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MEDIEVAL TIBETO-BURMAN LANGUAGES III

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NATHAN W. HILL

1 Introduction

A strict social hierarchy can be observed in the expressions used to describe death in the *Old Tibetan Annals*. This hierarchy reflects the Weltanschauung of the imperial Tibetan government. The document uses five terms for death. In order of descending social prestige they are: *dgung-du gshegs*, *nongs*, *gum*, *bkum*, *btungs*.

2 To go to heaven (dgung-du gshegs)

The most honorific expression is reserved for the emperor. Rather than dying the Tibetan emperor euphemistically 'goes to heaven' (*dgung-du gshegs*). This metaphor of voyage is treated quite literally. For Khri Mang slon Mang rtsan heaven was just another destination:

dgun. Tshang.bang.sna.nas/Khrĭ | Mang:slon. dgung.du. gshegs/ In the winter Khri Mang slon [Mang rtsan] went from Tshang bang sna to heaven.

(IO750.15 [676])

For Khri 'Du srong brtsan heaven is described almost as a wrong turn:

Quotations of the *Old Tibetan Annals* and the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* follow the text given by Wang Yao and Bsod nams skyid (1988). Citations from the *Old Tibetan Annals* and the Zhol inscription use a period for *tsheg* and a colon for a double *tsheg*. Because they lack a double *tsheg*, citations from other texts use a hyphen or space for a *tsheg*. Capitalizations and word breaks are mine. The transliteration follows the Wylie system except that the *gigu inversé* is written <ĭ>.

dgun. btsan.pho: chab.srĭd.la: Mywa.la. gshegs:pa.las/ dgung.du. gshegs/

In the winter the emperor went on campaign against the Mywa, but went to heaven. (IO750.97 [704])

The first emperor mentioned in the text, the famous Srong rtsan Sgam po, receives a somewhat less noteworthy sending away:

de.nas: lo.drug.na'/ btsan:po: Khrĭ.Srong.rtsan: dgung.du. gshegso/After that in six years, the emperor Khri Srong rtsan went to heaven. (PT1288.14 [649])

This expression is only used of the Tibetan emperors, and is used of all three emperors who die in the text.²

3 To grieve, regret; to make a mistake (nongs)

The verb *nongs* is used primarily of royal Tibetan women. All six recorded deaths of women use this verb.³ However, there are two further attestations of the verb. The first reports the death of the heir apparent:

² For the use of *dgung-du gshegs* in other texts relating to imperial times, cf. Erik Haarh (1969: 119).

³ These six women are: the 'grandmother' Mang pangs (IO750.107 [706]); that most remarkable of Tibetan matriarchs Khri ma lod (IO750.134 [712]); Empress Mchims Btsan ma tog Thog steng (IO750.172 [721]); Lady Lha spangs (IO750.205 [730]), the Chinese princess Jincheng (IO750.230 [739]); and Empress Sna nam Mang mo rje Bzhi steng (IO750.240 [742]). The death of the famous Chinese princess Wencheng is not recorded, but her funeral is (IO750.34 [683]). All information on these and other women available from Old Tibetan sources has been superbly studied by Helga Uebach (1997).

sras. Lhas:bon: Dron.na. bzhugs/bzhugs. || pa.las. nongs/
The son, Lhas bon, stayed at Dron, but while staying [there] he died.
(IO750.230 [739])

The final use of this expression in the text reports the death of a Chinese emperor:

dgun.smad. Rgya.rje: nongs.nas// Rgya.rje. gsar.du. bcug:pa/
In late winter the lord of China died; they newly installed a lord of China. (OR8218.49 [762,763])

The trait that royal Tibetan women, an heir apparent, and a Chinese emperor appear to share is that they are royal persons, but are not the Tibetan emperor. The dictionaries record two verbs *nongs* 'to grieve, regret' and 'to make a mistake.' Either a euphemism—'the queen was grieved for' or 'the queen made a mistake'—is conceivable. The second possibility is particularly interesting for it would imply that royals should be able to prevent their deaths, but may occasionally lapse. In contrast, the emperor makes no such mistakes and only 'goes to heaven' when he sees quite fit.

3 To die (gum)

The most neutral word for death used in the *Old Tibetan Annals* is *gum*, attested thirteen times. Three of these simply report a death with no elaboration.⁵ In an additional three examples it is mentioned that a revenue officer dies, re-

⁴ Compare gnong 'to feel ashamed.'

⁵ The three are: Prime minister Khri sum rje (IO750.185 [725]), Prime Minister Mang zham (IO750.193 [727]), and Zhang Khri mnyes Smon zung (IO750.233 [740]).

quiring the appointment of a new revenue officer.⁶ However, the verb is not restricted to natural death:

Da.rgyal:mang.po.rjes/ Mtsho.nag:Stong.rur/ Rgya. Se'u:den.pang.dang/ nol:thabs: bgyĭste/ Da.rgyal. gyang. gum.zhing: || brgyad:khrĭ.stong.la. rdugs.phar. lo.gcig.

Da rgyal Mang po rje fought with the Chinese Se'u den pang in Mtsho nag Stong ru. Although Da rgyal died, he reduced 80,000 [Chinese] to 1,000. So one year. (PT1288.36 [659])

blon.chen.po: Btsan.snya:dang/ Mang.nyen.stag. || tsab:gnyĭs/ dme': byung/ Shang:gyĭ. Sum.chu.bor/ blon.chen.pho. Btsan.snya: gum.

Between Prime Minister Btsan snya and [Mgar] Mang nyen Stag tsab, fratricide⁷ arose. Prime Minister Btsan snya died at the Sum river in Shang. (IO750.39 [685])

It is very unlikely that Da rgyal Mang po rje or Prime Minister Btsan snya died naturally in such circumstances. In another instance three important persons died at the same time; the text makes no mention of the circumstances:

blon.chen.pho: Khrĭ.gzĭgs:dang/ Zhang.btsan.to.re:dang/ Khrĭ.bzang.stag.tsab: || gsum: gum/
The three, Prime Minister Khri gzigs, Zhang btsan to re, and Khri

bzang stag tsab died. (IO750.169 [721])

⁶ Gnubs kho ma re died, and Rdo 'phan kong was appointed (IO750.110 [707]). Lang Sa tseng died, and Zhang Khri mnyes Smon zung was appointed (IO750.147 [715]). Ru yong Phyi gseng died, and Seng go Mon bu was appointed (IO750.160 [719]).

⁷ Compare Hugh E. Richardson (1998: 164 n. 39).

It is hard to imagine that the timing of their deaths was coincidental. The silence of the *Old Tibetan Annals* on this matter is likely deliberate.

The remaining examples include 'Bon Da rgyal convening the council in 694 with Mang nyen Bzhi brtsan and then dying (IO750.67), Skyes bzang Rgyal kong dying just before being appointed prime minister in 757 (OR8218.25), and Gnubs khri mnyen having his property redistributed after his death in 713 (IO750.140). Any of these three examples may have involved intrigue, but the context does not provide sufficient evidence to decide. The famous minister Mgar Stong rtsan dies in 667 (PT1288.47) one year after thong myig arises (byung). I am currently unable to understand what this means, and even whether his death is related to the arousal of thong myig. If thong myig is to be identified with thong myi as some authors suggest, his death would also be a case of homicide. However, homicide would be unlikely to require a year to take effect. The Old Tibetan Chronicle has him die of old age (rgas-te gummo, PT1287.104).

4 To kill (bkum)

The Chinese victims of Tibetan military campaigns fall prey to this verb both in 695 and 745 (IO750.70 and OR8212.6). Otherwise, the verb is used three

About the term thong myig Gnya' gong dkon mchog tshes brtan writes "thong myi dang don gcig / skrang nad cig yin par 'dod mkhan yang yod [the same in meaning as thong myi; also one wanting to be a swollen ill person] (1995: 62 n. 17 on pp. 68-69). On the word thong myi Ngag dbang tshul khrims writes "dgra sha len par yong mkhan gyi ming ste / [The word for one coming to revenge]" and further "'di la thong myig bris pa'ang snang ste / [This may also be written thong myig]" (1997: 302). Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las gives for thong myi verbatim "dgra sha len par yong mkhan [one coming to revenge]" (2002: 1059). Zhang Yisun for thong myi has " (rnying) dgra sha len par yong mkhan gyi mi / [(archaic) a person who comes to revenge]" (1985: 1194). The suggestion of Jacques Bacot et al. that thong myig is equivalent to mig mthong 'see [with] the eye' (1940: 32 n. 8) is not syntactically possible.

times of Tibetans who unwisely conspire against the government and are punished.

snom:bu:pas: dug.ma: mang.po: bzung.nas: bkum.bar: lo.gchig/
The warden(s) seized many poisoners and killed them. So one year.
(IO750.42 [685])

Nyen.kar:Lcang.bur: btsan.po. bkas:bcade/ Gung.rton. bkum/
The emperor having given the order, they killed Gung rton at Nyen kar
Lcang bu. (IO750.70 [695])

Ldeg.ren.pa': || Mnon:snang.grags:dang/ Khe.rgad.mdo.snang. las:stsogs:ba: log.ste: Bon.mo:Na.la.tser: Ldeg.ren.pa.log. || pa.rnams: bkum/

Ldeg ren pa, Mnon snang grags, and Khe rgad mdo snang and others revolted, and at Bon mo Na la tse, Ldeg ren pa and the insurgents were killed. (IO750.99 [705])

Interestingly, there are no clear examples of a Tibetan in the good graces of the emperor being 'killed,' even when a context such as battle strongly implies that the death was violent. It seems therefore likely that in the two examples where the reason for death is not specified the 'killings' were similarly performed at the behest of the Tibetan government. In his analysis of the *Old Tibetan Annals* Chang Kun (1959/60: 131) appears to agree with this analysis; he translates *bkum* as 'execution.'

Bal:po: Yu:sna:kug.tĭ. bkum/Na.rĭ.ba.ba: rgyal.phor: bchug/ They killed Yu sna kug ti [from] Bal po. They made Na ri ba ba king. (PT1288.11[ante 650])

yum: Rnang.pho:dur.myĭg.na. bzhugs.shĭng/ Khu.'byur.lod.btsan || bkum/ dgun. btsan.po. 'Jang.yul.du. gshegste/

The mother [of the emperor] stayed at Rnang pho dur myig, and they killed Khu 'byur lod btsan. In the winter the emperor went to the country of 'Jang. (IO750.93 [703])

The uses of the four verbs for dying discussed so far indicate that death, as conceived of in the *Old Tibetan Annals*, was expressed as a hierarchy of agency radiating from the Tibetan emperor outward. The emperor himself can control his departure from the world (*dgung-du gshegs*). The use of *nongs* to describe the deaths of royalty other than the emperor suggests that they should likewise be able to control the timing of their deaths and simply fail to do so. This inscribes both their social power as members of the royalty and their subordination to the emperor. Ministers and other non-royal Tibetans simply "die" (*gum*). They neither control the timing of their deaths nor do others control it, even when context suggests otherwise (e.g. death in battle). Enemies of the Tibetan state such as foreigners and traitors have no say in their deaths; rather, the Tibetan emperor's agency explicitly or implicitly determines the time and cause of their deaths. They are killed (*bkum*).

5 To massacre (btungs)

This verb is reported rarely by the dictionaries. Only the past stem is given by Das (1902), Zhang (1985), and Ngag dbang tshul khrims (1997) as meaning 'to kill.' All three dictionaries very probably derive this entry from Rin chen bkra shis (1998); Ngag dbang tshul khrims (1997) acknowledges as much. In the Old Tibetan Annals this verb is used only once:

rta'ĭ.lo.la'/ btsan.po: 'O.dang.na. bzhugs.shĭng/ Jĭ.ma.khol.du: Rgya.mang.po: btungs.phar: lo:gchĭg/

⁹ Originally published in 1536, according to Manfred Taube (1978: 172).

In the year of the horse the emperor stayed in 'O dang, and at Ji ma khol they killed many Chinese. (PT1288.50 [670])

However, "many Chinese" may also be killed with the more usual verb *bkum* (cf. IO750.70 [695] and OR8212.6 [745]).

The verb *btungs* is also attested in the south face of the Zhol inscription, line 61:

Bod:gyis: g.yu_i: || :bzlog:nas // Rgya:mang:po: btungs:pas
The Tibetans beat back the (enemy) army and killed many Chinese.
(Li and Coblin 1987: 145 and 160)

Finally, the verb occurs twice in the Old Tibetan Chronicle:

Dba's-skyes-bzang-stag-snang-gis // || Rgya-'i dmag-pon Hon-dze-sangs-dang / 'Gu'-log sgang-du g.yul sprad-nas / Rgya mang-po bthungs ste/|| 'Gu' log Rgya dur-du btagso./

When Dba's skyes bzang stag snang met the general of the Chinese, Hon dze sangs in battle at the 'Gu' log ridge, and killed many Chinese, so 'Gu' log was called "The Chinese Graveyard." (PT1287.378-380)

Bod-kyi dmag-pon/ blon Khri-'bring-gis/ dgra-thabs ...|| dang g.yag ltar byas-nas/ / Go-bar-du g.yul sprad-de/ Rgya mang-po bthungs-nas / Rgya-'i ro gchig gnam-du 'greng-ba yang || (myĭ) 'bum bsad-pa-'i mtshan ma zhes bya-'o

The Tibetan general, minister Khri 'bring, having done like a yak with ... ways of war, he made war at Go bar, and having killed many Chinese, [he said, "this place] will be known as 'one Chinese corpse, upright to the sky,' and 'a hundred thousand slain men.'" (PT1287.521-523, ellipsis and parentheses in original)

With these parallels in mind, the context of the verb *bdungs* appearing in the *Old Tibetan Annals* makes it clear that it is a voiced variant of *btungs*.

blon. skyes: bzang. ldong. tsab. las: stsogs: pas/mu. le: cu. ler. g-yul: sprade: rgya. mang. po: bdungs/Minister ['Bal] Skyes-bzang Ldong-tsab and others went to battle at Mu-le Cu-le and killed many Chinese. (IO750.200-201 [729])

It appears that *btungs* refers to a form of death particularly (perhaps uniquely) characteristic of many Chinese.

6 To die ('chi)

Although the verb 'chi, shis, shi 'die' is widely seen as the neutral word for dying in Written Tibetan, it is notable for its absence in the Old Tibetan Annals. The text has five separate words for death, but lacks the verb 'chi. Christopher Beckwith has argued, based on its paradigm and on similar words in other Asian languages, that 'chi is a loanword from Chinese 死 sǐ (1996: 824). The absence of this word from what may well be one of the oldest Tibetan texts, and a text heavily concerned with death, may be seen as adding weight to Beckwith's argument.

APPENDIX

EXAMPLES FROM THE OLD TIBETAN ANNALS

dgung-du gshegs

- PT1288.14 [649] de.nas: lo.drug.na'/ btsan:po: Khrĭ.Srong.rtsan: dgung.du. gshegso/After that in six years, the emperor Khri Srong rtsan went to heaven.
- IO750.15 [676] dgun. Tshang.bang.sna.nas/ Khrǐ || Mang:slon. dgung. du.gshegs/In the winter Khri Mang slon [Mang rtsan] went from Tshang bang sna to heaven.
- IO750.97 [704] dgun. btsan.pho: chab.srĭd.la: Mywa.la. gshegs:pa.las/dgung.du. gshegs/ In the winter the emperor went on campaign against the Mywa, but went to heaven.

nongs

- IO750.107 [706] dgun. Phyĭng.bar. btsan.po: || yab.gyĭ. mdad.btang/ pyi. Mang.pangs. nongs/ In the winter the funeral of the emperor, the father, was performed at Phying ba. Grandmother Mang pangs died.
- IO750.134 [712] btsan.po.mtshan. Rgya:gtsug. || ru.las/ Khrĭ.lde.Gtsug.rtsan.du. gsold/ pyĭ. Khri.ma.lod. nongs/ They changed the emperor's name from Rgya gtsug ru to Khri lde Gtsug rtsan. The grandmother Khri ma lod died.
- IO750.172 [721] yum. Btsan.ma.tog: nongs.par: lo.chig/ The mother [of the emperor], [Mchims] Btsan ma tog [Thog steng] died.
- IO750.205 [730] lcam: Lha.spangs. nongs/ Lady Lha spangs died.
- IO750.230 [739] sras. Lhas:bon: Dron.na. bzhugs/ bzhugs. || pa.las. nongs/btsan.po: yab. dgun. Bod.yul:du. slar.gshegs/ btsan.mo: Kim.sheng:kong.co. nongs.par. lo.chig/ The son, Lhas bon, stayed at Dron, but while staying

- [there] he died. The emperor, the father, returned to the land of Tibet in winter. The empress Jincheng Gongzhu died. So one year.
- IO750.240 [742] btsan.po: Srong.lde.brtsan: Brag.mar:du'. || bltam/ yum: Mang.mo.rje. nongs:phar: lo.gchig/ The emperor Srong Lde brtsan was born in Brag mar. The mother [Sna nam] Mang mo rje [Bzhi steng] died. So one year.
- OR8218.49 [762,763] dgun.smad. Rgya.rje: nongs.nas// Rgya.rje. gsar.du. bcug:pa/ In late winter the lord of China died; they newly installed a lord of China.

gum

- PT1288.36 [659] Da.rgyal:mang.po.rjes/ Mtsho.nag:Stong.rur/ Rgya. Se'u:den.pang.dang/ nol:thabs: bgyĭste/ Da.rgyal.gyang. gum.zhing: || brgyad:khrĭ.stong.la. rdugs.phar. lo.gcig. Da rgyal Mang po rje fought with the Chinese Se'u den pang in Mtsho nag Stong ru. Although Da rgyal died, he reduced 80,000 [Chinese] to 1,000. So one year.
- PT1288.45 [666] blon.che. Stong.rtsan: 'A.zha.yul.nas: slar || 'khord.te/
 Zrid.mda'r: thong.myig: byung.bar: lo.gchig/ [...] PT1288. 47[667]
 blon.che. Stong.rtsan. Ris.pur.gum.bar: lo:gchig/ Prime Minister [Mgar]
 Stong rtsan returned from 'A zha, thong myig arose at Zrid mda'. [...] The
 Prime Minister [Mgar] Stong rtsan died at Ris pu.
- IO750.39 [685] blon.chen.po: Btsan.snya:dang/ Mang.nyen.stag. || tsab:gnyĭs/dme': byung/ Shang:gyĭ. Sum.chu.bor/ blon.chen.pho. Btsan.snya: gum. Between Prime Minister Btsan snya and [Mgar] Mang nyen Stag tsab fratricide arose. Prime Minister Btsan snya died at the Sum river in Shang.
- IO750.67 [694] 'dun.ma: Glagĭ. Phu.chung.du: 'Bon.Da.rgyal.dang/ Mang.nyen. Bzhĭ.brtsan.gyis. bsduste/ Da.rgyal: gum.bar. lo.chig. 'Bon Da rgyal and Mang nyen Bzhi brtsan convened the council at Phu chung in Glag. Da rgyal died. So one year.

- IO750.110 [707] brung.pa: Gnubs:kho.ma.re. gum: | ste/ skyĭn.bar: Rdo.'phan.kong. bcug/ The revenue officer Gnubs kho ma re died; they appointed Rdo 'phan kong in his place.
- IO750.140 [713] dgun. 'dun. Mong.kar:du/ blon.chen.pho: Khrĭ.gzigs.gyĭs: bsduste/ Gnubs: || khrĭ.mnyen:mon.tsan. gum.nas/ khud.pa: chen.pho. 'bangs: khrĭ.sum:rje.rtsang.bzher.la: phul.bar. lo.chig/ In the winter in Mong ka Prime Minister Khri gzigs convened the council. When Gnubs khri mnyen died, [the Prime Minister] gave [his] subjects [and] great wealth to Khri sum rje rtsang bzher.
- IO750.147 [715] dbyar. 'dun. Zu.spugĭ. Rkyang.bu.tshal:du: blon. Khrĭ.sum.rje.rtsang: // bzher.gyĭs: bsduste/ Rtsang.cen.gyĭ. brung.pa: Lang.Sa.tseng. gum.ste/ Zhang: Khrĭ.mnyes:Smon.zung.bcug/ Minister [Dba's] Khri sum rje Rtsan bzher convened the summer council at Rkyang bu tshal in Zu spug. The revenue officer of Rtsang chen, Lang Sa tseng died, and they installed Zhang Khri mnyes Smon zung.
- IO750.160 [719] ru.gsum:gyĭ. rje.zhing.gyĭ. phying.rĭl:gyĭ. rtsis:dang/ sog.ma'ĭ. rtsis:dang/ Ru.yong.Phyĭ.gseng. gum ste/ brung.pa: Seng.go:Mon.bu: bchug. || pa'ĭ.rtsis: bgyis/ They did an accounting of the phying-ril of the demesne lands of the three horns, and an accounting of the fodder tax, and an accounting of the installation of Seng go Mon bu as revenue officer on the death of Ru yong Phyi gseng.
- IO750.169 [721] blon.chen.pho: Khri.gzigs:dang/ Zhang.btsan.to.re:dang/ Khri.bzang.stag.tsab: || gsum: gum/ The three, Prime Minister Khri gzigs, Zhang Btsan to re, and Khri bzang stag tsab died.
- IO750.185 [725] blon.chen. || po: Khrĭ.sum.rje. gum/Prime Minister Khri sum rje died.
- IO750.193 [727] blon.chen.pho: Mang.zham: gum/Prime Minister Mang zham died.
- IO750.233 [740] Zhang.Khrĭ.mnyes.Smon.zung: gum.bar: lo.gcig/ Zhang Khrimnyes Smon zung died. So one year.

OR8218.25 [757] Blon. Skyes:bzang. Rgyal.kong. blon.che'i. || 'og:dpon.'tshal: 'tshal.ba.:las: gum:/ Minister Skyes bzang Rgyal kong was being proclaimed deputy to the prime minister, but he died.

bkum

- PT1288.11 [ante 650] Bal:po:Yu:sna:kug.ti. bkum/ Na.ri.ba.ba: rgyal.phor: bchug/ They killed Yu sna kug ti [from] Bal po. They made Na ri ba ba king.
- IO750.42 [685] snom:bu:pas: dug.ma: mang.po: bzung.nas: bkum.bar: lo.gchig/ The warden(s) seized many poisoners and killed them. So one year.
- IO750.70 [695] Nyen.kar:Lcang.bur: btsan.po. bkas:bcade/ Gung.rton. bkum/blon.che. Khri.'bring. | 'A.zha.yul.du. mcĭs.shing/ Stag.la:rgya.dur.du. Rgya'ĭ.dmag.pon. 'Wang.zhang.sho.dang. g-yul.sprade. Rgya.mang.po. bkum.bar. lo.chig / The emperor having given the order at Nyen kar Lcang bu, they killed Gung rton. Prime Minister Khri 'bring went to 'A zha, and met the Chinese general 'Wang zhang sho in battle at Stag la rgya dur, and killed many Chinese. So one year.
- IO750.93 [703] yum: Rnang.pho:dur.myĭg.na. bzhugs.shĭng/
 Khu.'byur.lod.btsan || bkum/ dgun. btsan.po. 'Jang.yul.du. gshegste/ The
 mother [of the emperor] stayed at Rnang pho dur myig, and they killed
 Khu 'byur lod btsan. In the winter the emperor went to the country of 'Jang
- IO750.99 [705] Ldeg.ren.pa': || Mnon:snang.grags:dang/ Khe.rgad.mdo.snang. las:stsogs:ba: log.ste: Bon.mo:Na.la.tser: Ldeg.ren.pa.log. || pa.rnams: bkum/ Ldeg ren pa', Mnon snang grags, and Khe rgad mdo snang and others revolted, and at Bon mo Na la tse, Ldeg ren pa and the insurgents were killed.
- OR8212.6 [745] rgya.phal.cer. bkum/ They killed most of the Chinese.

btungs

- PT1288.50 [670] rta'ī.lo.la'/ btsan.po: 'O.dang.na. bzhugs.shǐng/ Jǐ.ma.khol.du: Rgya.mang.po: btungs.phar: lo:gchǐg/ In the year of the horse the emperor stayed in 'O dang; at Ji ma khol they killed many Chinese.
- IO750.200 [729] blon. skyes: bzang. ldong. tsab. las: || stsogs: pas/ mu. le: cu. ler. g-yul: sprade: rgya. mang. po: bdungs/ Minister ['Bal] Skyes-bzang Ldong-tsab and others went to battle at Mu le Cu le and killed many Chinese.

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