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An Introduction to the text of the Newly Discovered Khrom chen Stele

Pa tshab pa sangs dbang 'dus

“gsar du rnyed pa'i khrom chen rdo ring yi ge mtshams sbyor”

bod ljongs zhib 'jug 61.1 (1997): 10-18

Translated by Nathan Hill

The texts of stele and rock inscriptions from the era of the Tibetan empire are not only a precious cultural heritage produced by our ancestors but also important textual data for modern Tibetology. In 1980 there were no more than some ten stele and rock inscriptions well known among tibetologists and ancient Tibetan historians. Although the three edicts wherein both the father Khri srong lde btsan and the son Khri lde srong btsan aimed to establish holy dharma in perpetuity are not to be seen inscribed on rock or stone, luckily for posterity the originals are cited *in extenso* in the *mkhas pa'i dga' ston* by Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba. Recently for the last decade or so some old texts inscribed on rocks and stele have been discovered from various Tibetan cultural areas. Of these I myself offered an introduction to the Lho brag stone inscription in *Bod ljongs zhib 'jug* 1982 (Pa tshabs pa sangs dbang 'dus 1982). Esteemed Chab spel tshe brtan phun tshogs introduced the Ldan ma brag rock inscription in 1987 in *Bod ljongs zhib 'jug'* and the eminent Swiss Tibetologist Ms. Heller presented a discussion and analysis of it at the meeting of the International Association for Tibetan Studies at Fagernes, Norway (Heller 1994). Hitherto however there been no analysis or introduction of the Khrom chen stele, nor the Spu hreng stele. Similarly there has been none of Yer pa rock inscription of which many expressions are opaque, the 'Jang yul rock inscription, etc. So, on this occasion I would like to offer a first brief analysis concerning the Khrom chen stele.

The Khrom chen stele was discovered in a small village called Khrom chen in the jurisdiction of Lha rtse county in upper Gtsang. There are two areas there called Phur khrom phu and Mda' la khrom mda'. In the middle of a field to the south of the village is a great river (*gtsang chab chen mo*) and to the South West are Grom pa rgyang and Mang mkhar, to the east there are some famous places (*gnas chen*), such as the Jo mo nang and Dge ldan phun tshogs gling. Some years ago in that small village a large marvelous collection of tombs from the Tibetan imperial era were newly discovered. Therefore I prepared a paper as a form of initial research, which I offered as an address in 1992 at the meeting of the International

Association for Tibetan Studies in Fagernes, Norway (Pa tshabs pa sangs dbang 'dus 1994). I will thus not elaborate further here.

The Khrom chen stele is toppled over in the middle of a hilly area (*ri ma thang*) behind that village, broken to pieces, unattended, and pitiful to onlookers. Other than the the text of the stele to be examined, previously at that cite there was a temple (*gtsug lag khang*) where a group of clerics stayed. (*rdo ring de 'i yi ger dpyad pa las snga dus de phyog su dge 'dun gyi sde gnas gtsug lag khang zhid mchis pa gor mi chag mod/*). Other than a number of tombs to the east and in front of where the stele was discovered these days hardly a remnant of the temple (*gtsug lag khang*) remains visible.

The stele was discovered in 1990 broken into three pieces. So it was then transported to the Nor bu gling ka in Lhasa for conservation. There is writing on four sides of the stele.

The front face has 32 lines of writing; the back face has 28 lines of writing; the right face has 24 lines of writing; the left face 30 lines of writing. Both the back and front faces have an average of about seven syllables per line of writing, while the right and left faces have about three or four syllables per line of writing. Because of conditions such as suffering from the sun and rain for around a thousand years, having broken and what not, many syllables are effaced, thus some clarifications according to our own inspection are offered here adjoined.

The text of the front face

- // shes.rab.rnal.'byor
 gtsug.lag.khang.gi.chos.
 gl.chags.khung.pa' /lha.sras
 kyi.bkas.bcad.pa'i.mdo/ /btsan.
 5. po.khri.gtsug.lde.btsan.gyl.sku.yon.di.
 nas.nar.ma.mdzad.pa.nam.du.yang.myi.
 mye.dbri.gzhan.gyir.myi.bsgyur/ dar.ma.

 (This line is not clear because of the fissure in the stele)
 pa'.mo.ga.ya.po.yan.cad.gar.yod.
 10. bying.shugs.myi.sug /gzhan.yang.
 gtsug.lag.khang.ya.ya.nas.zhus.te.
 chad.pa.tshun.sa.slad.zhal.gyis
 bzhes.so.'tshal.'dir.de.bzhin
 nam.zhar.mdzad/ sus.kyang.de.las
 15. 'gul.ba.mi.bgyi.bar.yid.dam.dang.bro
 yod.kan.stsal.ba.la.gtogs.par
 'tsal.clg

- /dgung.gcig.bzhin/ dkon.
mchog.la.bshos.cha.gcig.drang./
20. ngas.ma.las.
.gsar.phyogs.lung
ma. .gcIg.ba. . . nad.snyom. . . .
.dge.msnyen.bcu'i.'tsho.ba'i.slad/
dge.slong.bzhis.rgyun.du.bsnyom.ba.ci.
25. spyod.du.mdzad/ dar.ma.mdos.gra'.
gcig.dge.bsnyen.bcu'I.nang.nas.
.dru.du.gdugs.la.bar.cad.ma.mchis.
par.klag dus.su. . . du.men.tog.rol.
mo.sil.snyan.bdug.spod.yon.chab.gdugs.
30. .gas.mcod.byangs.kyis.dkon.mchog.
'khor.dang.yang.mchod. btsan.po.khri.
gtsug.lde.btsan.chos.skyong.ba'I.sku.ched/

Text of the back face of the stele

- mchod.stod.gsol/ dgung.gcIg.
tu.dge.bcu.spod.bgyI.nar.ma.stang.
rgyad.du.myI.ngo.du.mchIs.bas.dkon.
mchog.la'.sang.zhe.re.ban.de.sgo.mang.
5. bzhI.la.myi.ngo.re.sman.nam.spos.zhe.re.
. . ba'am. . . 'a.ya.re.dbul/ .
.

(This line is not clear because of the fissure in the stele)

- dbul.zhIng.sku.yon.du.bsngo/ dgun.
sla.ra.ba.dang.dpyid.sla.ra.ba.nya'
10. bar.zhugs.mur.khru(?) brgya.rtsa.brgyad.
lha.rIs.kyis.rgyu.sbyar.te.lha.myIs.
bltam/ dbyar.sla.ra.ba.dang.ston.sla.ra.ba.
ra.ba.nya'.dbar.sa.ca'.sa.ce.tI.stong.
15. lhas.rIs.gyIs.sbyar.te.lha.myIs.gdung.
.s.ga'.stom.ba.di.gyi.'bangs.kyis.
.gyam.la.ce.ti.mu.ti.phyag.rgya.dang.bchas.
pa'.bum.
20. yang.dkon.mcog.
mcod.cing.smon.lam.gdab.dus.
dang.sbyar.zhIng.lha.ris.kyi.'bangs.
skyis.sems.can.'bum.phrag.srog.gdon.
pa.gdugs.re.zhIng.yang.dkon.mcog.
25. mcod.smon.lam.gdab.skabs.na.
mchIs.pa.na/ yul.myI.la.stsogs.pa.

30. chos.syan.pa.la.chos.bshad.cing.blab.
 rgya.mnga'.na.bla.thabs.chl.'os.su.dkon.
 mcog.mchod.'khor.rnam.bzhlngs/
 phonggs.pa.la.sbyin.gtong.bgyi//

Text of the right face of the stele

5. btsan.po.khri.
 gtsug.lde.btsan.
 gyi// sku.yon.nar.
 ma.mdzad.pa/ ma.
 bri.gzhan.gyi.ra..
 bsgyur.na/ 'dir..
 sa.nas.bsod.
 nams:b
 . . ca.he.gang. . .
 10. bgyid.do/ . .
 . . . la. . .
 . . . yang.d .
 bsu . rkya . .
 btang.ba'l.ma .
 15. . s.'byungpa'i
 don.dang./ mdor.
 na.myang.go.bab .
 'l.bag.dam.gya .
 . . sbya . .
 20. . s.log.pha.
 . . dal.b .
 . n.shes.rab.
 kyis.goms.
 par.bgyis

Text of the left face of the stele

5. . . srld.la.
 stsogs.pa.
 mnga'.thang.
 . s.sangs.
 rgyas.kyi.yon.
 . . chags.

10.
 . . mya . n .
 dge.
 ba'i.bshes.gnyen.
 mdzad.par.rjes.
 'bangs.kyls.
15. . . . ng.bcas.
 . . . r. sro.
 . . . b. gdab.

20.

25.

30. ba.bgya.yan.cad/

As a basis for the immediately preceding texts I have copied the text of the stele made available to me by colleagues connected with the Nor bu gling ka, and have compared with this the text of a photograph (*phran ngo mas par len*). Letters effaced or difficult to recognize are marked "...". Because not a few syllables are unclear a number of syllables not thus indicated may be incorrectly transcribed, these will be explained.

Furthermore because of its conciseness and the use of archaic expressions (*brda rnying*) the meaning of the text appears difficult indeed to understand. Nevertheless, in order to benefit Tibetan studies historical research and arrive at a basic analysis I offer here some annotations and analyses of the stele text to the extent I can.

1. *shes rab*. This is discriminating wisdom of phenomena, which discriminates among phenomena. When the entity to be examined, the self-object (*rang yul*), is considered *shes-rab* effectively differentiates its essence, particularities, and general characteristics. It is the action which best resolves doubts. (las can 'jug go).
2. *rnal 'byor*. This means the arousal of power on the completely pure path.
3. *gtsug lag khang*. A temple of the triple gem.

4. *lha sras*. A name applied to the Tibetan emperor. It is said that the first Tibetan emperor Gnya' khri btsan po came to rule over black headed men from the son (*sras*) of god (*lha*). Therefore that name caught on.
5. *bkas bcad pa'i mdo*. An edict proclaimed by the emperor.
6. *Khri gtsug lde brtsan*. Also known by the name Ral pa can 'fellow with braids' because the braids of his hair hung greatly. He reigned from 815 to 838 or 841. This emperor invited many Indian and Nepali pundits who together with Tibetan translator pundits newly translated many discourses of the Buddha. He inscribed the Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription of 821-22, and was assassinated by minister Dba' stag sna.
7. *sku yon*. I suspect this is a prayer (*zhabs brtan*) or religious ceremony (*rim gro*) which aims to maintain the long life of the emperor. It is called sku yon because of the great qualities of the emperor, like physical qualities, wages, and remuneration.
8. *myi dbri*. This means to not become fewer.
9. *dar ma*. This appears to be an old way of writing the Sanskrit word *dharmā*. It can be seen rather frequently in the old Dunhuang documents.
10. *nam zhar*. This means the same things as *nam yang* 'always'.
11. *yid dam*. The same in meaning as *yi dam* 'tutelary deity'. In the Tantra gods, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas who are the uncommon things to rely one are called *yi dam*. To these one has a promise and commitment.
12. *bro*. This means the same thing as *mna'* 'oath' as in *bro bor* which means the same thing as *mna' skyel ba* 'to take an oath'.
13. *dgung gcig bzhin*. I suggest that this is the same in meaning as *nyin gcig* 'one day, once'.
14. *bshos cha*. This has the meaning of *zas* 'food' for example the type of food brought before deities, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is called *bshos cha*.
15. *dge bsnyen*. A person who possesses doctrine who stays at home and promises to hold to four or five teachings.
16. *dge slong*. A person who performs religious rites and promises to hold 115 religious vows of the Buddhist faith.
17. *dar ma mdo*. Appears to indicate the discourses of Buddhadharmā.
18. *gdugs*. I suggest this is the same in meaning as *nyin mo* 'day, daytime;'. *gdugs la bar chad ma mchis klag ces pa* means 'it is necessary to read discourses without interruption through out the day time'.
19. *men tog*. The same as *me tog* 'flower'.

20. *rol mo sil snyan*. The melody of an offering of speech, and the sound of drum, conch, bell, cymbals, small drums, and the like.
21. *bdug spod*. The same as *bdug spos* 'incense'. Incense which is used as a religious offering.
22. *yon chab*. An offering of water.
23. *gdugs*. This means the same things as *nyi gdugs* 'parasol' and *dbu gdugs* 'parasol' (honorific). It indicates the manner of piling up the rosary of collected offerings: the scattering of flowers and incense, the playing of music, the offering of water, the presentation of parasols, etc. these are offerings to the triple gem.
24. *mcod dbyangs*. The same meaning as *mchod dbyangs* a melody which is an offering of speech.
25. *dkon mcog*. The same as *dkon mchog* 'triple gem'.
26. *dge bcu*. The ten virtues are: 1. not to kill, 2. not to take what has not been given. 3. to forego sexual misconduct. 5. to speak the truth. 6. not to slander. 7. to speak gently. 8. not to be chatty. 9. not to desire another's wealth. 10. not to wish another harm. These are the purity of the world.
27. *spod*. The same as *spos* 'incense'.

Notes

1. The author appears to refer to (Chab phel Tshe brtan phun tshogs 1988), which was however published a year later and in a different journal. [NH].

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