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TIBETAN STES, STES-TE, ETC. AND SOME OF THEIR SANSKRIT CORRESPONDENCES

By Walter Simon

As is generally known, the correspondence Tibetan stes-dban-gis—Sanskrit daivā or daivena was proposed by Johannes Nobel and translated by him as ‘durch Schicksalsfügung’ (by dispensation of fate). He did so in his edition of the Tibetan version Udrayana, offering the correspondence as a conjecture for naivam. The equation has been taken over by Professor Lokesh Chandra into his Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionary, though failing to refer to it there as a conjecture. While I do not wish to contest in any way Nobel’s conjecture, I thought it useful to adduce certain other correspondences, most of which were found when trying—unsuccessfully so far—to corroborate the conjecture by quotations from actual texts.

I venture to offer this attempt as a small tribute to the distinguished Indian scholar whose work we are celebrating in this issue.

I. Sumatiratna

A translation of a substantial portion of the entry stes in Sumatiratna’s Tibetan-Mongolian dictionary has been included by J. E. Bosson in a note to stanza 61 of his edition of the Tibetan and Mongolian versions of Sa-skya Pandita’s Subhāśitaratnāniḍhi (Legs-par bśad-pa'i rin-po-che'i gter). He supports thereby his translation of stes-dban-gis as ‘by good fortune’, which is in fact the most common meaning of this compound. But before dealing with it (under V), I wish to consider the single word stes and a few other combinations.

II. stes in re stes

Two examples for stes in combination with re ‘how’ have been adduced from the Tibetan translation of the Lalitavistara, translated as ‘how excellent!’ in the Sanskrit original the correspondence sobhanam syāt forms the main clause, preceded in the case of the two examples by a conditional clause and translated by Foucaux as ‘ce serait bien’.

III. stes followed by te or ho (so) (sometimes preceded by ma); stes in combination with la

As an example without a Sanskrit text I wish to adduce a passage from the Tibetan version of the Abhinīṣkramana-sūtra, the mNyón-par bḥyun-bahi

3 Pt. 5 (New Delhi, 1988), 972.
4 daivāt followed by kathancit occurs in Divyavadāna, loc. cit., 592, l. 10. The text has, however, not been translated into Tibetan.
5 x, 884 of the Bod-hor-gyi brda-yig (Corpus Scriptorum Mongolorum, 8), Ulanbatur, 1959.
6 See p. 314 of his Treasury of aphoristic jewels (Uralic and Altaic Series, 92), Bloomington, 1969. The Tibetan text of the stanza appears on p. 51, Bosson’s translation of both versions on p. 213. It should be noted that Sumatiratna’s equivalent for stes dban, stabs legs (good mode), occurs in fact as a textual variant of stes dban in stanza 61.
where stes-so is followed by a sentence with stes-te, and in both cases the combinations are preceded by ma. The death of a son is deplored as 'most unfortunate' : *(Tibetan) * T(ripitaka), xxxix, 258e, 1–2) 'E-ma-ho Rans-byed-kyi bu lHag-spyod si-ba de ni te-por ma stes-so/ 'e-ma-ho Rans-byed-kyi bu lHag-spyod si-ba de ni sin-tu te-por ma stes-te/c'os ḡul-ba ḡdi ma t'os-so.

In the second chapter of the Divyāvadāna, the Pūrṇāvadāna (Cowell and Neil, 29, 7–9 and 15–16), we find ma stes-te 'unfortunately' twice for daivayogāt (= daivāt 'disposition of fate'), thus showing the Tibetan version to be more in sympathy than the Sanskrit original with the prospective recipients of clothes and sugar who call on Pūrṇa on days when the more expensive relevant shops are closed *(Ti. T, xli, 114a, 5–6 and b, 1–2).*

In the 25th chapter (loc. cit., 443, 7–8), we find stes-te translating sobhanam when reading about the hunter Halaka who in pursuit of the Kinnari Manoharā recalls having 'fortunately' (stes-te) received from his Nāga the 'unfailing sling' which will enable him to catch her: sobhano 'yam mayamoghah pāśo nāgū labdho Manoharāyāk kinnaryākh kseṣpyāmi, Ti. T, xli, 198d, 2: bdag-gi klu-las don yod-paḥī žaggs-pa t'ob-pa stes-te de miḥam-caḥi bu-mo Yid-kh'rog-ma-la gdab-po snyam-nas... . . .

For stes-la ('luckily') Sumatiratna offers an example in the entry mentioned under I (though without a Sanskrit passage): *nyes-can stes-la sor-ra-re* ('May the guilty-one not have a lucky escape!').

For an example of stes-nas see under IV.

IV. ji-žig-ltar followed by stes (-nas)

An example from the Tibetan version of the Bodhicaryāvatāra—F. Weller in his Index 9 lists in fact two—may serve to illustrate the addition of stes (-nas) to stress the good fortune of the event. ji-žig-ltar renders Sanskrit katham, kathamcid or kathamcidapi 'somehow'. In the verse concerned,10 Finot11 translates *tathā kathamcid api (= de-bzin ji-žig-ltar stes-nas)* as 'je ne sais comment'.

For the translation of ji-žig ltar by stes-dban see under V.

V. stes-dban

As mentioned under I, J. E. Bosson translated stes-dban-gis as 'by good fortune' in a stanza of Sa-skya Paṇḍita's *Subhāśisūvatmanidhi*, which is preferable to Nobel's 'by dispensation of fate'.12 I shall adduce two further examples to confirm this meaning, though in both cases we have no supporting Sanskrit text. The first *(Ti. T, xliii, 222a, 8)* relates the story of a son who, after the death of both his parents, on a walk meets his landlord who turns out 'by good fortune' to be his future benefactor: *dus gzan-žig-na deḥi p'a-ma gnyis dus-la bab-nas/ de p'an-ts'un bk'ɪyam-pa-na stes-dban-gis k'ɪyim-bdag deḥi k'ɪyim-du p'yin-pa.* ... The second example *(Ti. T, xliii, 199e, 1–2)* reports that a woman has become pregnant whose husband had for a long time been praying for a son: *deḥi ts'e-na/ ḡbrog-gnas-na k'ɪyim-bdag cic ḡdu-ga de-la bu*

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10 IX, 27 (Finot) = III, 28 (Weller).


12 This was in fact an improvement on Schiefner's 'power of fate', included in Jäschke's dictionary (p. 222b).
med-nas de yun-rin-po-nas kye-ma bdag-la bu yod-par gyur-cig ces smon-nas stas (instead of stes) dbaṅ-gis deḥi c'uṅ-ma-la sems-can žugs-par gyur-to. . . .

An interesting example of stes dbaṅ-gis occurs in the Tibetan version of the Suvarṇavarnāvadāna which was edited, together with its Sanskrit original by Tissa Rajapatirana in his (unpublished) thesis (Canberra, 1974), ch. 91, translation p. 80. We find there our compound, not like stes-te in IV as an addition to ji-zig-ltar, but as its equivalent: the caravan leader Karna, his ship destroyed in the great ocean, together with a child somehow found a plank. . . . Tibetan: ded-dpon rNa-can yan rgya-mts'o c'en-por gru žig-pa dan / stes-dbaṅ-gis byis-pa žig dan lhan-cig span-leb-la hjus-te. . . . Sanskrit: Karnaś ca sarthavāho mahāsamudraḥ bhagñayānapatāḥ kathaṅcit phalakam āsādyā. . . .

In a similar way Sumatiratna in the entry ji-zig-ltar of his dictionary (1, 695) notes ji-zig-ltar-te stes dbaṅ understanding the te as ni and translating it as inu: jarnbar nigen metu inu jol-un ike.

In conclusion I should like to point out that sobhanam appears to be the most common correspondence to stes and its compounds. As its occurrence in the Divyāvadāna has shown me, it is often translated by ma nyes-so, ma nons-so, or by legs and bzaṅ-po, and sometimes it is completely ignored.

18 Leaving out cases like mk'o (Div. 511, 14/15 and 511, 15/16) and ruṅ-ba (Div. 437, 29/438, 1).