this aspect can be subordinate—behaviour, and character. Although the *Śālihotraśāstra* states that "these four classes are difficult to distinguish" (*rta yi rigs gzhi shes dka' ba*), the characteristics assigned to the respective horses' classes are quite unique.²²

The brahmin horse (bram ze rigs)

The description of the Brahmin horse focuses on the visible features of the horse such as body shape and coat colour. Furthermore, the text emphasises the nutrition of the *bram ze* horse. Brahmin horses' "shape is good, they are magnificent" (*gzugs bzang dpal dang ldan pa*). A further specification of what makes a shape "good" is however missing. Certain coat colours are seemingly appropriate for these horses, as the text mentions yellow, yellowish like honey (*sbrang rtsi ltar ser*), white, and red. In particular, a "fine coat" (*pags pa srab*) with a "glossy sheen" (*mdog snum*) attracts the attention of all Brahmans to these horses. The *brahmin* horses' food is of major significance, and

²⁰ Śālihotra (1987: 40–41): *rigs bzhi rnam par dbye ba ni / skye gnas dang ni gzugs byad dang / tshul spyod dang ni dul ba dang / skad gdangs dbyibs dang kha dog dang / dri nyid las ni nyer shes bya ||*

²¹ See Blondeau (1972: 58–59).

²² The elephant, another animal in India that was particularly important in warfare, was assessed in a similar manner to the horse; see Edgerton (1931: 74–79).

the passages dealing with the topic almost anthropomorphise the culinary preferences. Their preferred foodstuff resembles food that is commonly recommended for *yogins* such as honey, roasted rice, bread, butter, milk broth, and roasted foodstuff (*sbrang rtsi 'bras yos khur ba mar / 'o thug sreg rdzas la dga' zhing*).²³ They like garlands of jasmine (*sna ma'i phreng ba*). Moreover, "they enjoy ablution and blessings" (*khrus dang bkra shis la dga' zhing*). These horses are clean and enjoy cleanliness (*gtsang zhing gtsang sbra dag la brten*), a preference extended to food, as they disregard the leftovers of such. Since they are pure, they stay away from human excrement, dung of horses, and urine.²⁴

They presumably have a certain state of mind and a particular power, as "even when they lie down they do not sleep" (*nyal yang gnyid ni med pa dang*).²⁵ Moreover, they are assigned a unique disposition: when they sleep, they emit a beautiful smell of roasted rice, butter and so on (*gnyid log tshe ni 'bras yos dang / mar dang ur sher dri 'byung la*). They are attributed the powers of gods, *dri za*, the *gandharvas* (*lha dang dri zi'i (r. za'i) snying stobs can*). These horses are intelligent, of a good character, and they listen to the horse trainer. They are willing and obey their duties. They are fearless, clever, and can endure thirst and hunger; they have only little anger.²⁶ Their trot is excellent. With their auspiciousness and majesty they are to be recommended (*sngags par 'os*).²⁷

The kṣatriya horse (rgyal rigs)

The text describes in great detail the class of the *kṣatriya* horse. *Kṣatriya jāti* denotes the military caste²⁸ and since this type of horse was presumably deployed in warfare, *kṣatriya* horses were of major importance. Generally, the information on the *kṣatriya* horse's physical shape, colour of the coat, and fodder is scarce and likely unimportant. As for the body shape, "tail and mane are well stretched" (*rnga rngog legs par brkyang nas*). The coat colour seems to

²³ Court historians of the Ilkhans report on this peculiar food for horses: butter roasted peas and cow's milk or *kichiri*, boiled with sugar and oil, see Kauz (2009: 133).

²⁴ Śālihotra (1987: 41), *btung dang kha zas bza' bya yi / lhag ma dag ni mi gtsang dang / rta sbrang dang ni de bzhin gcin / 'di ni ring du spong byed cing / /*

²⁵ The author of the Tibetan text might have been unaware of the fact that horses sleep while standing.

²⁶ *ibid.*: 41, *blo ldan ngang tshul bzang ba dang / 'dul sbyong mkhan gyis byas pa nyan [...]* *bkres dang skom la sran che zhing / /*

²⁷ For the full text, see *ibid.*: 40–41.

²⁸ Monier-Williams (1986: 325).

be insignificant as the author states that “[any coat] colour is good, there is no bad [coat] colour” (*mdog bzang kha dog ngan pa med*). A pure colour, that is to say no spots or speckles in the coat (*tshangs pa' mdog ldan shis par bya*), is considered auspicious. The text describes the coat as “fine” (*pags pa srab*). The horses' eye colour is “yellow like a jewel” (*nor bu lta bu mig ser*). Unlike the *Brahmin* horses, these horses do not prefer a special foodstuff and are therefore not limited to a specific environment.

The author puts great emphasis on the character and the behaviour of the horses, as *kṣatriya* horses are of pure character (*rang bzhin gtsang*) and their behaviour is easy-going (*spyod pa yang*). They are always capable of doing any kind of work (*rtag tu las kun nus pa*). Generally, they neigh out of pleasure (*dga' ba' yid kyis 'tsher ba*) and are sure-footed as they place their legs firmly on the ground (*rkang gnyis legs par 'dzug bzhin du*). They cast away sweat, urine, and their own dung (*rta sbangs*) with their limbs stretched (*rngul dang gcin dang rta sbang ni/ yan lag bskyang nas 'dor ba*). The following characteristics prove the horses' suitability for warfare: their appearance is wrathful (*khros pa'i tshul*),²⁹ their mind is sharp (*rang bzhin rno*), they are intelligent (*blo ldan*), brave, fast, and very strong.

They don't fear any danger, water, fire and the sound of thunder, loud sounds, falling, scratching, sharp or rough touch. They neither fear rough nor wild land or dense forest; they are not afraid to walk long distances and on narrow paths. They fear nothing and no one, neither big elephant herds nor the sound of bells or the sound of loud voices, the neighing of other horses, the sound of horns and big drums, the sound of [other] musical instruments or the sound of kettle drums. They are not afraid of a parasol, a victory banner and a flag. They are the best horses.³⁰

Moreover, *kṣatriya* horses intimidate other horses (*rta gzhan la ni sdigs pa*) which do not dare to approach them (*rta gzhang dag ni phyin nas ni / de ni 'gro bar bzod mi byed*). In battles, they subdue horses, elephants, and carriages. Then they neigh aloud with a gentle voice in all directions. They are strong and endure a lot of hardship:

²⁹ For the characterisation of the *kṣatriya* as “harsh” (skt. *krūra*), see Smith (1994: 38).

³⁰ See Śālihotra (1987: 41–42), ‘jigs pa rnam la mi sgrags pa / chu dang me dang 'brug sgra dang / sgra cher grags dang lhung dang phur / tsha dang rtsub pa'i reg pa dang / sa rtsub shing gi tshang tshing dang / ring du 'gro gang lam dog par / gang zhig 'jigs pa med pa dang / glang po'i tshogs ni chen po dang / dril bu rol mo'i sgra rnam dang / ca co 'don pa'i sgra rnam dang / rta gzhang 'tsher bar gyur pa dang / dung dang rnga chen sgra dang ni / rol mo'i sgra dang rdza rnga'i sgra / gdug[ls] dang rgyal mtshan ba dan gyis / sgrag par mi 'gyur rta mchog yin //

Though hurt by a weapon they hardly become sick or afraid of weapons. They are however easily to be disciplined and they are brave.³¹

Reactivity in combat is another important quality ascribed to *kṣatriya* horses: they react quickly (*spyod pa myur*) and in fights they quickly suppress their opponent (*dpa' ba dang 'thab tshe myur du pha rol gnon*). Like the Brahmin horses, they have the power of the gods and the *dri za*, the *gandharva*.

In conclusion, the *Śālihotraśāstra* qualifies *kṣatriya* horses as “the best horse” (*rta mchog*) an assessment presumably referring to their possible deployment in warfare.³²

The vaiśya horse (rje'u rigs)

The depiction of the *rje'u rigs* horses is still focused on body shape but also extends to include the horses' nature and character. As for their body shape, it says: “The front and back part of the body are straight and big; the fore part of the body is larger [than the back part] (*ro stod che ba*)”. Acceptable coat colours are black, bluish, white or a hue reminiscent of the *dūrva*-grass. Their eye colour should be blue or yellow. Even the hooves are assigned a shape and a colour: they should resemble a palmyra tree. Commonly, they have the colour of a goose.³³ Though the *vaiśya* horses are not as excellent as the *brahmin* and *kṣatriya* horses, they are characterised as good horses: they are neither angry nor proud (*khro ba med cing nga rgyal med*).

These horses seem to be somewhat peculiar as the author compares their odour to camel's milk (*rnga mo'i 'o ma'i dri dang ldan*), that is to say, their smell is a bit strong but not bad. Moreover, they are considered able to bear the burdens of life: they endure diseases, heat, and hunger. Even when loaded with luggage they walk steadily and sure-footed with a moderate speed. Their strength and power are however only medium. The following statement seems to allude to some sort of deficiency: “These horses sleep deeply, and they do depend on the power of men”.³⁴ In other words: whereas *brahmin* and

³¹ See *ibid.*: 42, *g.yul ngor rta dang glang po dang / shing rta dpung bu chung 'joms dang / rjes su skad 'don sgra 'jam pas / phyogs kun khyab par 'tsher ba dang / [...] mtshon gyis bsnun kyang nad chung zhing / mtshon cha mthong na 'jigs mi 'gyur / spyod pa myur zhing dpa' ba dang //*

³² For the full text, see *ibid.*: 41–42.

³³ See *ibid.*: 43, *smyig ma ta la'i mdog 'dra dang / phal cher ngang pa'i mdog 'dra zhing*. Tibetan *mdog* here obviously means “look” and “colour”.

³⁴ See *ibid.*: 42, *bag chung gnyid ni che ba dang / mi yi snying stobs la brten pa //*

kṣatriya horses hardly sleep and their attentive mindfulness might even protect men from harm, *vaiśya* horses must be taken care of. Their further characterisation points to some kind of unreliability: they like to drink—although the liquid is not named—and are lazy. However, they are also calm, open-minded, tame, and of a good character. Their behaviour is disciplined (*dul ba'i spyod pa yang dag*) and they are even-tempered. Their overall rating in the *Śālihotrasāstra* is however only medium.³⁵

The sūdra horse (mi dmangs)

The characterisation of *sūdra* horses is quite intriguing.

These big-bellied horses are commonly smoke or dust coloured, yellowish, reddish or pale (*du ba rdul 'dra'i mdog ldan zhing / ser skya mdog dro dmar skya'i mdog*). They lack elegance as they dig in the ground with their round hooves (*mig rkan mig ni zlum pa dang / rkang pas sa ni brko ba*). They are unqualified for any kind of activity as “the character of the *dmangs rigs* horses is bad. These are the most unattractive horses: their behaviour is unclean” (*dmangs rigs ngang tshul ngan pa dang / spyod lam spyod yul mi gtsang zhing*). They cough and spit phlegm. And there is more. Their odour is repellent: they stink like a nest of crows (*bya rog tshang gi dri bro zhing*). Whereas the *brahmin* horses indulge in cleanliness, these horses are in every sense closely linked to dirt. They like to eat leftovers of food and they cling to anything dry, inferior, or bad such as dung and urine.³⁶ They go to dirty places and sniff at excrements just like a dog. This behaviour might be the reason that they cannot even really enjoy eating food. Moreover, in contrast to the other classes, their character is extremely bad: they kick the horse herdsman with their legs. They bite not only one another but also walls and wood. They are so insensitive that they do not feel it when beaten with a whip. Men cannot use them in warfare as they are cowards; they fear everything and even worse, they are inattentive.³⁷ They need protection like the *vaiśya* horses, but

³⁵ For the full text, see *ibid.*: 42–43, *rje'u rigs btung ba la dga' brtan / zhi zhing blo che le lo can / mi khruṅs dga' bar 'gyur ba med / dul ba'i spyod pa dang / [...] dul zhing ngang tshul snyoms pa dang //*

³⁶ Similar aspects are applied in Indian animal divination. Varāhamihira presents the following assessments: “The horse that passes urine and dung too frequently, does not go along the proper direction in spite of being whipped, shows fright without any cause (such as vicinity to its enemies), and has tears in its eyes, does not betoken prosperity or happiness to its master”; see Bhat (1987: 824).

³⁷ See Śālihotra (1987: 43), *bshang gci snom par byed pa dang / za zhing nyung du spyod pa dang / mi gtsang sar ni 'gro ba dang / rta rdzi la ni 'phra ba dang / rang dang rtsig pa shing la sogs / so yis 'drad par byed pa dang / 'bring ba dbyug pa lcug ma yi / lcag mi*

their behaviour virtually prevents this as they are not peaceful. They are completely unreliable as they drop off to sleep when they smell blood and corpses. They have the power of the flesh-eating *srin po* demons. They can only work when they are angry, as they are incapable to do so otherwise. Therefore, they are of hardly any use at all.³⁸

The king's horse

The horse for the king belongs to a category separated from the four classes. His horse is a unique specimen, and body marks such as the coat colour and hair whirls used for prognostication are of a special interest. Hair whirls can appear on any part of the body and the hair can turn clockwise or anticlockwise. These aspects indicate the horses' quality but also the owner's future wellbeing, prosperity, and victory or contrariwise illness, poverty, and loss. The king's horse requires ten steady whirls to be suitable for his royal rider.³⁹ Three colours indicate the rulership of a king: white, *ne tso*, literally "parrot,"⁴⁰ and red (*dmar*).

The best coat colour is shiny white, as this colour indicates positive aspects such as mental and physical purity and cleanliness. The white horse with the eyes of *mi la ka*⁴¹ assigned to the Moon God (*zla ba'i lha*) is considered to be the horse of the king who will rule the world (*sa steng dbang du byed par 'gyur*). The qualities of the red and *ne tso* coloured horses are similar: *ne tso* is the colour of Sun's horse (*nyi ma'i rta*). If the king rides it in a battle, he will achieve his aims and rule the world. Red horses are linked to Vaiśravaṇa (*rnam thos sras kyi lha*). If the king rides a red horse, there is no doubt that he will govern the world. To resume, it is fair to say that these qualifications and assessments presumably served the purpose to find the best horse for the king and the suitable horse for warfare.⁴²

tshor zhing mi 'khrugs la [...] 'jigs pa kun las sdar ba dang / mi gtsang ba la mi smod cing [...] bsrung bar rab du dka' ba dang //

³⁸ For the full text, see *ibid.*: 43–44.

³⁹ See *ibid.*: 95.

⁴⁰ The Tibetan term *ne tso* commonly means "parrot". Does it mean that the horse is bright coloured? The precious horse (*rta mchog rin po che*) as the one of the seven symbols of the *chakravartin* is of white or blue-black colour; see Dayab (1992: 107) where he also mentions two textual sources and Beer (1999: 163).

⁴¹ A certain plant?

⁴² See Śālihotra (1987: 94–97).

The horse classes of "Saloter" in Persian

This fourfold classification of horses spread in other cultures and entered Tibetan and Persian horse manuals. It was adapted for example in the 17th-century treatise *Tarjamah-i-Saalotar-i-asbaan*, "A Treatise on Horses Entitled Saloter or, a Complete System of Indian Farriery", a manual on horses that was translated from Sanskrit to Persian.⁴³ By the end of the 18th century, Joseph Earles translated this hippological and hippiatric text into English.⁴⁴ Although the basic medical concepts came from India, they were lately influenced by the Persian-Arabic tradition. The author dedicates one chapter to the four classes of horses: here they are called *brahmin*, *kehtrie*, *byes*, and *seuder*.⁴⁵ The character and qualities assigned to the classes resemble Śalihotra's presentation.

The brahmin horse

These horses

are for the most part of the Nukrè⁴⁶ kind, dove-eyed, finely shaped, of an elegant figure, and graceful in all their motions. They are remarkably clean and delicate in their food, and always calm and even-tempered. Their sweat is of an agreeable odour; they neither kick nor bite, but are under the strictest command and discipline. They bear the warrior well with their own and his armour, and have a clear, strong, animating voice.⁴⁷

The kehtrie horse

These horses are considered "an alert, brisk, active, strong vehement, swift, choleric, vindictive, fierce race. Their bodies are always constitutionally in a ferment. They kick and bite but are neither afraid of an elephant nor a lion, fire or water, nor does the wound of a sword much affect them. Their understanding is of less magnitude than their bulk, but their voice, like the voice of a lion, is tremendous, loud, and awful. They are in general a very stout race of horses of the

⁴³ See http://www.perso-indica.net/work/tarjuma-yi_salotar-i_asban

⁴⁴ For the discrepancies between the Persian and the English versions, see Oloff (1981: 32–38).

⁴⁵ Earles (1788: 37–38).

⁴⁶ A study of the horses' coat colours might reveal further links to the Arabic tradition. The names used are obviously derived from the Arabic language. The colour white is called Nukrè "when appl[ied] to a horse"; see Earles (1788: 25).

⁴⁷ *ibid.*: 37.

Kumaet colour—assessed as the best colour⁴⁸—well-shaped, clean-limb'd, and excellent for war."⁴⁹ This characterisation does not sound as positive as Śalihotras' in the Tibetan translation but the assessment is still the same: they are the best horses for war.

The byes horse

These horses are for the most part of the sirgha or bright bay colour. They are swift, have thick short necks, and large bellies. If a horse of this kind should have yellow eyes, he will be so exceedingly fond, they say, of spirituous liquor that if a vessel full of it be laid before him, he will drink it as if water. He is never jaded with long fatiguing journeys and is admirably patient of hunger and thirst. The class of horses is excellent for the road, going expeditious, safe, and easy.⁵⁰

The seuder horses

These horses like

impure and filthy things, eating ordure, dung and rubbish of stubble and sticks: they wallow in excrement and urine, and seemingly take delight in doing so. Their breath is nauseously foetid; they are patient under the whip, and their eyes are perpetually glutted with loathsome filthy rheum. They are in short altogether disgusting to the sight, and a very despicable weak race.⁵¹

The description closes with the following rhyme:

The Seuder being the lowest Indian Class,
eats filth and excrement instead of grass.⁵²

These insensitive horses are the worst of all, an ugly and disgustingly weak race. Like the Indian and Tibetan *brahmin* and *kṣatriya* horses, the *brahmin* and *kehtrie* horses are assessed as superior classes. Their outstanding quality is based on their character and nature and not on their exterior form such as body shape and coat colour. As for the *brahmin* horse, it is particularly the description of the fodder and

⁴⁸ *ibid.*: 32. The colour called Kumaet (Arabic *kumayt*) is a mixture of black and red resembling the colour of a date, see *ibid.*: 29.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*: 37.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*: 38.

⁵¹ *ibid.*: 38.

⁵² *ibid.*: 38.

cleanliness which reminds the reader of the quality called *sattva*.⁵³ The *vaiśya* horses are attributed some unfavourable qualities and characteristics but they are still useful to men and ranked as of a medium quality.

Quite peculiar is the characterisation of the *sūdra* horses, anthropomorphised as outcast, low class, and as alcoholics—in the Persian manuscript the horses that are described as alcoholics are however the *byes* horses that corresponds to the Indian *vaiśya* and the Tibetan *rje rigs*—they are even assessed as unqualified to fulfil any tasks and as more or less useless members of the society. With regards to terminology, it is interesting that the Tibetan translators rendered *sūdra* with *mi dmangs*, a term that nowadays commonly denotes “people, masses”. Therefore, the use of the term in Tibetan literature would require further study.

The origin of varṇa

The categorisation of horses into these four social classes raises some questions: From where does this classification of horses originate? Where does *varṇa* come from? Is this classification applied to anything else? Why was it applied to the horse?

As we have seen, the distinction of horses according to these four *varṇa* followed the assessment of certain physical and behavioural characteristics of the animals. In Indian culture, the distinction of *varṇa* is an ancient system and can be traced back to cosmogonic concepts that originated in Vedic times. The original number of *varṇa* is four though the Vedic texts can refer either to a group of three or to a group of four *varṇa*, the category omitted being that of the *sūdra*. The *Pañcaviṃśa-brāhmaṇa* and *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* for example refer to three *varṇa* only, those who are not assigned to *brahmin* and *ṣatriya* as the ruling class belong to the “masses” which would be *mi dmangs* in Tibetan. The *Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra* adds the *sūdra* as a fourth group.⁵⁴ To these *varṇa* are attributed certain qualities (*brahman*, *ṣatra*, *viś*), aspects of power (splendour, greatness, fame), ontological entities (self, human, animal), deities (Agni, Indra or Vayu, and Sūrya), the cosmological world (earth, atmosphere, and sky), natural elements (fire, wind, sun), times of day (morning, midday, afternoon), bodily functions (speech, breath, sight), sections of the

⁵³ For the characterisation of *brahmin* and *ṣatriya*, see for example Smith (1994: 36–42).

⁵⁴ *ibid.*: 27–54.

Veda (*ṛg, yajur, sama*) and so on.⁵⁵

The *Puruṣasūkta* in the *Ṛgveda* is the most well-known text on the origin of the *varṇa* and describes the magical and cosmogonic offering of the *puruṣa*, a kind of “Urwesen” out of which the world originates.⁵⁶ The Brahmins created the four *varṇa* to structure the society. Particularly interesting for the present discussion is verse twelve concerning the *puruṣa* as origin of the four *varṇa*:

Out of his mouth, the *brahmin*,
 Out of his arms, the *kṣatriya*,
 Out of his legs, the *vaiśya* and
 Out of his feet, the *śūdra*.

Planets, gods, heaven, earth, directions and so on originate from the *puruṣa*'s sense organs and other body parts.⁵⁷ Presumably, the inclusion of the origin of the four *varṇa* in the *Ṛgveda*—the holiest of the Hindu texts—was meant to legitimise and establish the *brahmin*'s superiority. In order to do so, the authors used the word *jāti*, “birth”, a term nowadays usually translated as “caste”. Though the four *varṇa* didn't, and still do not, reflect the social reality, the *varṇa* theory was nevertheless applied to structure the thousands of Indian *jāti*.

There were social classes such as *brahmin* and *kṣatriya*. The designation *vaiśya* however is unclear. It is derived from *viś*, which means something like “lineage” and includes the complete population, the commoners or masses who are neither *brahmin* nor *kṣatriya*.⁵⁸ The term's connotation is negative as it determines the members of this *varṇa* via the exclusion from the others. Sanskrit *śūdra* becomes even more problematic as it includes all kinds of tribes.

Tibetan Classification

Apart from the above Indian concepts, the hippological sections in the horse manuscripts also classify horses according to Tibetan or Central Asian models. These classifications are not directly associated with a social class; rather they are linked with other categories such

⁵⁵ *ibid.*: 67.

⁵⁶ Schneider (1989: 44–49).

⁵⁷ For the German translation, see *ibid.*: 48.

⁵⁸ Smith (1994: 42–44) and Schneider (1989: 51).

as the elements, animal species or animated being (*srog chags*)⁵⁹, and horse types, each element assigned to a certain physical shape and mental quality, in a classification process resembling the Indian one. After a brief survey of the Indian-Greek elements and humours applied in medicine, I will introduce the indigenous Tibetan horse types with their assigned elements.

Horses in elemental classes

Tibetan medical and divinatory sciences acknowledge two categories of elements: the Indo-Greek and the Chinese elements. As for the *varṇa*, the number of these elements is not fixed.

These cosmogonic elements are wind (*rlung*), fire (*me*), and water (*chu*). With earth (*sa*) and ether (*nam mkha'*) they total to five elements. They are linked to Indo-Greek medical concepts and related with the humours that correspond to the Sanskrit *doṣa*. They are *vata*, *piṭṭa*, and *kapha* and correspond to the Tibetan *rlung* (wind), *mkhris pa* (bile), and *bad kan* (phlegm), collectively referred to as *nyes pa gsum*. The Tibetan classification of horse classes follows the Indo-Greek elemental group, that is, wind, fire, water, earth, and occasionally ether. In the manuscript of Sras po 'Jigs med, the expert on horses called g.Yu gzher legs khrid summons seven pupils to transmit his teachings on the classification of five horse types: these are *mdo ba*, *bya to*, *gyi ling*, *gyam shing*, and *bu ron*, a classification found in many other hippological manuscripts as well.⁶⁰

The *mdo ba* is of the wind element, the *bya to* of the earth element, the *gyi ling* of the water element, and the *gyam shing* of fire element. With the *bu ron* of the ether element, five types of horse are differentiated.⁶¹

⁵⁹ The category *srog chags*, for example, is used in the manuscript of *bla ma Ye shes rgya mtsho* from Nyile in Tsum; see Maurer (2001: 70).

⁶⁰ This manuscript presents orthographical variations such as *bya lto* and *phug ron* and refers to two other types called *khu gyen* and *rong bu*; see Maurer (2001: 135–137).

⁶¹ *g.yu gzher legs 'khrid de bdun bos / mdo ba rlung gi[s] khams / bya lto sa'i 'khams / gi ling chu'i 'khams / gyam shing me la / bu ron nam mkha'i rigs dang lnga ru 'byed / For the German translation, see *ibid.*: 133–134.*

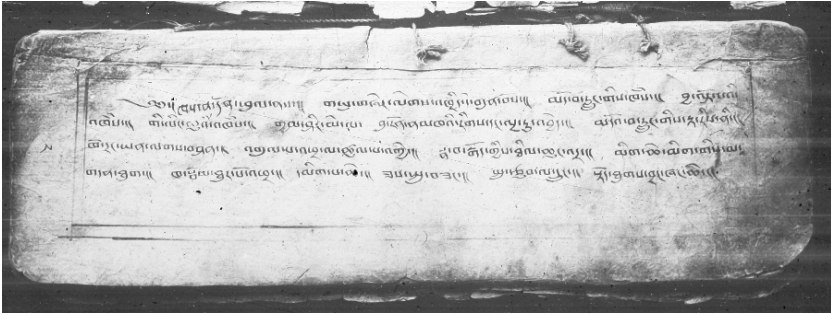


Fig. 2 – Horse Types and Elements. Photo courtesy of Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP, Reel No. 91/1)

The Gesar Epic also sheds some light on these types of horses:

rta mdo ba'i rig[s] la rnam bzhi yod / mdo ba be to mu khengs gsum / gyi ling 'di dang rnam bzhi yin//

Among the *mdo ba* horses, there are four different types: *mdo ba*, *be to*, *mu khengs*, these three and with *gyi ling* they are four types.⁶²

The typology of Tibetan horses has not been studied in detail and it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the subject any further. Since the various types of horses are linked to the elements, I will very briefly refer to the information that the Tibetan dictionaries provide on them.

The term *mdo ba* occurs already in the Old Tibetan Dunhuang documents, and denotes not only horses but also yaks (*mdo ba* or '*do ba*).⁶³ The dictionaries relate this horse type to Eastern Tibet, usually Amdo, an area that was, and still is, famous for horse breeding. Jäschke describes this type under its variant spelling '*do ba* as "a breed of fine horses". Das differentiates "'do chung: a good breed of pony, prob[ably] those imported from Amdo" and includes the example: "'do chung nya rlon chab la lding pa 'dra the breed of '*do chung* goes smoothly as fish swimming in water". "'do chen: another Amdoan breed" with the example: "'do chen ri bong gyen du rgyug pa 'dra the '*do chen* horse gallops up-hill like a hare". The Tibetan-Tibetan-Chinese dictionary by Zhang regards '*do ba* as synonymous to "horse".⁶⁴

Though Jäschke explains *gyi ling* as the "n[ame] of an excellent breed of horses", Das ascribes the type to eastern Tibet. He defines it

⁶² Stein (1956: 304); the type *be to* is most likely identical with *bya rdo*.

⁶³ See Jäschke 1985: 279; Das 1983: 689, and Zhang 1985: 1413.

⁶⁴ See Jäschke (1985: 74) and Das (1983: 235).

as “name of a good breed of horses from Amdo where there are twelve different breeds, *gyi ling* and *gnam sa* being the best among them.” Zhang describes it simply as “the best horse”.⁶⁵ Das notes furthermore the type *gyer ling* as “a high breed horse or pony”,⁶⁶ which I assume could be a spelling variety of *gyi ling*.

As an additional remark, I would like to mention that according to Blondeau, the term *gyi ling* has been adapted from the Chinese language.⁶⁷ In volume three of the *Gzi brjid*, the meat of the *gyi ling* is listed alongside bird, donkey, buffalo, and cock meat included in the sixteen types of meat of lesser quality that should not be eaten (*nyams pa'i sha la bcu drug ste / gyi ling rta dang bya bon (r. bong) sha / ma he [...] khyim bya de po'i sha las sogs / nyams pa che bas spang bar bya / /*).⁶⁸

Two further types are accounted for in the dictionaries: one is *rong rta* “a horse bred in ... [a rough country]”, or regarded as “horse bred in [...] Sikkim or Bhutan.” Zhang explains it just as *rong yul gyi rta*, without giving a clear definition of what is understood as *rong yul*.⁶⁹ In general, the term *rong* refers to deep and narrow valleys. The other horse type is *mu gyen* “n[ame] of a fine breed of horses imported from Kham and Amdo.”⁷⁰ *Mu gyen* is most likely an orthographic variation of *mu kheng*.

In the manuscript of *Sras po 'Jigs med*, these main horse types are assigned a certain physiology and quality:

The *mdo ba*, the horse type of the wind element: the trunk is straight, and the limbs are slender. The base of the neck is fine, and the lower part of the face is broad. The ears are like the small feathers of a vulture. The eyes are big and the lower eyelids thick. The mouth is coarse, and the region of the noseband is narrow. The hooves are big, and the hair of the mane is good [i.e. the hair is long and thick]. The coat is bristly and solid. The front body is strong, and the chest is broad. In any case, it is beautiful.

The *bya lto* horse, the horse type of the earth element: The site of the saddle is wide, and the hips are flat. The middle of the tail is thick and [the region of] the stomach and chest is big. The head is small, and the mane is flat. The eyes [resemble] those of a pig. Though its nutrition is simple, the shape of the horse is bad. It is not suitable for procreation. Therefore, it is best to sell it.

⁶⁵ See Zhang (1985: 382), *rta mchog gam phul du byung ba'i rta //*

⁶⁶ Das (1983: 236).

⁶⁷ Blondeau (1972: 157). The term *gyi ling* might correspond with the *zi ling* horses of the nomads in northeastern Tibet; see Ronge (1978: 12).

⁶⁸ *Gzi brjid* (vol. 3: 764).

⁶⁹ Jäschke (185: 536), see under the lemma *rong*; Das (1983: 1194), and Zhang (1985: 2727).

⁷⁰ Das (1985: 966).

The *gyi ling* horse, the horse type of the water element: The body is round like bamboo. The limbs are slender, muscles and bones are round. The head is square, and the ears are long. The oesophagus⁷¹ is broad and the region between the nostrils is small. The part of the snaffle reins is exposed and the base of the neck slim. Although it is not the best [horse], it has the characteristics of a good one.

The *gyam shing* horse, the horse type of the fire element: The trunk is elongated, the head is long, and the ears are short. The front body is stocky and the chest broad. The flanks are long and round. The limbs are stubby and straight. The skin is loose. Its power is big. It is the horse of a robber, [suitable] for flight and pursuit.

The *phug ron*, the horse type of the ether element: The trunk is thick and the muscles big. The ventral border of the mandible is high and the indentation on the nostrils coarse. The coat is bristly and thick [literally: many]. The hair of the tail and the mane is good. It is slow, the steps are big and calm. The region of the belly is big. It is the riding horse of the *zhang blon*.⁷²

⁷¹ The translation of *og bar* follows the explanation of the healer and horse doctor mTshams pa Ngag dbang (personal communication in 1997).

⁷² *mdo' rlung gi[s] rta ri[g]s ni / kho[gl] drang yan lag[s] bshan / 'gul pa 'phra la [m]tshul 'gye (r. bkyed) / sna (r. rna) rgod gyis (r. kyi) thülchung 'dra / mig che mig gi[s]ma gdan l' }thug / kha sbom thur po 'phra / [d]mig pa che / zas (r. ze) spu bzang / spu rtsub la drung / stod l' }thug[s] brang zhang (r. zheng) che/ gang ltar byas kyang yid du 'ong ba'o / bya lto'i rta rigs ni / rga (r. sga) l' }phrag yang[s] la spyi (r. dpyi) bo leb/ 'jug snying sbom la [g]sus snying che / mgo chung brgyud {b}leb[s] phag gi mig / gso ba bla (r. sla) yang rta ri[g]s ngan/ spel ba'i rigs men (r. min) tshong na bzang / gyi ling chu'i rta ri[g]s ni / lus po snyug ma 'dril ba 'dra / yan lag shan la sha rus 'dril / mgo ni gru bzhi sna (r. rna) ba ring/ l' }og bar yang la sna ba brag (r. phrag) dog / srab kha thar la ske mgul l' }phra / rab[s] ma yin kyang bzang ba'i rtags / gyam shing me'i rta rigs ni / khog[s] 'gyong mgo ring sna (r. rna) ba thung / {b}stod thung brang zheng che / rked pa ring la 'gril / yan lag sbom la drang / lpags lhod / shed che / 'bro[s]l 'ded byags (r. jag) pa'i rta yin no / phug ron mkha'i rta ri[g]s ni / khog sbom sha sul che / za'u (r. za yung) mtho la nyag sna rags / spu bgod (r. rgod) mang 'jugs ma dang ze ba bzang / sos dal gom pa che la dal / bsus (r. gsus) khyim che / zhang blon gyi 'og rta yin // For the German translation, see Maurer (2001: 133–136).*



Fig. 3 – *The horse types mdo ba, bya lto, gyi ling and gyam shing.* Photo courtesy of Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP, Reel No. 91/1)

A summary on three horse types with a brief assessment of the *gyi ling* horse follows this physiological distinction:

As for the horse, three types are defined: The *mdo ba* resembles a cow placed on a base. One rides it in the region of the beloved relatives; therefore, it is a peaceful [horse]. The *rong bu* is like an antelope chased by a dog. One rides it in the area of the detested enemies. The *khu gyen* is like a she-wolf roaming around in the mountainside. One rides it to flee and to chase [someone]. In the evening, it is faster than in the morning. If one compares it with [others], one assesses it as a good analysis. The assessment of the *gyi ling*: It is the decoration of high nobility. It is the best animal.⁷³

As these passages show, the names for the horse types are not fixed and change even within the same chapter of the text, and element assignments vary from one textual source to the other. Moreover, other texts assign the horse types to other elements.

⁷³ *rta la rigs gsum nges / mdo ba leng (r. glang) brtegs (r. stegs) la bzhang pa 'dra ste / byams pa gnyan (gnyen) yul du {g}zhon pas sos dal pa yin / rong bu sgo (r. dgo) ba khyis 'ded ba 'dra ste / gdang pa (r. sdang ba) dgra yul du {g}zhon / khu gyen spyang mo ri rtsibs spyod pa 'dra ste / 'brod (r. 'bros) [']ded byed pa la zhon / snga gro (r. dro) bas kyang phyi gro (r. dro) 'gyong (r. mgyogs) / blo bsdur nas bzang spyad (dpyad) 'di rtsis so / gyi lng rta yi[s] spyad (r. dpyad) / ya rab[s] gong ma'i {b}rgyan / dud 'gro rnamis kyi mchog[s] //* For the German translation, see *ibid.*: 135–137.

Change in assignment and subcategories of horse types

The elemental assignation of the horses appears to have been a matter of discussion: whereas Sras po 'Jigs med's text refers to an authority called g.Yu gzher legs 'khrid who ascribes the *gyi ling* to water, the horse book of Tshe ring bkra shis bla ma assigns it to the earth element. The expert (*rta mkhan*) here is Cog ro, a name common in manuscripts on horse texts, e.g. Cog ro, Cog ro bu mo rta yi lha and Cog ro rje khye'u chung. The term *cog ro* is well-known from Dunhuang sources as it denotes a Tibetan region and a clan.⁷⁴

Tshe ring bkra shis bla ma's text also distinguishes new horse types and creates further subcategories. It omits the ether element and adds a new category created from all four elements (*'byung bzhi 'dus pa'i khams*). He assigns it to two horse types, thus totalling six types:

In this great practical teaching of Cog ro are, [regarded] from the exterior (*phyi ngos nas*) [of the horse] the four elements. The horse is composed of the four elements: The *mdo ba dar shog* [is the horse] of the wind element, the *jag to ar rgyus* is the horse of the water element, all *gyi ling* [are horses] of the earth element. The *rong ngu be gar* is of the fire element. The *mu gan* is of the element that combines the four elements. The *'dra men* is of the element that combines the four elements.⁷⁵

As the present study shows, a comparison of the manuscripts of Sras po 'Jigs med and Tshe ring bkra shis bla ma reveals changes in the spelling of these types. The horse type called *bya lto* in the one text turns for example to *jag to* or *byeg to* in the other. To create subcategories, the latter links the types with colours and/or aspects. The *byeg to* (*jag to*) is assigned to white and black. The *rong ngu* horse is assigned to *nyin* ("day, sunny side") and *sribs* ("night, shadow"), a distinction that recalls the Chinese concept of *yin* and *yang*, a feature that appears to suggest some Chinese influence. It seems, however, that these assignments do not correlate with the horse's quality.

Remarkable in Tshe ring bkra shis bla ma's manuscript is the fact that the elements that are ascribed to the *gyi ling* horse change. The introductory passage links the *gyi ling* type with the earth element. Following, the *gyi ling* is assigned to various elements and

⁷⁴ See Zhang (1985: 745) and Blondeau (1979: 326, footnote 25).

⁷⁵ *cog ro'i dnar khrid chen mo 'di la phyi ngos nas 'byung ba chen po bzhi yod pas / rta 'byung ba bzhi la[s] grub pas / mdo ba dar shog rlung gi khams / jag to ar rgyus chu'i khams / gyi ling (thams cad) sa'i khams / rong ngu be gar me'i khams / mu gan 'byung bzhi 'dus pa'i khams / 'dra men 'byung bzhi 'dus pa'i khams //* For the German translation, see Maurer (2001: 143).

dimensions; these are space (*gnam*), atmosphere (*bar snang*), earth (*sa*), and water (*chu*). These manifold characterisations of the *gyi ling* could point to a certain peculiarity of these horses. Unlike Sras po 'Jigs med's manuscript, the author does not always ascribe a positive quality to *gyi ling* horses as shown below.

If the *gnam gyi gyi ling* resembles a lion, it cannot be compared with another. If the *bar snang gi gyi ling* is like a dragon it cannot be compared with another. If the *sa'i gyi ling* is like a frog that hides in a meadow one cannot compare it with another. If the *gnam rta gyi ling* is like a one-year old antelope that runs to a cliff it cannot be compared with another. If the *chu'i gyi ling* resembles a fish, one cannot compare it with another. The characteristics of the *gyi ling*: The agility with the mouth is big and the nostrils are large. The forehead is big and the region between the forelegs wide. The muscles of the back are good, and the chest is big. Tail and mane are good and the *tshe skor*⁷⁶ is wide. If it rolls on the back, it looks up and rolls [again]. In the middle of the night it likes to lie down. If it gets up it shakes the four [limbs]. These are the characteristics of the *gyi ling*. [...] About the five types of bad *gyi ling*: the head is short, the hind leg is long, the stomach [resembles] that of a stag. This is a bad type. If the *gyi ling* looks like a one-year-old sheep that is forced down by a load of salt, it is a bad type. If the *gyi ling* resembles a one-year-old goat whose companion was sold, it is a bad type. If the *gyi ling* resembles a cracked mask with broken loins, it is a bad type. The head is long, the hind leg short and the belly [like the one of] a she-dog. These are the bad types and they are five.⁷⁷

The elemental categories and the varṇa theory in other contexts

The elemental categories and the *varṇa* theory are not solely applied in Tibetan horse medicine. They appear, rather, as two approaches used to structure visible features of bodies and environment. Chinese divination, for example, bases its divinatory concept on four (or five) elements and the associations among them, developed independently

⁷⁶ This body part is not identified, it could be related to *'tshe ba*, and denote the region of the psalterium, see Jäschke (1985: 459). According to mTshams pa Ngag dbang (personal communication in 1997) it could be the body part between the spur and the hoof.

⁷⁷ *gnam gyi gyi ling seng ge 'dra ba byung na cis kyang mi thub 'byung / bar snang gi gyi ling 'brug 'dra na cis kyang mi thub 'byung / sa'i gyi ling sbal pa na la gab pa 'dra na cig byung na cis kyang mi thub 'byung / gnam rta gyi ling sgo (r. dgo) thong zur la rgyugs pa 'dra na cis kyang mi thub 'byung / chu'i gyi ling nya 'dra ba cig byung na cis kyang mi thub 'byung gyi ling yin pa'i mtshan nyid ni kha rtsal che la sna bug yangs / spral sdeng (r. dpral steng) che la lag bar yangs / {b}shul sha bzang la brang gdengs che / rnga sngog (r. rngog) bzang la tshe skor yangs / 'dre (r. 'gre) ba'i 'dus na rte (rt. lta) 'dres (r. 'gre) byed / nyin mtshan phyed par nyal la dga' lang(s) pa'i dus na bzhi srugs byed / gyi ling chags pa'i mtshan nyid yin // For the German translation, see Maurer (2011: 144–145 and 147–148).*

from the Indo-Greek theory. The elements are related to five cosmogonic elements called *keg*, *ji*, *kungs*, *shang*, and *'u*. They are related to the five common elements (*rus khams*): wood (*shing*), fire (*me*), earth (*sa*), iron (*lcags*) and water (*chu*).” The *sde srid* Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705), the Fifth Dalai Lama’s regent, applies these categories in a very similar way, that is to describe physiognomic characteristics and/or the voice of a person.⁷⁸

The *varṇa* theory appears as a more general pattern for qualification. In India, it was not only applied to categorise humans and horses but also a common qualifier for the building ground. The geomancer who determines the construction site tested the characteristics of the ground (*vastu lakṣaṇa*) such as the smell, taste, colour, and consistency in order to assign it to a specific class. Of a striking similarity to the horse’s characteristics is the following assessment of the ground described in a *Śilpaśāstra*: earth with a ghee-like smell is assigned to the *brahmin* class, a blood-like smell to the *kṣatriya*, a rice-like smell to the *vaiśya* and a wine-like smell to the *sūdra* class.⁷⁹ The Tibetans adopted this *varṇa* theory, with Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho adding a fifth category in the geomantic chapter of his *Vaidūrya dkar po*. The colour of the earth determines the quality and class affiliation: “Oily black earth or earth with the colour of the five precious things is good. White is assigned to the king (*rgyal rigs*), yellow to the nobility (*rje rigs*), red to the people (*dmangs*), green to the Brahmins (*bram ze*), and oily black for the outcasts (*gdol*).”⁸⁰

Conclusion

The Indian hippological tradition represented by Śālihotra characterises horses by assessing physical shape, the colour of coat and eyes, odour, and behaviour, including preferences for food. Finding the best horse for the king and the most suitable horses for warfare may be the main purpose of this assessment but it is certainly not the only one. Śālihotra links the horses’ physical and mental qualities with specific categories that are also applied to the structure of social classes (Sanskrit *varṇa*, Tibetan *rigs*).

A similar procedure is noticeable in Indian cosmogonic tradition, where social classes are used as a category to structure the world, the environment, and the universe. Here, the three or four social classes

⁷⁸ See Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1996, *stod cha*, 259.15 and 260.4–7).

⁷⁹ Bose (1926: 67).

⁸⁰ Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1996, *smad cha*: 282): *snun nag rin chen kha dog lnga / byung bzang dkar po rgyal rigs dang / rje rigs ser po dmangs dmar po / bram ze sngon po gdol pa nag / snun*. For the German translation, see Maurer (2009: 285).

are defined through other aspects such as directions, seasons, deities, elements and body parts and animals and so on.⁸¹

A similar approach is followed in the Tibetan hippological tradition, where the assignment of horses to the different elements—wind, water, fire, and earth—determines their specific physiology and mental quality.⁸² The whole body of the horse, as well as its individual parts, are identified with a certain shape. In the Tibetan hippological tradition, social class appears to be of secondary importance, as horses are not directly assigned to a specific one, yet, depending on the elemental assessments, horses are qualified as particularly suitable for specific classes such as the *zhang blon*, the nobility in general or, for example, a robber who presumably represents the lowest class (*rigs*).⁸³

The elements applied to characterize horses in Tibetan theory are identical to the natural-philosophical Greek elements. Initially three in number—wind, water and fire—the elements increased to four when the philosopher Empedocles (ca. 495–435 BCE) who, by the way, was said to be vegetarian—added earth to their group.

These in turn correspond to the bodily elements, namely the three—four by the beginning of the 5th century—humours of the Greek humoral pathology: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and brown bile.⁸⁴

It was the Greek physician Galenos of Pergamon (ca. 130–200 CE) who ascribed primary qualities to the elements, both natural and humoral: warm and wet (wind and blood), cold and wet (water and phlegm), warm and dry (fire and yellow bile) cold and dry (earth and brown bile). The original theory focused on the micro- and macro-cosmic relations, the relation of the humours and the cosmic elements, their qualities and the seasons.⁸⁵ Later on, further aspects and qualities were assigned such as colour, taste, seasons, times of the day, age, and so on. It was the famous Plato (427/8–348/7 BCE) who linked the cosmic elements with physical shapes.⁸⁶

⁸¹ See for example Smith (1994: 67, 70, 75, 81). The number of social classes is not fixed.

⁸² They correspond with the “bodily elements” or humours (*nyes pa*) wind (*rlung*), phlegm (*bad kan*), bile (*mkhris pa*); occasionally blood (*khrag*) is added the a fourth.

⁸³ Apart from qualifying a horse by assigning it to an element, the horse and its body parts are compared with other animals in order to describe its shape and to assess the horse’s quality.

⁸⁴ See Böhme (2014: 92–98). The theory started with three elements; after the 5th century they were found and ether as fifth element was added later; see *ibid.*: 143–144.

⁸⁵ The idea that seasons influence the elements also provides the basis for the Chinese elemental concepts, see Steinert (2016: 239–241).

⁸⁶ See Böhme (2014: 101–104, 163–167).

Furthermore, this concept formed the foundation for the distinction of character dispositions postulated in the doctrine on physique and body structure (sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic), according to which there is a causal connection between elements and mental capacities. In the middle age, Paracelsus (1493–1551) developed, based on the same concept, the doctrine of signature that states a relation between the shape and the inner nature or character of nature and parts of it.⁸⁷

This brief analysis shows that the “traditional Tibetan” concept in horse medicine that relates elements and humours with shapes and mental capabilities corresponds, in terms of medical theories, with Greek concepts.⁸⁸ These theories originated at a time when men were trying to understand the natural environment including animals and humans and represent the first steps taken in the fields of natural and philosophical sciences. The relations between shapes and characteristics assigned to each element express the effort to understand the world and its existing structures, both in terms of micro- and macrocosm, as they classify humans, configure the environment, and offer models of social organisation. By all appearances, social class and horizontal and vertical structures of any kind are nothing but a theoretical frame used to analyse society and could therefore be traced back and reduced to the elemental theories.

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⁸⁷ For Paracelsus, his activities and publications, see Böhme (2014: 127–131) and Eckart (1990: 122–127).

⁸⁸ Though there are links between the Greek and the Babylonian cosmic and medical concepts, it seems that these theories come originally from Greek or Indian tradition whereas the medical theories of hot and cold-diseases appears to originate in Mesopotamia. There, only two seasons where distinguished, summer (hot) and winter (cold). See Steinert (2016: 240).

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