

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Plans for the present work grew out of a research programme conducted on Yar-lung (in South Central Tibet) initiated a decade ago, and took its beginning with a study of the local history of Yar-stod or Upper Yar (cf. T. Gyalbo, G. Hazod, P.K. Sørensen 2000). In the progress of our research, our interest should gradually turn towards the lower-lying areas of Yar-lung with its innumerable and rich cultural settlements. Substantiated by a row of historical documents, written sources and inscriptions, and corroborated by a number of other leads soon convinced us of the overwhelming historical, political, and cultic importance surrounding the old royal temple of Khra-'brug ("Thundering Falcon"). It moreover became evident that both zones of Upper and Lower Yar concomitant with the neighbouring 'Phyong-po Valley from earliest time constituted a historico-geographical unity. The area in question is famous as the home of the Tibetan kings and according to the indigenous concepts of history, it also was the area where the cradle of the Tibetan civilization stood. The Italian scholar Guiseppe Tucci, one of the first Western visitors to sojourn for a lengthy period in the area, noted accordingly in his travel diary (1948): "Yarlung is for Tibet what the seven hills are for Rome. All legends revolve around that spot." It not least are this larger history and the intriguing legends surrounding this ancient historic landscape – going far beyond the narrow Yar-lung area itself – which we find reflected in the richly documented tradition of the temple. The shrine in the heart of lower Yar commonly counts as the first temple in Tibet and always formed a significant landmark and point of reference in the Buddhist history of the Snowland. Tucci had succeeded in acquiring a valuable local pilgrimage guide to Khra-'brug of which a copy today is still kept in the temple and which now has served as a point of departure for the present study. The result of the latter proved to be a long-standing collaboration between its authors and methodologically consists of a rewarding combination of text and ethnography, interlinking historical and socio-anthropological research which in its analyses and queries primarily focus on the identification of the most relevant phases of the temple's history and its specific links to policy and religious and cultic traditions both in a closer and a wider regional context.

The work has been conducted in collaboration with the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences (TASS) and initially was part of a research programme at the University of Vienna, linked to the Commission for Social Anthropology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and supported by the Austrian Fonds for the Promotion of Scientific Research (FWF). Ultimo 2000, the Khra-'brug project should be continued within the frame of a research project attached to the Institute of Central Asian Studies at the University of Leipzig (Germany) and supported by the German Research Council (DFG). Our initial thanks therefore go to these institutions and their representatives who made the collaboration between Europe and Tibet possible. In this connection, the fruitful initiatives and support from Prof. Tsewang Gyurme (TASS, Lhasa) and Prof. Ernst Steinkellner (Vienna) should here be mentioned as well as Prof. Andre Gingrich, who at that point headed the Austrian Project.

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A very special kind of thanks must be tendered to numerous, mostly anonymous individuals from Khra-’brug and from other sites throughout Yar-lung who provided us with precious information during our field-work. Their assistance doubtlessly shall be regarded as a remarkable contribution to the book: Often the information stemmed from an unique fond of older orally transmitted histories or from living memory of old Khra-’brug – it nevertheless carries inordinately great documentary value. This sort of information greatly assists us in identifying a number of key points in the local history and in the cultic tradition that all pointed to a world now no more existing and that in a foreseeable time moreover will disappear from the memory of its inhabitants.

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