

‘Tibetan’ – All-inclusive?

Rethinking the ‘Tibetan-ity’ of the ‘Tibetan Empire’

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1. Introduction

Scholarly literature devoted to issues that concern, broadly speaking, the ‘Tibeto-sphere’ of the period between the 7th and 10th century makes abundant use of terms such as: ‘the Tibetan Empire’, ‘the (Old) Tibetan language’, ‘Tibetan culture’, ‘Tibetan history’, ‘Tibetan society’, ‘Tibetan texts’, ‘Tibetan rituals’, and last but not least, ‘Tibetan religion’. Most frequently the other terms are reduced in their understanding to the ‘language’, ‘culture’, ‘society’ etc. of the ‘Tibetan Empire’. But a self-reflecting question is missing from any discussion: what does ‘Tibetan’ mean in the said period? Was ‘Tibetan culture’ any culture within the territory controlled at a given time by the Tibetan army, including Feryana and Kābul? Did ‘Tibetan society’ include all the peoples subjected to any form of taxation imposed by the ‘Tibetan’ overlords, counting China? Were ‘Tibetan rituals’ those practised on the territory of the ‘Tibetan Empire’, by the ‘Tibetan society’, or were they those performed in the ‘Tibetan language’? To what extent did the texts written in the Tibetan script or Tibetan language mirror the ‘Tibetan’ ‘state of mind’? Familiar as it seems in English wording, the Tibetan language of yore did not even have an adjective like the English ‘Tibetan’! No term corresponding to the English ‘the Tibetan Empire’ appears to have ever been in use either. Thus, the urgent question is: what are we talking about when we are talking about ‘Tibetan’? The question is not only of linguistic-philosophical value. The answers we (can or cannot) deliver are absolutely crucial to the proper evaluation of the sources that, since their discovery at the beginning of the 20th century, have been taken for granted as belonging to or representing the ‘Tibeto-sphere’.

Disappointing as it may be, it is not the aim of this study to deliver the answers to the above questions. It is likewise not the aim to put forward a comprehensive definition of ‘Tibetan-ity’, just as it is not the leading hypothesis that there is/used to be only one ‘Tibetan-ity’. The objective of the paper is much more modest: it is concerned with two case studies that should demonstrate how complicated and fragile the matter of defining (or at least attempting to define) the ‘Tibetan-ity’ (i.e. the state of being ‘Tibetan’) in fact is. The examples represent two antithetical tendencies of change and invariance. The first example concerns the title of the Tibetan rulers (*btsan po*) and its variable character during the Tibetan Empire. In the second case study I will try to identify the common features of ‘Tibetan’ burial customs in the available sources, stemming from very distant places.

The chosen examples are also interesting for another reason: they demonstrate varying strategies in dealing with phenomena that are located on the borderline between the secular dimension of human activities and what is usually referred to as the religious sphere. On the one hand (Case study 1),

secular rulers of the Tibetan Empire, *btsan pos*, bore titles through which their identification with virtual beings (called *lha*) was established, at least in the language. On the other hand (Case study 2), a funeral ritual – a ritual which by definition most vividly addresses human anxiety about one’s fate and the possibility of coming to non-existence – is presented in an OT text as devoid of any reference to eschatological concepts. The examples bring to the fore the mutual relationship between ‘the social’ and ‘the religious’¹ and thus trigger the question of the boundaries (if any) between the two spheres in a Tibetan context.

The two problems broached in the paper are indeed rather disparate but they both touch upon the fundamental significance of definitions in Tibetan studies: what does ‘Tibetan’ mean and what is ‘the religious’? I don’t pretend to be able to answer these questions; my first concern is merely to direct the general attention to issues that are too often passed over in silence or taken for granted.²

2. Sameness in difference – Case study 1: *lha* in the title of the Tibetan *btsan pos*

The following juxtaposition presents all titles of the *btsan po* which contain the syllable *lha* and are attested in the selected corpus of Old Tibetan (OT) historical documents.³ The titles are arranged chronologically according to the reigns of the *btsan pos*:⁴

<i>lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	Śa khyi	(Rkoñ 5)	
<i>bod kyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>		(PT 1287: 519)	Khri ydus sroñ (676-704)

¹ Cf. Bloch 2008.

² The Tibetan script is transliterated according to the principles put forward in Hahn (1996: 1) with some minor exceptions that are particularised below. Only the first letter (even if not the root consonant) is capitalised. Following Hill’s reconstruction of the Old Tibetan phonetic value of the ^a letter as a voiced fricative [ɣ] (2009), I transliterate the letter as *γ*. If not otherwise stated, passages quoted from OT sources have been transliterated by myself on the basis of scans made available on the IDP and Gallica. The OT orthography is strictly followed. The ‘reversed *gi gu*’ is transliterated as *ī*. Reconstructed verb roots (*√*) are quoted in an IPA-based transcription. If not otherwise stated, the passages from Tibetan texts have been translated by myself.

³ The study is primarily based on historical documents that have been commonly considered as originating from Central Tibet: the *Old Tibetan Annals* (PT 1288, ITJ 750, Or.8212/187) and the so-called Central Tibetan inscriptions (Žol, Bsam, Bsam B, Rkoñ, Yphyoñ, Khra, Žwa, Skar, Khri, ST Treaty, Lcañ, Khrom, Lho). It is not assumed that these provide us with a complete picture of the issue, but rather that they constitute the most secure starting point for any historical analysis. In addition, I have also included the *Old Tibetan Chronicles* (PT 1286, PT 1287, ITJ 1375) and the Dgay and Dun inscriptions. The former text is undoubtedly based on official life stories of the most significant figures of the period. The Dgay and Dun inscriptions, even though not originating from Central Tibet, share their official language (vocabulary and phrasing) with the inscriptions from Central Tibet, suggesting that their texts might have been composed in a central chancellery.

⁴ The title *lha sras* has been excluded from the analysis for it was used not only with regard to the actually ruling *btsan po* but also to the heir to the throne even before his enthronement.

<i>bod kyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME ⁵	(Dgay 1)	Khri lde gtsug brtsan (704-54)
<i>lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME	(Bsam B 7)	Khri sroñ lde brtsan (754-97)
<i>lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME	(Rkoñ 1)	
<i>lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	<i>yab myes</i>	(Yphyoñ 1)	
<i>lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME	(Yphyoñ 5)	
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME	(Yphyoñ 16)	
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>byañ chub chen po</i>		(Yphyoñ 33)	
<i>lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME	(Khra 3)	Khri lde sroñ brtsan (797-815)
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME	(Žwa W 1)	
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME	(Skar 1, 15)	
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	<i>myes</i>	(Skar 4)	
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	<i>yab</i>	(Skar 22)	
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME	(Žwa E 1-2)	
<i>lha γphrul</i>			(Khri 13, 22, 50) ⁶	Khri gtsug lde brtsan (815-41)
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>		(ST Treaty W 2; E 16)	
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	NAME	(ST Treaty W 12; E 1, 51)	
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	Khri sroñ brtsan	(ST Treaty E 22)	
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	Khri lde gtsug brtsan	(ST Treaty E 25)	
	<i>btsan po</i>	<i>yab lha γphrul</i>	Khri lde sroñ brtsan	(ST Treaty E 34)
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>brtsan pho</i>	NAME	(Dun 365)	

The title *lha γphrul* is used in two different inscriptions, Khri and ST Treaty, but always with reference to the deceased Khri lde sron brtsan. Therefore, we may assume that this title was conferred upon him posthumously. Besides, we have three titles: *bod kyi lha*, *lha*, and *γphrul gyi lha*.⁷ The

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, the label NAME refers to the contemporary *btsan po*.

⁶ “Khri” is a funeral inscription and the titles used therein refer to the deceased Khri lde sron brtsan.

The newly discovered stone inscription (located presumably in front of the temple Pra dun rtse in Gro śod of Gtsaṅ) uses the title *lha yi sprul pa* (ll. 2-3) with reference to Khri sroṅ lde btsan (l. 5; for the only thus far published text of the inscription see Dbus gtsaṅ rig mdzod, “Khri sroṅ lde btsan skabs kyi pra dun rtseyi rdo ring zhal bshus ma”, posted 22.03.2019, URL: <https://utsangculture.com/ཁྱི་སྲོང་ལའེ་བཙན་སྐབས་/> (accessed 16.09.2019). We notice here two inconsistencies with other historical sources. First of all, the title *lha yi sprul pa* is not attested in OT. The only similar expression is *lha rnams kyi sprul pa* recurring in two manuscripts of the *Rāmāyana* (PT 981: r91; ITJ 737.2: r89-90; *apud* OTDO). In both cases it forms part of the clause *lha rnams kyi sprul pa maṅ po bkye ὅ* “Gods sent many transformations” (see also de Jong 1989: 15). It is apparent that *lha rnams kyi* and *sprul pa* belong here to two distinct arguments. The second problem with the inscription is the form of the name of the *btsan po*. Namely, its last syllable is spelled as *btsan*. In all OT inscriptions of Central Tibet, this syllable is always spelled *brtsan* (or: *rtsan*) when being

above juxtaposition demonstrates exactly this chronology of their usage. *lha* of Rkoñ with reference to Śa khyi is an obvious anachronism confirmed in the inscription by the use of the same title for the contemporary and, contrary to Śa khyi, historical *btsan po* Khri sroñ lde brtsan. *Lha* of Khra instead of the expected *γphrul gyi lha*, at first sight opposing my hypothesis, may be reasonably explained by the fact that the text is inscribed on a bell and so its composer had very limited space at his disposal. An interesting fact about the titles is that *btsan pos* prior to Khri γdus sroñ (i.e. Khri slon btsan, Khri sroñ rtsan, and Khri mañ slon mañ rtsan) did apparently not have a title based on the term *lha*.⁸

Therefore, we have the following titles used for the particular *btsan po*:

<i>bod kyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	Khri γdus sroñ Khri lde gtsug brtsan
<i>lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	Khri sroñ lde brtsan
<i>γphrul gyi lha</i>	<i>btsan po</i>	Khri sroñ lde brtsan Khri lde sroñ brtsan Khri gtsug lde brtsan

Apparently two changes occurred with regard to the titles that contained the element *lha*. First, the ‘mundane’ restriction of *lha* by the determinant *bod kyi* ‘of the Tibetans’ was given up by the *btsan po* Khri sroñ lde brtsan.⁹ Can we interpret this change as marking a turn in the self-perception of the Tibetan ruler from being a *lha* of the Tibetans towards being **the** *lha*? This change could have been an expression of consummation of the conquests done by the predecessors of Khri sroñ lde brtsan who had expanded the empire in all directions. Now, it was up to Khri sroñ lde brtsan to turn the conquered territories and their peoples into integral parts of one polity under the sway of the

a part of a proper name of a *btsan po*. These two circumstances suffice actually to discard the inscription as a historical document from the imperial period.

⁸ The use of the title *γphrul gyi lha* with reference to Khri sroñ brtsan in Skar 4 and ST Treaty E 22-3 is an obvious anachronism just like the spelling of the last syllable *brtsan* instead of the original *rtsan* (see PT 1288). The inscriptions use the title with respect to Khri sroñ rtsan only when juxtaposing his achievements with those of his successors, all of whom bore the official title *γphrul gyi lha*.

⁹ As a matter of fact, we find the title *bod kyi lha* attested four times in non-historical documents: *bod kyī lha btsan po myi rje lhas mdzad pa khrī gtsug lde brtsan* (PT 16: 25v3); *bod kyī lha btsan po / γphrul gyī ža śna nas bžugs te //* (ITJ 751: 36r2); *bod kyi lha btsan po khri gtsugs ldem brtsan kyī sku riñ la* (PT 1088 A: 1-2); *bod kyi lha btsan po khri gtsug lde brtsan kyī sku riñs la* (PT 735: 2). The second occurrence concerns a clause that is apparently distorted; the idiom *ža śna nas* is otherwise not attested with the verb *bžugs*. In Bialek (2018: 2.45, fn. 3) I argued that the document PT 16/ITJ 750 is not a trustworthy witness of the Old Tibetan language because it abounds in grammatical and stylistic errors. Regarding PT 1088 A, not only its orthography but also the general character of the manuscript prove that this piece of paper was intended as a rough draft for various unconnected notes, some of which were exercises in preparation for official documents. Whether this unofficial character is responsible for using the ‘incorrect’ title remains unknown. The last example belongs again to a rough draft of an official document. The short passage contains orthographical errors, some of which have been corrected, some not (cf. *riñs* instead of *riñ*). In the case of all these documents it may be relevant to mention that they were not composed in Central Tibet and therefore their authors might not have been acquainted with the language protocol of official documents.

btsan po. To this aim it might have appeared advisable to elide the determinant *bod kyi* “of the Tibetans” from his official title.

The long reign of *btsan po* Khri sroñ lde brtsan witnessed yet another change in the nomenclature: *lha* was added the determinant *γphrul gyi*.¹⁰ In historical sources at our disposal the title *γphrul gyi lha* is attested for the first time in Ṣphyoñ¹¹ – an inscription that on an earlier occasion addresses the same *btsan po* with the sole *lha*. The inscription clearly consists of two parts. The first part is an incipit and contains standardised formulas that praise the *btsan po* in traditional terms, but it also attests to the oldest occurrence of the title *chos rgyal* (l. 11) in historical sources. The second part of the inscription begins with the new title *γphrul gyi lha* (l. 16) and is a eulogy for the *btsan po* as a Buddhist ruler. Here several clearly Buddhist phrases are used: *byañ chub spyod pa* (l. 27), *γjig rten las γdas payi chos* (ll. 28-29), *bkaγ drin* (ll. 29-30, 31), *byañ chub chen po* (ll. 33-34).

¹⁰ The reader finds a detailed discussion of the title *γphrul gyi lha* and in particular of the word *γphrul* in Stein 1981 and Li and Coblin 1987: 82f. The point of departure for Stein’s analysis was the Chinese equivalent of this title in ST Treaty W 1: *sheng shen* 聖神. The latter is rendered in French by Stein as “Saint et Divin”. He assumed that the Tibetan form was a calque of the Chinese original (*ibid.*: 236). Already Stein’s translation “Saint et Divin” contains an interpretation at odds with the Tibetan original in which *γphrul gyi lha* is a determinative and not coordinative phrase. (This argument was also put forward by Li and Coblin 1987: 83). Should it have been a loan translation, there would have been no problems for the Tibetans to render it simply as **γphrul lha*. The pre-existence of the forms of *bod kyi lha* and *lha* in Tibetan titles suggests that *γphrul gyi lha* was coined on their basis as a natural continuation of a well-established native tradition. Moreover, a translation in a bilingual text of a diplomatic agreement must not denote identity of concepts expressed by the terms, an issue not considered by Stein. I will not pursue the issue in the paper for it lies outside of its main focus. For a more recent interpretation of the word *γphrul* in OT see Bialek 2018: 2.558, fn. 1.

¹¹ This is true with respect to the historical documents. The absence of the title from earlier documents was already noticed by Stein (1981: 245), who concluded that it was used only in the period between 800 (or: 790?) and 830/840 (*ibid.*: 248). One occurrence of the phrase *γphrul gyi lha btsan po* is attested in ITJ 1368: 18, a document popularly known as *Annals of the Ya za principality* (cf. Uray 1978). As argued by Uray, the document concerns the years 706/7-714/5 (*ibid.*: 572), and so the occurrence of our phrase therein in the year 709/10 seems to contradict the hypothesis put forward in the present paper. However, notwithstanding the comprehensive analysis undertaken by Uray, a few details have escaped his attention and these suggest that the document is a much later redaction and/or copy of the original. Apart from the seemingly anachronistic usage of the title *γphrul gyi lha btsan po*, the document mentions Mun šeñ Koñ-co instead of the expected Kim šeñ Koñ co, as convincingly argued by Uray. This is of course a grave mistake in an annalistic work and certainly could not have been made by a contemporary analyst (cf. also “Les ‘Annales des Ya za’ ont été visiblement manipulées”, Stein 1981: 254). Another puzzle connected with the princess concerns the use of the kinship term *lcam* in l. 43, which, according to Uray’s interpretation, narrates events of 712/3 (1978: 560). In the OTA she is already addressed with the title *btsan mo* in 710/1 (ITJ 750: 176), right after her marriage with the *btsan po* (ITJ 1368: 22). On an earlier occasion she is called *rgya rjeγi sras mo* (l. 22); *sras mo* does not surface in official documents of the Empire. Furthermore, ITJ 1368 always uses the honorific verb *bžugs* “to abide, stay” with terminative instead of the correct and ubiquitous inessive “to abide in TOPONYM” (*rkoñ yul du bžugs* in Rkoñ 6 should be read **rkoñ yul du žugs* “entered the Rkoñ-land”). Furthermore, Stein argued that because the title *γphrul gyi lha* does not surface in the OTA one would not expect it to be used in the *Annals of the Ya za* (*ibid.*: 254). In my opinion these facts indicate that the document at our disposal was re-edited sometime after the events described therein had taken place and the titles were adjusted to the contemporary court protocol.

It doesn't look like a coincidence but rather like a deliberately chosen rhetorical means; a newly coined image of the *btsan po* as a universal Buddhist ruler necessitated a new title – *γphrul gyi lha*. Doney (2014: 76, fn. 61) made a perceptive remark that the title *γphrul gyi lha* is introduced in Ṭphyoñ in the context of territorial expansion in “four directions”:

(16) // *γphrul gyi lha btsan po khri sroñ lde* (17) *brtsan gyi źa sñā nas / mthaγ bźiγi rgyal po*
 (18) *gźān dañ myi γdra ste / byin gyi sgam dkyel* (19) *chen po dañ / dbu rmog brtsan pos / yar*
ni (20) *ta źig gyi mtshams man chad / mar ni loñ* (21) *śān gyi la rgyud yan cad / chab γog γdu*
 (22) *ste / chab srid ni lho byañ śar nub /* (23) *mthas klas par cheγo //* (Ṭphyoñ)

γphrul gyi lha, *btsan po* Khri sroñ lde brtsan, was equal to no other king of four directions; by the great versatility of [his] splendour and by [his] mighty helmet [the lands] upwards, from the borders of Ta źig down to the mountain range of Loñ śān, gathered under [his] sway; [his] realm was great so that the south, the north, the east, and the west were filled with [its] frontiers.

The passage is a manifest of the unsurpassed military and political achievements of *btsan po* Khri sroñ lde brtsan. His realm extended in all directions justifying the adoption of a new title for its ruler: *γphrul gyi lha*, lit. “deity of transformational might”.¹²

The above discussion based on data extracted from historical documents unequivocally attests to a shift in the title of the *btsan pos*. The change concerned the principal title used by Tibetan rulers apparently from very early times. The data reveals an internal logic and therefore leaves no doubt that the shift took place during the Tibetan Empire and was not a later invention. Moreover, it seems probable that the shift was related to the growing importance of Tibet in international relations in the region. It mirrored changes in the self-perception of the Tibetans from a regional polity with some military aspirations to the internationally acknowledged and respected (maybe even feared) political superpower. Hence, the title may well have reflected a natural development not necessarily triggered by external patterns or models.

But why *lha*? Why was the foremost title of a Tibetan ruler focused around the lexeme *lha*? In Old Tibetan the word *lha* had three principal usages: 1. a common noun “virtual being; deity, divinity”; 2. part of the *btsan pos*’ titles (*lha*, *lha sras*, *bod kyi lha*, *γphrul gyi lha*); and 3. part of proper names.¹³ In traditional cosmology *lha* were a class of virtual beings with explicit celestial connotations, cf.: *lha gnam* (PT 1286: 30) “the sky of the *lha*”; *gnam gi lha* (ITJ 738: 3v76; Khri 1-2) “*lha* of the sky”; *gnam lha* (ITJ 740: 74) “id.”; *dguñ gyi lhaγ* (PT 1043: 43) “*lha* of the welkin”;¹⁴ *dguñ las nī lha gśegs* (ITJ 738: 3v151) “*lha* came from the welkin”; *lha dguñ du gśegs*

¹² In Bialek 2018 (2.559) I explained *γphrul* as denoting “the capacity to change, to transform oneself” and proposed to tentatively translate the term as “transformational mights, magic powers”.

¹³ It must be stressed that although the syllable *lha* commonly occurs as a part of proper names, it is never used as a title with respect to persons other than *btsan pos*. Walter’s assumption that “*lha* is [...] attested as a collective term for the nobility” (2009: 118) and the ensuing discussion are based on a misunderstanding of the passage from PT 1287: 148-9 (for a translation see below).

¹⁴ For the etymology of *dguñ* and its usage as an honorific see Bialek 2018: 1.413.

(ITJ 747: v8) “*lha* went back to the welkin”.¹⁵

On the other hand, a *btsan po* never dies, he “goes to the sky” – *dguñ du gśegs* is the standardised formula to inform about the ruler’s death. Although Old Tibetan possessed honorific verbs of dying (like *noñs* or *groñs*), with respect to a *btsan po*, only the idiom *dguñ du gśegs* was used. Its oldest historical occurrence is found in the OTA:

649/50

de nas lo drug naŋ/ btsan po khri sroñ rtsan dguñ du gśegsol (PT 1288: 15)

Thereafter, in the sixth year, *btsan po* Khri sroñ rtsan passed away.

In OT narratives, the sky is an important point of reference when speaking of a *btsan po*:

bla na rje sgam nal khri sroñ brtsan/ yog na blon γdzañs na stoñ rtsan yul zuñ / (447) *rje nī gnam ri pywa γī lugs// blon po nī sa γī ñam len gyi tshull/ mñay thañ chen po γi rkyen dul jī dan jir ldan tel pyi γi* (448) *chab srid nī pyogs bžīr bskyed// nañ gī kha bso nī myi ñams par lhun stug/* (PT 1287)

Above, if the lord is profound, [it is] Khri sroñ brtsan; below, if the councillor is wise, [it is] [Mgar] stoñ rtsan yul zuñ. As for the lord, [his] custom of the *mountain peaks*¹⁶ of the sky, [and] as for the councillor, [his] nature of the ravines of the earth, equipped with everything as bases for (lit. of) great authority, extended dominions of the exterior in four directions [and] (made) the prosperity of the interior grand so that [it] was unimpaired.

bod kyi lha btsan po dan / gnam gñis kyis bdud bchad nall γbal lji rmañ las che (520) *ba myed pa γī bull sa dgur rīm yog du sbas pa yañ bthud de bsad doll* (PT 1287)

When both, the *lha* of the Tibetans, the *btsan po*, and the sky, have suppressed the demon, [they] have killed also a child, not bigger than γbal lji rmañ, who had hidden below the nine-stored earth.

(1) // *btsan po lha sras/ γo lde spu rgyal/ gnam gyī* (2) *lha las myīγi rjer gśegs pall* (Khri)
the *btsan po*, the Divine Son, γo lde spu rgyal, who came as a lord of men from the *lha* of the sky

lha sras gnam dan γdra baγi chags yog na / (Rkoñ 8)
at the feet of the Divine Son who equals the sky

¹⁵ As far as I am aware, no etymology of *lha* has been proposed yet. Walter’s assumptions that “*lha* meant [...] figures such as γod lde spu rgyal and previous *btsan pos*, all imperial **ancestors**, real and (to our minds today) mythological” (2009: 111, emphasis – JB) and further “Deceased rulers, back to what many consider their mythological predecessors, were *lha*, i.e. *gnam* [γyi] *lha*, and *myes*, “ancestors”.” (ibid.: 112), does not find confirmation in OT textual material known to me and Walter does not provide any quotations that would support his words. His interpretation of the phrase *γphrul gyi lha btsan po myes khri sroñ brtsan* (Skar 4) as “Sroñ btsan sgam po was a *lha* to Ral pa can” (ibid.: 112) is yet another example of a falsely interpreted OT passage. The same inscription refers to the reigning *btsan po* as *γphrul gyi lha btsan po khri lde sroñ brtsan* (ll. 1 and 15) but one would never assert that Khri lde sroñ brtsan was a *lha* *‘‘ancestor’’ to himself.

¹⁶ For this reconstruction see Bialek 2018: 1.484ff.

Now, it appears that the sky was the domain common to both *lha* and *btsan po*s. We may never be able to establish what was first, the *btsan po*'s connection with the sky as his place of departure, or rather his affiliation to *lha* that enabled him a 'celestial death'. The first option seems more convincing in so far as it identifies a common domain that forms part of the material world and thus would be a more concrete basis for the association: "because a *btsan po* goes to the sky, he is a *lha*". In the preserved historical documents, the idiom *dguñ du gśegs* is attested earlier than the title *lha* for a *btsan po*. This, however, is only negative evidence that may result from accidental gaps in our data. It is also rather unlikely that the formula *dguñ du gśegs* was coined based on a particular funerary practice of burying rulers in higher areas or even on mountains. Assuming that the transmitted identification of the royal tombs is correct (see Hazod 2018: esp. Fig. 1 on p. 73), it occurs that other *btsan po*s were not buried on mountain slopes, apart from Khri lde gtsug brtsan and Khri sroñ lde brtsan. But even if the identification of the tombs contains some errors, the fact remains that only two of the royal tombs are located on a mountain slope of Mu ra ri.

A mythological narration from PT 1287 establishes yet another relation between a Tibetan ruler and *gnam*:

btsan po dri gum lde (18) *bla guñ rgyal gyis gnam du drañs na / lo ñam gyīs mchan nas spre
yu pyuñ bas/ lde bla guñ rgyal ni ti tse gañs* (19) *rum du γphañste gśegs so //* (PT 1287)

When Lde bla guñ rgyal led *btsan po* Dri gum to the sky (*gnam*), because Lo ñam drew out a monkey from the side of [Dri gum's?] breast, Lde bla guñ rgyal went, being thrown away to the glacier Ti tse.

One feels justified to ask, why it was *gnam* that Dri gum was led to? The passage certainly does not warrant the interpretation given to it by Walter that Dri gum is drawn back "to his heavenly home, *gnam*" (2009: 149, fn. 47), but it confirms a unique relationship that *btsan po*s had with the sky, be it *gnam* or *dguñ*.

If we accept the second option, "because a *btsan po* is a *lha*, he goes to the sky", then the question remains "why is he a *lha*"? Below I will examine several OT passages that bring together *btsan po*s and *lha*. It seems that the title *lha* of Tibetan *btsan po*s was a derivative of *lha* as a common noun. However, the basis for the derivation is unclear. In order to throw light on the issue I shall quote several passages from OT texts that illustrate various kinds of relationship the *btsan po*s could have with *lhas*. An interesting starting point for the discussion is delivered in the opening words of the Żwayi lha khañ inscription:

myīyi rgyal po lhas mdzad pa // γphrul gyī lha (2) *btsan po khri / lde sroñ brtsan gyi / bkas
///* (Żwa E)

by the order of the king of men, the one *mdzad* by *lhas*, the *lha* of *γphrul*, the *btsan po* Khri lde sroñ brtsan

The meaning of *mdzad* is crucial in resolving the role of *lhas* in "making" Tibetan rulers. The phrase *lhas mdzad pa* also recurs in other OT texts:

bod kyī lha btsan po myi rje lhas mdzad pa khrī gtsug lde brtsan (PT 16: 25v3)

the *lha* of the Tibetans, the lord of men, the one *mdzad* by *lhas*, Khri gtsug lde brtsan

myī srīd nī lhas mdzad kyis/

srīd che nī mthaʻr myi ʻgyur/ (PT 1287: 359)

Because the dominion of people is *mdzad* by *lhas*,

The dominion is great, [its] borders do not change.

myī rje lha{s} mdzad gtsug myi ʻgyurs // (PT 1290: r2)

[If] the lord of men is *mdzad* by *lhas*; [his] principles do not change.

rgyal po lhas mdzad na ʻzal mtho / rgyal ʻbañs rjes mdzad na go mtho (ITJ 740: 70-1)

If a king is *mdzad* by *lhas*, [his] face is elevated. If the king’s subjects are *mdzad* by the lord,

[their] position is high.

The clauses *myi srīd lhas mdzad* (PT 1287) and *rgyal ʻbañs rjes mdzad* (ITJ 740) demonstrate unequivocally that a relation of power (rather than creation) was involved in the meaning of *mdzad* here.¹⁷ When the patient of the verb had a human referent, its meaning might have been specialised as “to guide”. This latter sense is especially evident in PT 1290 where the fact that a lord is *mdzad* by *lhas* results in his principles being unchangeable. It is conspicuous that the remaining passages are metrical, apart from *lhas mdzad pa* in titles (cf. Žwa, PT 16).

Beside *lhas mdzad pa*, there is yet another phrase that recurs in OT documents and that involves both words *lha* and *mdzad*. This is *lhas thugs dgoñ mdzad* (PT 1046B: 40; ITJ 740: 7, 97, 101, 160), lit. “*lhas* give thought to”. In some cases, this phrase is preceded by a nominal phrase in absolutive, which is then to be interpreted as a recipient. I argue that this very phrase gave rise to our *lhas mdzad pa* and the development may be sketched in the following steps:

1. NP_{ABS} *lhas thugs dgoñ mdzad* “*lhas* give thought to NP” > “*lhas* think caringly about NP”
2. PROSODY NP_{ABS} *lhas mdzad* “*lhas* take care of NP” > “*lhas* guide NP”
3. TITLE “guided by *lhas*”¹⁸

Although revealing another puzzle of the Old Tibetan language, this analysis still does not answer our question about the relationship between a *btsan po* and *lhas*. We now know that a *btsan po* was titled *lha* and that he was conceived of as guided by *lhas*. Yet another passage has *btsan pos* ruling over *lhas*:

lha btsan po yab myes lha dañ myiʻi (2) rjer gśegs te (Yphyoñ)

The *lha*, the *btsan pos*, fathers and grandfathers, came as lords over (lit. of) *lhas* and men.

On the other hand, at some point the idea that *btsan pos* come from *lhas* must have also been created. This is attested in the title *lha sras* and the following passage:

chab chab (149) nī pha rol nal

yar chab nī pha rol nal/

¹⁷ Were *lha* is meant as progenitors, at least in phrases concerning *btsan pos*, the expected verb would have been *bśos* and not *mdzad*.

¹⁸ *lhas mdzad pa* was translated as “qui est un dieu” by Stein (1981: 233), without any remark on the ergative -s in *lhas*, and as “made by the *lha*” by Walter (2009: 112).

myī yi ni myī bu stel
lha yi ni sras po bzugs// (PT 1287)

On the other side of the river,
 On the other side of the Yar [luñ] river,
 Being a man's son,
 A son of *lha* abides.

This is part of a song that praises *Spu rgyal stag bu* as a true ruler and contrasts him with *zin po rje* *Khri pañ sum*. The following verses use the metaphor of true ruler (*rje bden*) and true saddle (*sga bden*), called a metaphor of horse and rider by Dotson (2013: 215). In Bialek 2019 (151f.) I suggested that this metaphor might have been of Iranian provenance and entered Tibetan literature in Central Asian centres of cultural exchange. Whether the same could be said of the phrases *myi bu* and *lha yi sras po* (> *lha sras*), remains to be established by future research.¹⁹ This passage, and a few others that mention *myi bu*, attests to the existence of a literary topos of *btsan pos* as coming from *lhas*.

To sum up, *btsan pos* were conceived of as guided by *lhas*, ruling over *lhas*, and coming from *lhas*. Were these ideas mere mythological explanations of the fact that *btsan pos* held the title *lha*? The sober answer is that as long as we are not able to date OT texts, we will not be able to trace the history of the most formative ideas of the epoch. Consequently, the question of the origins of the royal title remains open.

The above survey has revealed that the principle titles of Tibetan *btsan pos*, although liable to major changes, persistently revolved around the concept of *lha*. The changes can be perceived as a reflection of socio-historical processes in the Tibetan Empire. We may notice that the changes occurred within ‘the core’ of the Empire; all the titles using *lha* are attested in Central Tibetan inscriptions. What remained constant was that Tibetan rulers sought to legitimise their mundane power by referring in their title to a supra-mundane sphere.

3. Sameness in difference – Case study 2: Uniformity of funeral rituals across the Tibetan Plateau²⁰

The second case study intends to identify common features of a ‘Tibetan’ funeral ritual across the

¹⁹ An alternative origin of the term *lha sras* was proposed by Uray (1968: 292, fn. 3). His hypothesis was, however, partly based on a false reading of *lte bu* in PT 1287: 398 as *lde bu* and the identification of the latter as a variant of the title *lde sras*. He further argued that the originally Tibetan *lde sras* was “ousted by the title *lha sras* ≲ Skt. *devaputra*”. Because the meaning of *lde* remains an unsolved problem, Uray’s hypothesis cannot be verified. Prior to Stein, Tucci suggested that *lha sras* was a calque from Skt. *devaputra* that entered Tibetan either via Khotan or China (Tucci 1950: 77, fn. 37).

²⁰ The research, the preliminary results of which are presented in this contribution, has been carried out within the project “The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet. Part II” financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF P 30393). I wish to thank Guntram Hazod for the invitation to collaborate on the project. Hours of constructive discussions held with Guntram on many occasions have undoubtedly deepened my understanding of the ritual setting of PT 1042.

space. By comparing textual, archaeological, linguistic, and art historical data I hope to be able to bring to light pieces of ‘Tibetan-ity’, stemming from various distant places in- and outside the Tibetan Plateau.

The vast majority of the so-called ‘Old Tibetan texts’ were found far away from Central Tibet (i.e. Four Horns of the Tibetan Empire), the cradle of the Tibetan culture.²¹ Among these texts, manuscripts that form the basis of our knowledge about the culture and religion of the Empire were excavated in the vicinity of Dunhuang, a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual trade centre located on the crossroads of the Northern and Southern routes of the Silk Road. Previous research has already demonstrated that some of the manuscripts that contain narrations intrinsically bound to Tibetan history (e.g., PT 1287) attest to elements borrowed from non-Tibetan cultures.²² Some other secular texts were translated from local vernaculars (e.g., PT 1283),²³ whereas yet another group of texts were only written in Tibetan script but their language is demonstrably not Tibetan (Chinese, Old Uighur, *Žaṅ žuṅ* [?]). Therefore, the question whether manuscripts written with Tibetan script and in Tibetan language, all represent ‘Tibetan’ culture (i.e. culture of Four Horns) is more than justified. In the following sections I will attempt to demonstrate that one such manuscript discovered in Dunhuang, PT 1042, not only represents the culture of Central Tibet, but was also composed by an eyewitness of a funeral ritual that was held in Central Tibet.

3.1 Common characteristics

PT 1042 contains a description of a funeral ceremony referred to in the text as *mdad chen po* (ll. 81 and 97) “a great funeral”.²⁴ The text relates a lavish and complex ritual that must have involved large numbers of participants, including humans and animals, and sumptuous grave-gifts. I assume that this extraordinary character of the ceremony was expressed in the very attribute *chen po* “great”. The funeral was certainly held for an elite member of society, whose family had enough political power and financial means to afford it. The elaborate character of the ceremony also suggests a complex eschatological system shared by the group.

In the following I will attempt to relate chosen elements of the ritual as presented in PT 1042 to the known facts about the Tibetan culture of yore.

3.1.1 Time schedule

The following passage from PT 1042 provides very detailed information regarding the most suitable time for a great funeral (*mdad cen po*):

mdad cen po ni thog ma groṅs ṅog du / (82) *gyur nas* // **lo gsum** *gyi du{s}* *su bgyi ṽtshal te*
// *mdzad paṽi tshe* / *zla ba daṅ skar mar sbyar te* // **zla ba** *yar gyī myi ṅo* / (83) *mar gyi myi*

²¹ On Four Horns as administration centre of the Tibetan Empire see Uray 1960; Hazod 2009.

²² Cf. Takeuchi 1985; Dotson 2013: 71ff. and 79ff.; Bialek 2019.

²³ Cf. Bacot 1957; Clauson 1957; Venturi 2008.

²⁴ In Bialek (forthcoming-a) I argue that the text is a quasi-ethnographic report of a funeral originally written by an eyewitness. However, the manuscript which came down to us is indisputably a copy of another written document.

ño / gar (read: *gañ*) *mdzad kyañ ruñ ste // dgun sla γbrin po la / gor γkhyags sin γkhyags te / mdad sid* / (84) *btañ yañ phan myi thogs so // dbyar sla γbrin po la / gor sño sin sñoyi dbal te sman myi thogso // ston sla* / (85) *tha chuñs tshes ñi su gsum phan chad tañ // dgun sla ra ba tshes gsum tshun chad // žag bcu la mdad* / (86) *śid btañ na // [–] nam gyi mhaγ la bab ste / mdad {śid}*²⁵ *btañ na / γdaγs pa la yañ myi sman // slad ma la yañ dño sdig* / (87) *du mchīyo //* (PT 1042)

Regarding the great funeral, first, after the death occurred (lit. [one] became dead), [one] wishes [it] to be prepared within (lit. at) the period of **three years**. At the time of preparations, having consulted the moon and the stars: when preparing not during the waxing moon, not during the waning moon, but during the **full moon**, [it] is appropriate. In the mid-winter month, while the gravel-soil is frozen, being frozen, even if [one] prepared the funeral, it would not be beneficial (lit. benefit would not be achieved). In the mid-summer month, while the gravel-soil becomes green, being the high season (lit. the peak of greening), it would not be favourable (lit. welfare would not be achieved). If [one] prepares the funeral **within ten days between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd day of the first winter-month**, [–] (A clause saying that this period is auspicious is missing from the text here).²⁶ If one prepares the funeral at the end of the night, it will not come as welfare for the deceased, but as great harm to those who remain alive.

Thus, a great funeral should be held within three years after the death. The most favourable time period comprised the ten days between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd day of the first winter month. In addition, the day of the funeral shall fall on the full moon. From the last sentence we may infer that the funeral should be held during a full moon night but the full moon should not occur at the end of the night.²⁷ These are very detailed data that we may be able to partly verify with other sources.

In the OTA-I (PT 1288 + ITJ 750) the following deaths and funerals of members of the royal family are recorded:²⁸

Title	Person	Death	Funeral	Years
<i>btsan po myes</i>	Khri sroñ rtsan	649/50 (l. 15)	651/2 (ll. 19-20)	2
<i>btsan po yab</i>	Khri mañ slon	W 676/7 (l. 66-7)	679/80 (l. 74)	3

²⁵ I have reconstructed **mdad śid* by analogy with the verbal phrase *mdad śid btañ* in ll. 83 and 85-6.

²⁶ Lalou observed that a part of the text was inadvertently omitted by the scribe and complemented her translation with “[cela est bien]” (1952: 355).

²⁷ Theoretically, in every non-lunar calendric year full moon occurs twelve or thirteen times. Lunar calendric year comprises by definition always twelve full moons. Statistically about a half of the full moons occur during the day, the other half during the night. This clarifies the condition that a funeral should be held when the full moon occurs during the night. Haahr (1969: 369, 371) passed over in silence the word *gar* which I have proposed to amend with **gañ* “full [moon]”. This allowed Haahr to state that the funeral could be held either on full or new moon (*ibid.*: 371).

²⁸ The abbreviations used are: W = winter, S = summer, A = autumn, Sp = spring.

<i>btsan mo</i>	Mun cañ koñ co		W 683/4 (l. 85)	
<i>btsan po yab</i>		W 704-5 (l. 148)	W 706/7 (ll. 158-9)	2
<i>pyi</i>	Mañ pañs	W 706/7 (l. 159)	A 707/8 (l. 162)	1
<i>btsan mo ga tun</i>			Sp 708/9 (l. 170)	
<i>pyi</i>	Khri ma lod	W 712/3 (l. 186)	W 713/4 (ll. 190-1)	1
<i>yum</i>	Btsan ma tog	W 721/2 (l. 223)	W 723/4 (l. 229)	2
<i>lcam</i>	Lha spañs	S 730/1 (l. 256)	W 732/3 (l. 264)	2
<i>sras</i>	Lhas bon	S 739/40 (ll. 281-2)	W 741/2 (l. 287-8)	2
<i>btsan mo</i>	Kim šeñ khoñ co	W 739/40 (l. 282)	W 741/2 (l. 287-8)	2
<i>yum</i>	Mañ mo rje	742/3 (l. 292)		
<i>jo mo</i>	Khri btsun		W 745/6 (l. 302)	

It occurs that a funeral was held one to three years after the death. Because according to PT 1042 the ideal time frame encompassed only ten days, within which full moon must have additionally taken place, it is reasonable to assume that the three years marked the upper limit. That is why PT 1042 states *lo gsum gyi du{s} su* “within the period of three years” and not for instance **lo gsum na*.²⁹ We can assume that the funeral was held on the first appropriate date after all the preparations, including building the grave, had been accomplished.³⁰

PT 1042 agrees with OTA-I in one more detail: the most auspicious time for a funeral was between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd day of the first winter month. Except for two funerals, the remaining ceremonies mentioned in the OTA-I are said to have taken place in the winter. On one occasion a funeral was carried out in the autumn, which also agrees with PT 1042. The only violation of the rule concerns the funeral of a foreign princess, *btsan mo ga tun*, in the spring 708/9. Here we could speculate that she was interred according to customs of her native culture.

Unfortunately, we know very little about the calendar used in the Tibetan Empire.³¹ We know that a year was divided into four seasons: summer (*dbyard*), autumn (*ston*), winter (*dgun*), and spring (*dpyid*). Each of the seasons consisted of three months: the first (*ra ba*), the middle (*γbrin po*), and the last (*tha chuñs*). I call these months ‘seasonal’ in order to distinguish them from lunar months. Thus, a ‘seasonal’ year consisted of twelve ‘seasonal’ months. The phrase *ston sla tha chuñs tshes ñi sú gsum phan chad tañ dgun sla ra ba tshes gsum tshun chad žag bcu* “within ten

²⁹ The phrase *lo gsum gyi du su* was falsely understood by Haahr (1969: 357, 369) and Chu (1991: 137) as denoting the third year. For **lo gsum na* compare *lo gsum na* “in the third year” in PT 1288: 13 and *lo drug nay* “in the sixth year” in l.15 of the same document.

³⁰ A rough calculation by Feiglstorfer has yielded that for a tomb like that of Khri sroñ lde brtsan (appr. 120x120x26m) 200 people, working seven days a week ten hours a day not using working animals, would require two years “just for the movement of the rammed earth” (Hazod 2018: 27); the details of the calculation can be found in Feiglstorfer (2015: 29). This of course doesn’t say anything about the actual working flow apart from the fact of how labour-intensive the building of one tomb could have been.

³¹ Brief discussions of the imperial calendars may be found in Haahr (1969: 422-424) and Dotson (2009: 12-13). More detailed studies, albeit not restricted to the imperial calendar, may be found in Schuh 1974, Uray 1984, and Yamaguchi 1984. Schuh 2012 is a comprehensive description of various calendric systems and calculations that were in use in Tibet starting with the 13th century.

days between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd day of the first winter-month” suggests (presuming that the same calendar is applied) that at least the last autumn month had 29 days. Certainly not all seasonal months had 29 days because this system would be formally identical with a lunar calendar. We can speculate that, for instance, the first months (*ra ba*) had 31 days, the middle ones (*ybrin po*) 30, and the last months (*tha chuñs*) only 29 days. This would yield 360 days in a year. But this is pure speculation. OT texts do mention intercalary months:

byi ba loyi sol bor bayi ston sla tha cuñs gyi tshes bchu drug lall (SI P/135: r1; trslr. *apud* Takeuchi 1995: 279)

“on the sixteenth day of the last autumn month, an added intercalary month of the rat year”

lan yd̄yi ston sla sol bor bayi ston zla ybrin po tshes / (5) lña la (Or.15000/426: r4; trslr. *apud* Takeuchi 1998: 2.179)

“on the fifth day of the middle autumn month, an intercalary month added to the autumn month of this year”

khyiqi lo yi sol bor bayi dgun sla ybrin po tshes [-] (Or.15000/470: 2; trslr. *apud* Takeuchi 1998: 2.198)

“[on the X] day of the middle winter month, an added intercalary month of the dog year”

The passages suggest that an intercalary month could be added to any month of the year. A brief notice on modern Tibetan calendar calculation might throw light on the issue. According to Shakabpa, in order for the lunar year to correspond to the solar year in number of days “an intercalary, or extra, month is added every third year. Unfortunately for the purposes of conversion, the intercalary month is not added consistently at any point, but anywhere among the twelve regular months that is considered lucky for that particular year.” (1967: 16). It seems that there might be some continuity between the imperial and modern calculation systems, although Schuh points to the existence of several different systems of calculation of an intercalary month in post-13th-century Tibet (2012: 1.cxv). Another problem is that all the above passages come from Central Asian contracts. Albeit they are written in Tibetan, we cannot be sure that the dates followed the same calendar as the one used in Central Tibet.³² No document undeniably originating in Central Tibet mentions intercalary months but the texts contain very few time specifications anyway.

In the vast majority of the annual entries of the OTA-I the first event recorded took place in the summer.³³ However, in two instances events of the spring preceded those of the summer, cf.:

675/6

(62) § :/ phagī lo la bab ste / btsan po *ḍpyid* že śiñ du gśegste / [...] *ḍbyard* bal po na bžugs

³² Of course, it is possible that they were in accordance with the Central Tibetan calendar, but we are not in a position to relate the calendars to each other on an independent basis. Nevertheless, such an identity was assumed, for instance by Yamaguchi (1984: 408) and Dotson (2009: 12). According to Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya (1992: 91), calendars based on the animal cycle started to be used in Central Asia (East Turkestan) only during the second Tibetan occupation.

³³ Most frequently, only events of the summer and the winter are reported in the OTA-I. There are only two mentions of autumn and altogether six mentions of spring events.

(64) *śiñ* / [...] (65) *dgun btsan pho yon gyī sna bo na bžugs par lo gchīg* / (ITJ 750)
 [This is] an annual report: in the swine year, the *btsan po* went in the **spring** to *Že śiñ*. [...] In the **summer** [he] was abiding in Bal po. [...] In the **winter**, the *btsan pho* abode in Sna bo of Yon.

704/5

(146) § / *γbrugī lo la bab ste* / *dp̄yīd kho brañ tsal du rgyal gtsug ru bltam* / *dbyard btsan po yab rma grom gyī yo* (147) *tī cu bzañs na bžugs śiñ* / [...] *dgun btsan pho chab srīd la mywa la gśegs pa las* / *dguñ du gśegs* / (ITJ 750)

[This is] an annual report: in the dragon year, in the **spring** Rgyal gtsug ru was born in Kho brañ tsal. In the **summer**, the *btsan po*, the father, was abiding in Yo ti cu bzañs of Rma grom. [...] In the **winter**, the *btsan po*, upon going on a military campaign against Mywa, passed away.

On the other hand, spring is mentioned as following the winter season in years 701/2, 708/9, 725/6, 726/7; compare, for instance:

708/9

(166) § / *spreγu lo la bab ste* / *btsan po dbyard bal po{e}* / *śa ru mkhar na bžugs* / [...] *dgun*
 (168) *btsan po{e} pho brañ brag mar na bžugs* / [...] *dp̄yīd btsan mo ga tun gyī mdad btañ bar lo gchig* / (ITJ 750: 170)

[This is] an annual report: in the monkey year, in the **summer**, the *btsan po* was abiding in Śa ru mkhar [of] Bal po. [...] In the **winter**, the *btsan po*’s court abode in Brag mar. [...] In the **spring**, [one] held the funeral of the *btsan mo*, the *ga tun*.

From the quoted passages we may infer that the four seasons divided into three months were independent from the New Year day. The latter could apparently fall in the spring or in the summer.³⁴ We may hypothesise that it was either in the last spring month or in the first summer month. According to PT 1042 full moon should occur within the 10 days between the 23rd of the last autumn month and the 3rd of the first winter month. This means that ‘seasonal’ months themselves were not determined according to the phases of the moon, as opposed to the modern Tibetan calendar, in which each month begins with a new moon and therefore the full moon always

³⁴ Haahr’s statement that “the order of the seasons was: summer, autumn, winter, and spring” (Haahr 1969: 422) is therefore inaccurate. Yamaguchi (1984) noticed that two consecutive clauses in PT 1089 confirm that the last spring month might have belonged to one year together with the following summer: *byī ba loyi dp̄yīd sla tha cuñs* / (r52) *tshes bžī la* “on the fourth day [of] the last spring month of the rat year” and *byī ba loyi dbyar* “[in] the summer of the rat year” (PT 1089: r52). This however does not entitle us to automatically identify the calendar followed in this document with the one used in Central Tibet. And it is certainly not justified to assert that “the Tibetan calendar started from the first day of the third month of spring in the Tibetan calendar” (Yamaguchi 1984: 208). Likewise unwarranted is Haahr’s conclusion, accepted by Schuh (2012: lxxix), that “the old Tibetan calendar of the Yar luñ dynasty placed the New Year at the beginning of the summer” (1969: 423). Even though in ITJ 1368 *lo sar* (CT *lo gsar*) “New Year” is coordinated in one phrase with the first summer month: *lo sar dañ dbyar sla ra ba* (ll. 5, 21, 36, 42, 50), other data indicate that the New Year day must have varied.

falls on the 15th day of the lunar month (Schuh 1974: 555 and Schuh 2012: 1.lxxxiv). This must have been different in the Tibetan Empire, where the beginning of the New Year was determined according to the lunar calendar, but the administration preponderantly used the ‘seasonal’ calendar.³⁵

In addition, the passage from PT 1042 provides arguments for the short period appropriate for a funeral: before that period (or at least in the mid-summer month) plants are still growing, after that period (starting with the mid-winter month) the soil freezes. This suggests that the period between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd of the first winter month had a constant place in the natural cycle of vegetation independent from moon phases. This period fell approximately six ‘seasonal’ months (three summer months + three autumn months) after the New Year day, presuming that the New Year day was in the last spring month or the first summer month.

In Bialek 2018 (1.417ff., s.v. *dguñ sla*) I argued that Tibetans had two parallel calendric systems – a fact reflected in the language: *zla ba* referred to a month as a unit of time within the seasonal division of the year, whereas *dguñ sla* denoted a lunar month. This again supports the above conclusion that the ‘seasonal’ calendar was not based on lunar phases. Administrative means were recorded according to the ‘seasonal’ calendar but royal funerals were partly determined by the lunar calendar. Moreover, in PT 1042 (79-80) post-funeral offerings are said to be made on every full moon of a lunar month (*dguñ sla*).

Does the whole analysis help us to relate the data from the OTA-I to the information provided by PT 1042? The texts agree on three points:

1. 3 years. According to PT 1042 a royal funeral should take place within three years after the death; the funerals recorded in the OTA-I were held one to three years after the death. Not even a single funeral was held in the year of the death.
2. Autumn/winter. On the authority of PT 1042, a funeral should be held at the end of the autumn or at the beginning of the winter. With one minor exception (a funeral of a foreign princess) all the remaining funerals took place in either autumn or winter.

³⁵ According to Yamaguchi (1984: 205), Chinese historiographical sources are in agreement in stating that the year of Tu fan (identified with Tibet) starts “when barley ripens”. Because later Tibetan and Chinese sources have limited historical value when it comes to the period of the Tibetan Empire, Yamaguchi’s calculations must be treated with due reservation. On the other hand, two dates of OT documents can be identified with dates of the Western calendar. These are the dates of taking the oath in Chang-an and in Lhasa, reported in the ST Treaty:

Tibetan calendar	Chinese calendar	Western calendar
10 th day of the first winter month	10 th day of the 10 th month	8 th November 821
6 th day of the middle summer month	6 th day of the 5 th month	1 st June 822

However, as already argued by Li (1955: 10) and Uray (1984: 349), the Tibetan dates are adapted to the Chinese calendar and cannot be taken as orientation points for other calculations. Were the first winter month the tenth month and the middle summer month the fifth month of the year, the Tibetan year would have always started with the first spring month. The above analysis proves that this is not correct.

3. 2 calendars in use. PT 1042 determines the rough time of a funeral according to the ‘seasonal’ calendar, but specifies it with moon phases. The text also reports on other funeral rites that are to be carried out in accordance with the lunar calendar. The reference to a calendar is less prominent in the OTA-I. The text regularly uses most general season descriptions, clearly dividing the year into four seasons: summer, autumn, winter, and spring. On the other hand, sporadic reference to spring as once beginning, once ending, a year, makes it clear that the New Year day was not determined according to the ‘seasonal’ calendar; an alternative calendar must have been in use as well.³⁶

The similarities cannot be a result of a mere coincidence. They point to a common cultural background behind both texts.

3.1.2 Architecture

The royal tombs of *Phyiñ ba*³⁷ and the most impressive from among other tombs scattered throughout Central Tibet share several architectural features that make them unique in this part of the continent.³⁸ These are:

1. Relative location towards a river and a mountain slope
2. Square or trapezoidal shape of the tumulus

³⁶ Compare in this context Haahr’s notice: “The continuous correlation between the dates of the Tibetan documents and the Chinese historical sources indicates that the Tibetan calendar of lunar months was a lunar-solar calendar. This involves the occurrence of intercalary months and (or) days and a movable beginning of the years within a fixed cyclis” (1969: 423). However, his statement that “the New Year is probably connected with the summer solstice” (*ibid.*) is premature. As indicated above, the New Year must have been calculated according to the lunar calendar. Otherwise there would be no reason why a new year should once begin in the spring, and once in the summer. It is however conceivable that the ‘seasonal’ calendar was based on solstices and equinoxes with the spring equinox starting the new ‘seasonal’ calculation.

Schuh (1974: 557) expressed the opinion: “[...] den tibetischen Kalender im Sinne eines einzigen in Tibet verbreiteten Systems der Zeiteinteilung und Zeitählung (dürfte es) wohl nie gegeben haben”. As for the imperial period, Uray proved that already then two distinct calendars based on sexagenary cycle were in use (Uray 1984).

³⁷ Because the paper is based on OT documents, I use the OT name *Phyiñ ba* instead of the modern *Yphyon rgyas* (cf. Richardson 1963: 75-76). The latter is not attested in OT and it is not possible to ascertain whether the two toponyms referred exactly to the same locality. According to Tucci (1950: 31), *Yphyiñ ba* is the name of the hill on which the fort *Yphyiñ ba stag rtse* (OT *P(h)yiñ ba stag rtse*, PT 1287: 58, 118, 470, 477; *Rkoñ* 4-5) is built. This however must be a later tradition for in the OTA *Phyiñ ba* is the place of royal funerals whereas in the OTC it is a name of a fort (*mkhar*), probably identical with *Phyiñ ba stag rtse*. As it seems, Tucci was the first western scholar who identified the burial grounds of *Yphyon rgyas* as belonging to the royal family (Tucci 1950: 31-32).

³⁸ Cf. Caffarelli 1997: 239. Hazod (2019: 23f.) roughly classified Tibetan mound graves from the imperial period according to their size in the following groups: 10-15m, 20-25m, 30-35m, 40-45m, 50-55m, 60-65m, 70-75m, 80-85m, and more than 85m, i.e. up to 130m. They are thought to represent the so-called ‘elite tombs’. In Hazod’s opinion, these graves belonged to either the members of the royal family, rank-holding nobility, military leadership, or “battle-tested heroes” (Hazod 2018: 14; Hazod 2019: 24).

3. Horizontal trenches in front

4. Pits in the back.³⁹

Thus far this kind of grave was reported only in Central Tibet, most frequently within the Four Horns, and in the Dulan region (including the most renowned Reshui cemetery).⁴⁰ Below I will discuss each of the features separately with the aim of relating, whenever possible, the archaeological findings from Central Tibet and the Dulan region to the textual witness of PT 1042.⁴¹ In this way two planes of comparison arise. On the one hand, I confront the archaeological data from Central Tibet with the data from the Dulan region and see whether they could represent the same culture. On the other hand, the textual evidence of PT 1042 is juxtaposed with the archaeological data to check whether the two kinds of data point to any shared features.



Fig. 1: TTT 0092 Slebs-E (28 58 53, 93 21 02; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2013; modifications and additional data by the author)

³⁹ Pits in the back of elite tombs have been confirmed only in a few cases in Central Tibet thus far. The issue can be settled first when more thorough excavations have been carried out and their results meticulously documented and published. Heller (2013: 117) lists more features characteristic of tombs of Central Tibet and of the Kokonor region. However, not all of them are relevant to the present discussion.

⁴⁰ Hazod 2018: 15; Hazod 2019: 14. For an overview of all cemeteries from Central Tibet dated to the imperial period see Map Burial mound sites recorded by the TTT, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/maps/overview/> (accessed 17.09.2019). Dulan is a modern name. The earlier Chinese name of the region was Bailan (Heller 2007: 63, fn. 10).

⁴¹ For the location of the most important sites discussed in this section of the paper see Map 1 in Appendix.

Re: 1. The most frequently encountered location of imperial burial sites has been classed as FT-A by Hazod and characterised as: “The cemeteries are situated in the non-arable zones, usually in the upper or lower part of the fan-shaped niches of the valley and settlement area. This is by far the most common type.”⁴² A typical example of this type is the burial site 0092 (Fig. 1).⁴³

The tombs face the valley floor with a mountain slope at their backs. Naturally, the location of the tombs towards the floor of the valley and a river that flows through it can be at least partly explained by the topographical features of the terrain (Central Tibet is cut across with innumerable valleys) and limitations it imposes on the construction.



Fig. 2: M-1 at Reshui-I cemetery. (Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2010; modifications and additional data by the author)

The main grave in the Reshui-I cemetery, M-1 (geogr. position: 36°10'42.57"N, 98°17'54.55"E), is directed with its longest side towards the Chahan Usu River that flows through the valley (Fig. 2).⁴⁴

⁴² TTT, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/introduction-and-legend/> (accessed: 23.08.2019); cf. also Hazod 2018: 9ff.

⁴³ The site numbering follows the one proposed on TTT.

⁴⁴ The local tradition considers this tomb as belonging to great councillor (*blon chen*) Mgar (Hazod 2018: 54, fn. 53). According to *Old Tibetan Chronicles* (OTC, PT 1287), five members of the Mgar family held the office of a great councillor: Mgar khri sgra ydzi rmun (l. 79), Mgar mañ žam sum snañ (l. 87), Mgar stoñ rtsan yul zuñ (l. 102), Mgar btsan sña ldom bu (l. 105), and Mgar khri ybrin btsan brod (l. 109; see also the list in Hazod 2019: 110). Three of them occur as great councillors in the OTA: Mgar stoñ rtsan yul zuñ, Mgar btsan sña ldom bu, and Mgar khri ybrin btsan brod. If the local tradition is correct, the tomb could have been built only after the conquest of the Ya ža in 663. Therefore, only the last three great councillors from the Mgar family are relevant for verifying the local lore. Mgar stoñ rtsan yul zuñ was responsible for conquering the Ya ža but died in Ris pu, Central Tibet, in 667 (PT 1288: 48). Mgar btsan sña ldom bu died in Sum chu bo of Śaṅs (Right Horn; cf. Dotson 2009: 212 and Map 6a-c, p. 202) in 685/6 (ITJ 750: 91). Mgar khri ybrin btsan brod was accused in 698/9 (ITJ 750: 128) and, according to Chinese sources (Garatti 2015: 162), committed suicide. Thus, we are left with no candidate for the resident of the Reshui tomb.

It is located on a slope of a mountain where the mountain just starts to rise from the valley floor.

PT 1042 concentrates on the description of a funeral ritual and unfortunately does not treat the general location of the tomb in any detail. The text uses several technical terms to refer to various architectural details of the burial place itself but none of them allows us to reconstruct the topographic characteristics of the spot.

Re: 2. The most majestic of the Central Tibetan tumuli are those of rectangular or trapezoidal shape. They have been classed by Hazod as MT-C mound types: “The coffer-shaped, walled tomb; the tamped earth above the chamber(s) is enclosed by one or more thick walls made of a mixture of stone (or stone slabs) and earth, often reinforced by timber. The space between the walls is filled with stones (or pebbles) and earth. The whole wall construction seems to have been originally covered in earth to accent the hill or mountain-like shape, but in most cases due to erosion the outer earth has partly disappeared so that the parts of the walls are exposed. This is the most common type of the larger burial mounds. [...] Tombs of the MT-C types are rectangular, mostly trapezoidal. They are to be found in the size range of small (5-20m), medium (20-30m) and large (up to ca. 130m). [...] Usually the height of a larger tomb is not more than 5 to 10m.”⁴⁵ The longest side of a trapezoidal tumulus faces towards the valley floor and the river, whereas its opposite side is oriented towards the mountain in the back of the tomb (see Fig. 1 above). Their tops are flat (cf. Hazod 2014: 60; Feiglstorfer 2018: 110). As observed by Feiglstorfer, the trapezoidal shape of tumuli that are located on hillsides with their longer side facing towards the river valley can be explained by geological features of the terrain: this shape gives the tombs greater stability. However, as the author rightly notes, tombs of this shape are also found in the plain (2018: 109), indicating that other considerations must also have played a role in devising the tombs.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Feiglstorfer noticed that the outer orientation of the tumuli

Moreover, as already noticed by Hazod (2019: 50), the recent dendrochronological dating of parts of Reshui-I M-1 to 715 or 716 (Li *et al.* 2015) clearly excludes any great councillor from the Mgar family to be buried in the tomb. If that is the case, one must ask about the reliability of local traditions when it comes to verifying historical facts.

⁴⁵ TTT, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/introduction-and-legend/> (accessed 23.08.2019)

⁴⁶ I put forward the hypothesis that elite tombs were originally square and located on top of mountains or in valleys (cf. the first royal tombs in Phyiñ-ba on Fig. 1 in Hazod 2018: 73). At the beginning their shape might have been influenced by the architecture of square defence towers or maybe square walled households. First with the relocation of grave grounds towards non-arable piedmont areas (triggered most probably by the scarcity of arable land in Central Tibet and the demographic boom in the early imperial period) their shape was changed to trapezoidal in order to provide them with greater stability in the sloping terrain. This shape was popularised so that some of later tombs built in the plains were arranged accordingly too. The generalisation of the trapezoidal shape possibly ensued from the mythical interpretation of the tombs and their new association with the typical Tibetan tent – *sbra*. This hypothesis is additionally supported by the fact that trapezoidal mound tombs have not been attested anywhere else in Central Asia. We may assume that they were ‘invented’ due to the limitations of Central Tibetan landscape. The trapezoidal shape resulted from adaptation to local topography and subsequently received a cultural significance by being juxtaposed with the traditional Tibetan form of housing – the *sbra* tent. Round graves of Central Tibet are generally much smaller than the trapezoidal ones. One could assume that they were round also due to economic factors; not all families could afford paying for a stone construction that would

doesn’t have to parallel the orientation of the tomb it conceals. Actually, the data at our disposal suggest that they didn’t match at all.⁴⁷

Similar architectural features can be ascribed to the Reshui-I tomb M-1 excavated near Dulan: “In terms of the methods and materials used in its construction, as well as its dimensions and shape, the tomb very strongly recalls those of the Yar lung valley royal necropolis in central Tibet” (Heller 1998a: 85). According to Xu, the tumulus measures approximately 65m in front and 55m in the back (Xu 1996c: 24; see Fig. 6 below). Likewise, M-2 from Reshui-II has trapezoidal shape (cf. Fig. 6.1.1-9/2 in Tong 2008: 317). Furthermore, most of the larger tombs of the cemeteries in the Dulan County, Delingha City, and in Ulan County also have a trapezoidal shape with the longest side located towards the river (Tong 2008: 86).

PT 1042 uses terms that denoted various architectural structures that belonged to the tomb. The majority of the structures were to be located within the tumulus. It is to be expected (and is in fact implied by the text) that the tumulus was built after all the funeral ceremonies had been completed. In Bialek 2018 I have proposed interpreting OT *se gru bži* as an epithet of grave, lit. “a small spot of four corners”. The term recurs in many OT texts that deal with funeral rituals but its denotation is far from clear. We know that the rectangular (trapezoidal or square) walls were built to strengthen the construction of larger tumuli (Feiglstorfer 2018: 108ff.). In the next paragraph I suggest that the walls of the tumuli were erected prior to the funeral ceremony but following building of the grave chambers. In this case *se gru bži* could have referred either to the proper grave construction or to the rectangular walls that were later concealed under the tumulus.⁴⁸ It is hoped that the future research into the technical vocabulary of PT 1042 will clarify the relationship between the archaeological data and PT 1042.

Re: 3. Another commonly observed characteristic of the tumuli is the presence of a few horizontal rows in front of larger graves. These are trenches that always run parallel to the front wall of the tumulus construction. This position of the trenches suggests that they were dug after the rectangular

support a trapezoidal (or earlier: square) shape. It is not possible to make a trapezoidal mound without a permanent support. As Feiglstorfer remarks, “[i]ndividual buildings decisions may be related to a mound’s total size, the topographical situation, the material available on site, and certainly also the principal’s capacity regarding the expenditure on labour.” (Feiglstorfer 2015: 4). Therefore, for the period of the Tibetan Empire three basic shapes of burial mounds are attested: round, square, and trapezoidal. The chronology of their occurrence was most probable: round (less labour-intensive and thus requiring less economic means) – square (more labour-intensive because of the need for a more stable construction and so introduced by the elites) – trapezoidal (an adaptation of the square shape triggered by topographic constraints). An indirect implication of this hypothesis would be that as soon as trapezoidal shape was generalised and applied to tumuli erected on plains, square shape would have been abandoned. The verification of the proposed hypothesis will be possible first when large-scale excavations (including dating) have been carried out, meticulously documented, and their results published.

⁴⁷ Feiglstorfer 2018: 126f.; see also Caffarelli 1997: 237.

⁴⁸ Cf. in this context Feiglstorfer’s comment: “Reconstructing the building phases, the inner core must have been the starting point of a grave-mound construction and the following steps towards the outer shells seem to follow a structural logic. From inside to the outside was the ideal method [...]” (2015: 4).

walls of the tumuli had been erected. Hence, the rectangular walls must have been completed before the funeral ceremony started. The rows have been identified as offering trenches. Fig. 3 presents the burial ground of Lha rtse Khrom chen (TTT 0339) with 28 identified sacrificial pits (Hazod 2018: 13, fn. 11). In Skyid stod (Fig. 4; TTT 0065) 68 mounds and 36 sacrificial pits with animal bones inside were counted (Hazod 2018: 48).⁴⁹ Trenches are also clearly visible in front of two of the royal tumuli situated in Phyiñ ba (Fig. 5; TTT 0032). The remaining royal tumuli are now located among arable fields and so their original burial grounds have not been preserved on the surface.⁵⁰ Sacrificial trenches are also clearly visible on satellite photographs of the following cemeteries recorded in the TTT database: 0003, 0024, 0092, 0112, 0113, 0134, 0171, 0172, 0176, 0237, 0278, 0284, 0337, 0532, 0560, 0581 and 0592.⁵¹

An interesting and heretofore not recognised feature of these trenches is that there seems to be always an odd number of them (3, 5, 7, or 9; cf. the numbered trenches in Figs. 3-5). The highest number of nine trenches has thus far been attested only in the royal tomb identified as belonging to

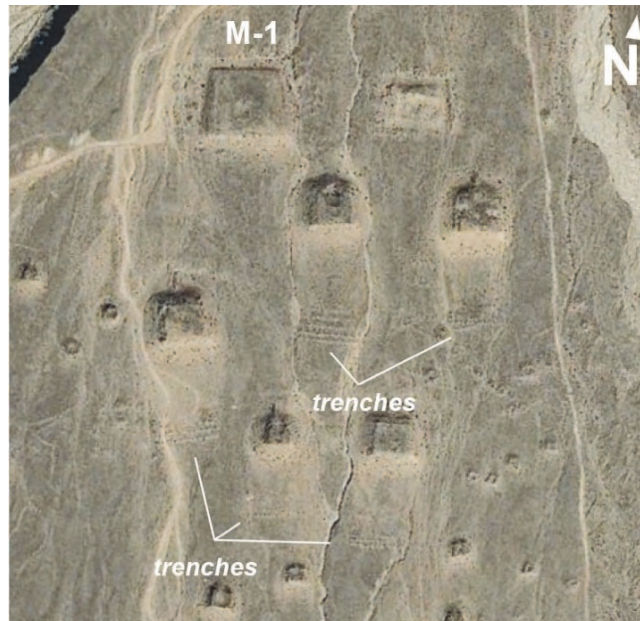


Fig. 3: TTT 0339 Lha rtse khrom chen (29 21 33, 87 48 42; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2012; modifications and additional data by the author)

⁴⁹ From the quoted descriptions of the Lha rtse khrom chen and Skyid stod cemeteries it is not clear whether the word 'pits' refers to the sacrificial trenches only or include also sacrificial pits (see the next paragraph).

⁵⁰ According to Feiglstorfer, the stone inscription (*rdo rins*) of Khri lde sroñ brtsan's tomb is now located 2.5m below the ground. This has been caused by the successive erosion of the surrounding terrain over centuries (2015: 5 and the graphic on p. 31). From this we can infer that also in the case of other graves built on a plain, their supplementary constructions (like trenches and pits) will not be easily recognisable on the ground anymore.

⁵¹ As for the moment (21.09.2019), TTT has indexed 616 potential imperial tumulus fields in Central Tibet.

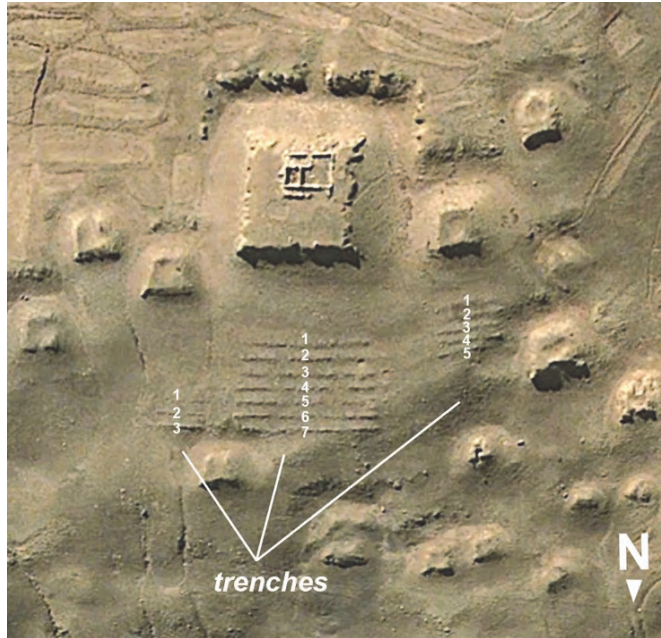


Fig. 4: TTT 0065 Skyid stod (28 22 57, 90 47 53; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2011; modifications and additional data by the author)

Khri lde gtsug brtsan (see Fig. 5; Hazod 2018: 73, Fig. 1).⁵² Regarding the second royal tomb in Fig. 5, remains of only 5 trenches can be seen, but this situation obviously results from the erosion of the site. No trenches could be identified in front of round or *stūpa*-shaped mounds and apparently not all trapezoidal tombs had trenches. I put forward the hypothesis that some trapezoidal tombs were devoid of trenches for religious reasons. In *Dbay bzéd* we read: “So, it was decided that from then on Bon po should not perform funerals and it was also decided that cattle, horses and other animals should not be slaughtered for the deceased and the meat of these animals offered in sacrifice” (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 62).

The prescription was presumably made during the reign of *btsan po* Khri sroñ lde brtsan. On the other hand, it was suggested that stone lions found in the direct proximity of several tombs should be related to Buddhist influences (cf. Heller 2007; Tong 2008: 105; Hazod 2015; Hazod 2019: 72).⁵³

⁵² As a matter of fact, a considerable mismatch prevails in the Tibetan literature concerning the identification of single tombs in Phyiñ ba (cf. the concise description of earlier comparisons in Haarh 1969: 393, esp. Tab. XIII on pp. 395-396). Recently Hazod has identified all the tombs according to the section *Gsañ ba yañ chun* from the *Mkhas pa ldeyu chos γbyuñ* (2018: 61ff.). It is apparent that the reconstructions of Haarh and Hazod do not match each other in some points. A thorough comparison of the most important written sources made available after Haarh’s publication is necessary before we may proceed with further examination of the royal necropolis. It is likewise not certain whether the names transmitted in later sources are indeed original and ‘correct’. For instance, the OT name of the tomb of Khri lde sroñ brtsan seems to have been Rgyal chen γphrul (Khri 59) whereas GLR has Rgyal chen bañ so (Bsod nams rgyal mtshan 1966: 183, 89v) and *Gsañ ba yañ chun* gives γphrul chen bzér (*apud* Hazod 2018: 66 and Fig. 1 on p. 73).

⁵³ This in my opinion however does not mean that, as assumed by Hazod (2019: 72), the lions must have started occurring after the model of the tomb of Khri sroñ lde brtsan. Because lions belong to the general iconography of Buddhism their implementation in architecture was not dependent on *btsan po*’s order. The



Fig. 5: TTT 0032 Mu ra (29°00'55, 91°41'62; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2011; modifications and additional data by the author)

For instance, in front of M-1 in Khrom chen (29°21'33.00"N, 87°48'42.00"E) two lions have been found (Hazod 2019: 72). Even though M-1 is the largest tomb in this cemetery (TTT 0339) and the remaining big trapezoidal tombs all have trenches in front (see Fig. 3 above), no trenches can be seen in front of M-1. Lions could have indicated a turn in a person's or family's religious affiliation. Trenches were abandoned in Buddhist circles because they were intrinsically bound to animal sacrifice – a rite condemned by Buddhism. The only known exception thus far is the tomb of Khri sroñ lde brtsan which has both lions and trenches. This results from a particular position of a *btsan po* towards his subjects and the society. Consequently, a *btsan po*'s tomb was devised on the basis of a political rather than a personal decision.

In front of the main Reshui-I grave M-1 five trenches stretch 3 meters apart from each other (see Fig. 6 above and Fig. 9 in Heller 1998a: 87; cf. Heller 2006). Inside them one found skeletons of 87 horses. In addition, in front of the grave there are 27 pits, 14 on the eastern, and 13 on the western side of the trenches (Xu 1996b: 15; Xu 1996c).

Re: 4. In addition to the trenches, in some cases sacrificial pits behind a tomb can be seen. In Yon (Fig. 7; TTT 0024) ten pits arranged in one row behind the tomb have been identified.⁵⁴ This is very exceptional for usually only single sacrificial pits behind the mound are reported. In this case remains of trenches in front can likewise be recognised. Less clear is the situation with the M-2 in

use of lions in tomb architecture might post-date their application in other contexts. For instance, Heller (1998b) describes lions represented on Tibetan textiles. Another example is a stele (*rdo riñs*) dated to the reign of Khri sroñ lde brtsan on which an elephant and a lion are sculpted (Heller 2007: 61f.). The stele is located near Glañ dkar village (Sman gliñ county). Lions seated on a lotus pedestal (a typical Buddhist pose) ornament a brass plaque dated to eighth-ninth century (Heller 2007: 62).

⁵⁴ Cf. Feiglstorfer 2015: 5 and TTT, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites_by_id/0024/ (accessed 31.12.2020).

Sñe mo (Fig. 8; TTT 0274). Behind the left back corner of the tumulus, about 20m away from the bottom of the tumulus, a round shape can be seen on all satellite pictures (29°30'1.83"N, 90°9'49.48"E). Whether this is a sacrificial pit or not, can only be established on site. In Sri (Fig. 9; TTT 0157), again in the left back corner behind the tumulus, in its immediate proximity, a clear round object can be seen on satellite photos (29°36'59.74"N, 91°14'34.79"E) that could be a sacrificial pit. A structure-from-motion (SfM) 3-D visualisation of a sacrificial pit from the burial ground 0172 is presented in Feiglstorfer (2018: 139, Fig. 16). The exact position of the pit is not provided in the publication, but Guntram Hazod (personal communication, 03.01.2020) kindly informed me that the pit lies outside of the proper burial ground.

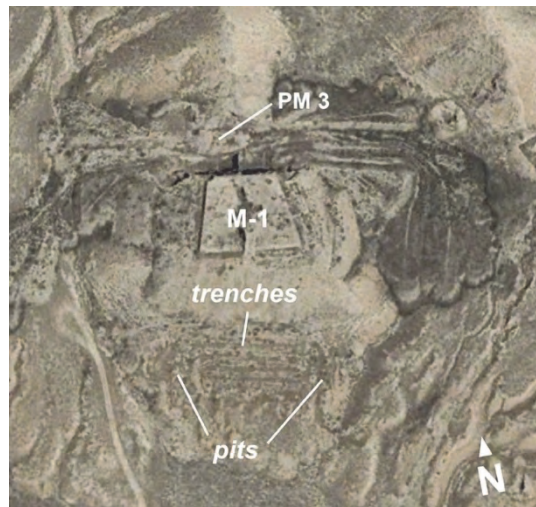


Fig. 6: Reshui-I M-1 (36 10 42, 98 17 54; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2006; modifications and additional data by the author)

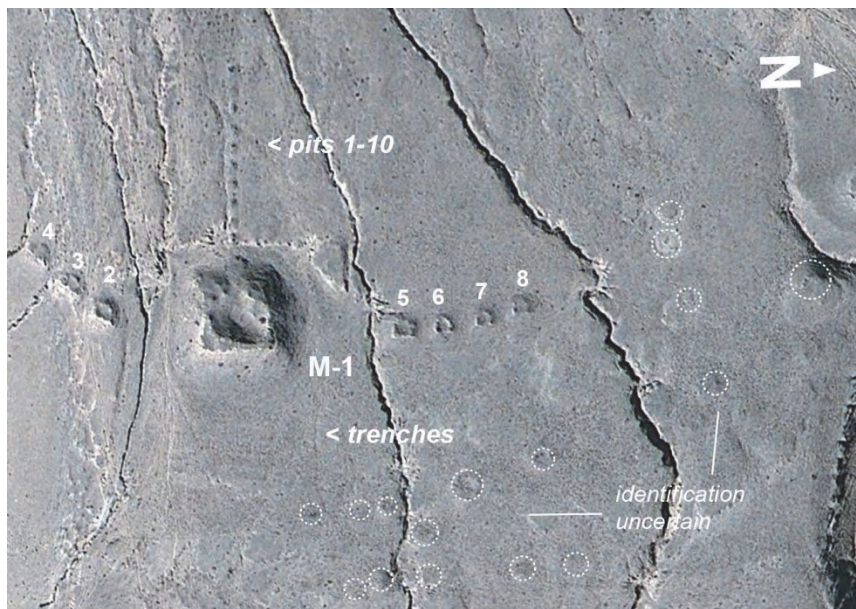


Fig. 7: TTT 0024 Yon (29 20 08, 91 49 28; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2010; modifications and additional data by the author)



Fig. 8: TTT 0274 Sñe mo (29 30 00, 90 09 48; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2012; modifications and additional data by the author)

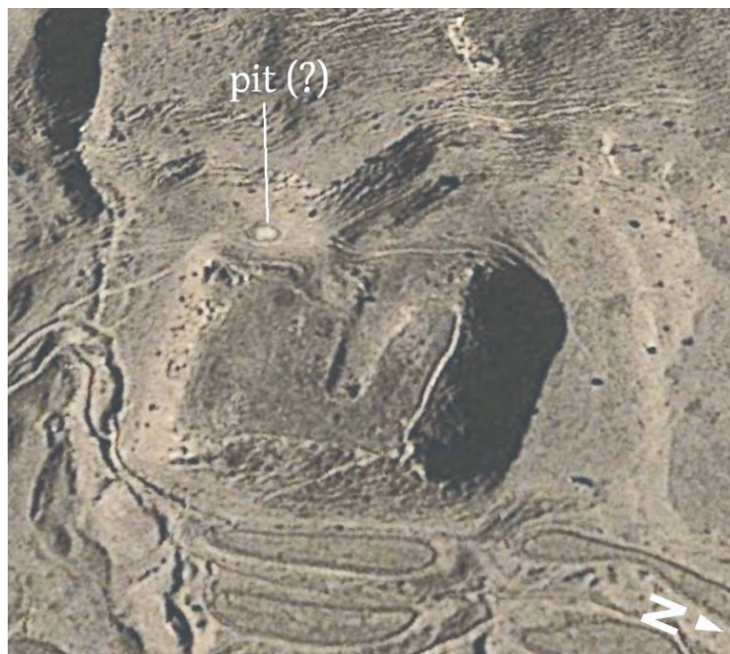


Fig. 9: TTT 0157 Sri (29 36 60, 91 14 36; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2012; modifications and additional data by the author)

The round pit behind the Reshui-I grave M-1 (PM-3, see Fig. 6) contained yak and sheep skulls (Xu 1996b: 14; Xu 1996c: 25). According to Tong, PM-3 is located 20m to the north-west of the tumulus

(2008: 88), although Xu gave his position as north-east of the tomb (Xu 1996b: 14). Satellite images are too imprecise to allow us settling the issue, but the location to the north-west (i.e. behind the left back corner of the tumulus) would correspond to the position of the assumed sacrificial pits in TTT 0274 and TTT 0157 (see above Figs. 8 and 9).

Concerning the external structure of a burial ground, in PT 1042 (93) we read of *thog mayi yon kuñ* “offering pits of the front part” and *tha mayi gtañ khuñ* “gift-pits of the back part”:

spyi groñs ñog du gyur pa la / thog mayi yon kuñ / tha mayi gtañ khuñ lastsogs / (94) te sa lan gsum las {lhag pa} thur du rkor myi ruñ ño //

Generally, it is not proper to dig down earth like offering-pits of the front part [or] gift-pits of the back part, among others, more than three times for those who died.

The passage is very enigmatic and seems to be taken out of context. The meaning of the clause “to dig down earth three times” is unclear. I tentatively assume that this prescription meant that in order to dig an offering pit one was allowed to spade (i.e. remove the necessary soil with a spade) not more than three times. This would have yielded rather shallow pits, but might have been dictated by pragmatics: many of the mound tombs identified so far are located on mountain slopes, i.e. they must have been dug in rock or similar hard substrate. Apart from that, religious concerns might have been involved too; one could fear harming virtual beings considered to inhabit the soil, like *sa bdag* etc. Alternatively, “three times” could mean three series of pits, i.e. three trenches or three pits.⁵⁵ Despite the problems of its interpretation the passage establishes an important connection between PT 1042 and the archaeological facts revealed above about the imperial mounds.

Another passage relevant to the discussion can be quoted from PT 1287:

btsan pos bkaŋ stsald pa // dbyī tshab glo ba ñe bas // gum na mchad pyag dar te brtsig par gnañ / (265) rta nī brgyaŋ dgum bar gnañ // bu tsha gañ ruñ ba gchig // gser gyī yi ge myī chad par stsald par bkaŋ / (266) {s}tsal to //

The *btsan po* [Khri sroñ brtsan] ordered: “Because [Dbays Phañs to re] Dbyi tshab is loyal, when he dies, [it] is allowed that [his] tomb, being *pyag dar*, is built. As for horses, [it] is allowed that one hundred are killed (for his funeral). The one of [his] descendants who is capable will interminably (lit. so that it does not stop) be given a letter of gold.”⁵⁶

It follows that horse-sacrifice (at least, of this size) had to be permitted by the *btsan po*. The only remains found in trenches of the Reshui-I M-1 grave belonged to horses, although other sacrificial pits contained bones of various species, like yaks, dogs, and sheep. One can speculate that trenches were reserved for horse-sacrifice. It is possible that, due to the high value of horses for military purposes, not everyone was allowed a horse-sacrifice at his/her death. This, beside Buddhist affiliation, could be another reason explaining why not all trapezoidal tombs have trenches.

⁵⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the passage and the proposed reconstruction see Bialek forthcoming-a.

⁵⁶ This passage makes the distinction between OT *gnañ* “to allow” and *stsald* “HON to bestow” clear. The former is also commonly used in this meaning in OT inscriptions. The CT meaning “to give” apparently developed later.

The above analysis has proved that sacrificial holes were dug in front of tumuli (trenches) and in their back (pits). These constitute the basic feature that distinguishes imperial tumuli of Central Tibet and the Dulan region from other burial constructions of Eurasia.

To conclude, the discussion has shown that Central Tibetan tumuli share some characteristic architectural features with the mounds situated in the Dulan region (foremost, in the Reshui cemeteries). These are: location in a non-arable zone in a piedmont, trapezoidal shape with the longest side facing towards the valley floor and the river, front sacrificial trenches, and back sacrificial pits.⁵⁷ The last two characteristics are also addressed in PT 1042. Furthermore, the term *ban so* “funeral mound” is mentioned in the text, but its exact meaning (and denotation) in relation to other spatial terms needs further research. Other architectural terms occurring in the text refer to the inner architecture of a tomb. Unfortunately, due to the lack of solid archaeological excavations in Central Tibet our knowledge about the internal structure of the imperial tombs is more than scanty. In this regard PT 1042 and the archaeological data diverge: the first gives us more detail on the internal, the latter on the external architecture of the tumuli.

3.1.3 Economy

The economy of the social group behind the funeral in PT 1042 was apparently related to four species of animals that also acquired a principal role in the ritual: horses, yaks, *mdzos*, and sheep.⁵⁸ These animals recur, for instance, in the OTA or in the OTC – texts of whose cultural affiliation there can be no doubt. According to PT 1042 (116 and 121), horse mounts (*chibs*), sheep (*lug*), and horses (*rta*) were sacrificed in the grave during the funeral ritual. The fate of the remaining animals is not directly addressed in the text. We only learn that they participated in the funeral procession (ll. 15-18, 28-40, 123-134).

⁵⁷ There are however many more features that indicate that the tombs of the Dulan region should be related to the culture of the Tibetan Empire. Objects with Tibetan inscriptions were excavated from several tombs: wooden slips (Reshui M-10, 99DRNM3, 99DRNM2, 99DRNM1), a horse skull (Kaomiaotu), and a silk fragment (DRNM1; Tong 2008: 143ff.). In addition, four stones, used to seal the entrance to 99DRNM3, had Tibetan inscriptions: *blon*, *khri*, *seyu*, *ka* (Tong 2008: 144 and 413, Fig. 6.2.10-4, the third stone with the syllables *seyu* is reproduced upside down). Taken together they yield “councillor (*blon*) Khri *seyu* ka”. *Seyu ka* does not seem to be a Tibetan name, but *khri* is an element frequently encountered in Tibetan names. Chinese inscriptions were found only on silk-ware and vessels, whereas one piece of silk had a Pahlavi inscription (Tong 2008: 145f.). The wooden slips and the stones were undoubtedly inscribed for the sole purpose of the funeral; the slips contain inventories of goods that were laid down in the grave and the stones apparently identify the deceased as a councillor (*blon*). The remaining inscribed objects might have been produced for other purposes but eventually found their way into the tombs. The recent dendrochronological dating of wood used to roof Reshui-I M-1 has proven that the tomb was built not earlier than in 715 (Li *et al.* 2015) and thus certainly after the Tibetan conquest of the *Yā za* (= Tuyuhun). The owner of the tomb cannot be identified yet but mitochondrial DNA analysis of human bones excavated from 99DRNM2 and 99DRNM4 confirmed that it “corresponds to the DNA of modern Tibetans” (Heller 2016: 158, fn. 21).

⁵⁸ PT 1042 attests to a very rich vocabulary connected to these species; for each at least a few distinct terms are used. A detailed analysis of the terms will be presented in Bialek forthcoming-a. No other animal species are mentioned in the text.

Recent archaeological and art historical research has delivered a fair amount of data on funerals and tombs that have been associated with the culture of the Tibetan Empire.⁵⁹ Two kinds of data are of special interest to the present discussion: 1. remains of animals found in graves or in their immediate proximity; and 2. illustrations on coffin panels that were made with the clear purpose of being laid down in a grave.⁶⁰ Below I will discuss the available data.

Tomb sacrifices: At Guolimu, in the Delingha county, a tomb with two rectangular coffins of a buried couple was excavated. On either side of the coffins there were “complete skeletons of a horse and a camel” (Heller 2013: 11; cf. also Tong 2008: 95). Above a cypress board, with which another tomb chamber of the same grave was covered, “there were scattered bones of sheep” (Heller 2013: 11). The human remains were buried in wooden coffins, some painted panels of which have been preserved (see below). On the basis of the paintings presenting Tibetan-clad people, the tombs were identified as Tibetan and dated to the period 700-750 (Tong 2008: 95).

In the Reshui-I tomb M-1 “[a]bout 4.5 metres below the top, a rectangular pit (designated PM-1 – JB) for animal burial was discovered, containing the bones of sheep, horses, yak and deer” (Heller 1998a: 85).⁶¹ Round pits in front of the tumulus (see Fig. 6 above) contained yak heads and hooves, and dogs. According to Xu (1996a: 7), eight complete skeletons of dogs were found.⁶² Furthermore, 87 horses were buried in the trenches before the tumulus (Xu 1996a: 10). The round pit behind the tumulus (PM-3) contained yak and sheep skulls (Xu 1996b: 14; Xu 1996c: 25). The excavations also comprised other tombs from the Reshui cemetery. 84% of them contained animal remains, of which the majority belonged to horses, yaks, goats/sheep, and dogs (Xu 1996b: 15).

In Kexiaotu (36°1’56.20”N, 98°5’49.96”E), a site in Dulan county, two horse skulls were excavated from a tumulus (Heller 1998a: 89). One of them is inscribed with Tibetan text and drawings identified as *linga* by Heller (2006; see Fig. 13 in Heller 1998a: 89).⁶³ Besides the horse skulls, an inscribed sheep’s rib and a sheep shoulder blade with drawings were discovered. A few wooden slips with Tibetan inscriptions were found as well (Heller 1998a: 89-90).

Archaeological excavations within the historical Four Horns are rare. Xu reported pits with horse sacrifices in Qielongzemu (Tib. Mchims luñ rtse mo; 29°22’20.89”N, 91°49’19.69”E, Naidong (Tib. Sne gdong) county, Shannan (Tib. Lho kha) prefecture), from the imperial period

⁵⁹ Cf. Heller 1998a; Xu 1996a; Heller 2013; Heller 2016.

⁶⁰ Designs found on textiles or vessels are less indicative, for these objects could have been primarily manufactured for other purposes and only secondarily laid down in graves.

⁶¹ See also Xu 1996b: 14.

⁶² In Xu’s opinion (*ibid.*), this fact indicates that the deceased stemmed from Tuyuhun (OT ḡa ža). However, in another publication, Xu characterised the deceased buried in the tomb as “Tubo aristocrat” (1996c: 24). The latter view was apparently expressed in order to ‘facilitate’ the discussion on the inner architecture of Tibetan tombs, by comparing the excavated Reshui-I tomb M-1 with Tibetan textual sources. In this way Xu attempted to avoid the question of the relation between archaeological finds and textual witnesses.

⁶³ Heller originally described the skulls as belonging to a camel but later re-identified them as horse skulls (Heller 2006; see also Tong 2008: 144).

(1996b: 16).⁶⁴ In sacrificial trenches and pits of another unnamed tomb one found bones of horses, sheep, cows (yaks?), dogs, deer, chicken and doves. Apart from the horses, all the other animals had been cut into pieces, which means that dogs were not conceived of as psychopomps (Feiglstorfer 2018: 113, fn. 4).

Coffin panel paintings: In two tombs (M-1 and M-2) of the Guolimu cemetery three painted wooden coffins were found.⁶⁵ Plank I (Fig. 6.5.1-1 on p. 418 in Tong 2008) of the coffin from M-1 contains pictures of horses, yaks, deer, and a dog in what seems to be a hunting scene. Another scene shows horses and a camel. In a third scene a yak bound to a stake is depicted. The painting of plank II (Fig. 6.5.1-2 on p. 419 in Tong 2008) is badly damaged and so its contents are less certain. It also contains various scenes, some of which include animals such as: decorated horses, a camel loaded with goods, and cattle (yaks?). Plank I of the coffin of M-2 depicts horses, deer, yaks, wild donkeys, and a dog. Plank II is only partly preserved and only horses are visible.⁶⁶

Planks of another coffin, that are now in a private collection and their provenance is not certain (Tong 2008: 163 and Fig. 6.5.1-11-12 on p. 425), depict horses, deer, camels, dogs, sheep, and yaks. The deceased for whom the coffins were prepared can be identified as either Tibetans or Tibetanised ʁa ʁa on the basis of the headdresses and costumes of the main figures on the panels (Tong 2008: 165ff.).

Yet two other coffin panels (from an unspecified site) kept in an anonymous collection are connected by Heller with Tibetan culture and its spread in East Turkestan. The author identifies it on the basis of a picture of “a man dressed in a typical Tibetan white robe with multi-colour medallion cuff, wearing low turban” (Heller 2013: 18).⁶⁷ Regarding animals, the panel contains pictures of grazing horses, white goat being slaughtered, and two dogs. Another illustration presents goats, sheep and a camel with an empty saddle (*ibid.*). In Heller 2016 (182) the author interpreted the scene as presenting animals “destined for sacrifice”. On panel II of the same coffin a hunting scene is shown with a yak, wild donkey (*rkyanis*), Tibetan antelopes, a tiger, and horses, whereas a distinct scene has a yak tethered to a pole (Heller 2016: 178 and 184). A ‘caravan’ scene depicts a laden camel led by a man on horseback (Heller 2016: 181).

The very custom of painting wooden coffin panels might not have been Tibetan and, in fact, no such objects have been reported from Central Tibet thus far.⁶⁸ Instead, painted coffins were popular

⁶⁴ This site corresponds to ʁon-3 (0023) of TTT. As Guntram Hazod kindly informed me, the name Mchims luñ rtse mo does not seem to be known in his sources for this area (personal communication, 03.01.2020).

⁶⁵ It was not possible for me to establish the exact geographic position of the cemetery. Detailed descriptions of the coffin panels including reproductions can be found in Tong (2008: 154ff.) and Heller 2016. Heller speaks of four coffins excavated at Guolimu county and one of unknown provenance, now in a private collection (2016: 156). “Four coffins” might be a slip of tongue for “four panels”.

⁶⁶ The third coffin excavated in Guolimu is in a private collection and its description is missing in the literature.

⁶⁷ Side by side with three spherical white tents, the panel depicts a black trapezoidal tent (Heller 2016: 157 and Panel I on pp. 161 and 162) – an important element missing from Guolimu panels which contain only drawings of white spherical tents.

⁶⁸ So far, painted coffins with motifs that can be identified as Tibetan have been discovered only in the Dulan region; cf. Heller 2016: 147. The latter author nevertheless sees the use of painted wooden coffins as a “common characteristic of Tibetan burial practices” (*ibid.*: 149). Because no wooden coffins have been

among Xianbei (Tong 2008: 175) from whom they might have been adopted by Ya za (possibly a confederation of ethnic groups of at least partial Xianbei provenance) and then by the Tibetans in Central Asia.⁶⁹

To conclude, there is limited overlapping between the archaeological data and the information delivered by PT 1042. Table 1 gives an overview of the animals occurring in these sources:

Animal	PT 1042	CA Excavations	Coffin panels
horse	+	+	+
yak	+	+	+
<i>mdzo</i>	+		
sheep	+	+	+
camel		+	+
deer		+	+
dog		+	+
wild donkey/ <i>rkyañ</i>			+
goat			+
Tib. antelope			+
tiger			+

(Tab. 1)

Only horse, yak, and sheep recur everywhere, therefore more important is the question what is missing in the particular sources, and why? *Mdzo* is only present in PT 1042. Furthermore, camels, deer, and dogs were both excavated and presented on the coffin panels. Their remains in tombs indicate that they were sacrificed during the funeral. Camels are not native to the Tibetan Plateau but to Central Asia – wild camels (*Camelus ferus*) still live in the northern parts of China, in the Kokonor region, and in southern Mongolia. In the graves of the region around the Kokonor Lake there seems to have been a longer tradition of burying dogs with the deceased. Some of the oldest of such graves from the common era were excavated in the Shangsunjiazhai cemetery (36°45'42.89"N, 101°45'23.03"E; 14km north of Xining) that has been dated to the period between the 1st c. BCE and the 3rd c. CE (Tong 2008: 42ff.). Beside the more general assessment that certain animal species were buried in graves or in their proximity, we shall distinguish between animals that were dismembered (horses, dogs, sheep, camel) and those buried whole (horses, dogs). Sacrificial dismembering is indeed mentioned in PT 1042:

(96) *thugs dbab pa dañ / sñun śan gdab pa yañ // lhu bcu gñis mgo dañ bcu gsum ste / γdi las mañs /* (97) *na yañ drags // ñuñs na yañ chad de myi ruñ ño //*

Regarding the *thugs* that was cast down and *sñun śan* that was thrown, [there] being twelve portions, thirteen together with the head; if [there] were more than these, [it would be] too many; if [there] were less [than these], [it would be] too little. That would not be appropriate.

Some of the animals buried in the Reshui cemetery must have been dismembered. Sacrificial pits

reported from Central Tibet, Feiglstorfer assumes that they must have been extremely rare. On the other hand, stone coffins were found in several graves of Central Tibet (Feiglstorfer 2018: 124f.).

⁶⁹ Painted wooden coffins are found already in Xiongnu tombs (Miller *et al.* 2009: 11; Miller 2011: 570).

contained hooves (yaks), skulls (sheep, bharal (blue sheep), yaks, goats, red deer, horses), and other bones (horses, yaks, sheep; cf. Xu 1996b: 14f.).

The coffin panels present saddled camels and horses without a rider. This motif was interpreted as representing animals destined for funeral sacrifice (cf. Heller 2016: 182). According to PT 1042, a *do ma* horse and, first of all, a psychopomp sheep (*skyibs lug*) were adorned and equipped to accompany the deceased in the afterworld. Tong (2008: 216, Table 5) lists parts of saddles excavated from five different tombs but it seems they were not connected with any animal remains (or, at least, such a connection was not addressed in the publications).

The coffin paintings (presenting main participants of the event in Tibetan attire) and Tibetan inscriptions on wooden slips, as well as the acknowledged historical facts on the presence of Tibetans in this region from the second half of the 7th century onward, allow us to interpret the graves as belonging to either Tibetans or highly Tibetanised locals. The divergence in the use of animals attests to local adaptation of Tibetan funeral rituals. Dog companions were a long-standing custom practised in the region, whereas camels (unknown in Central Tibet but commonly used in Central Asia) supplemented the funeral ‘gifts’. The composition of the remains in the graves reflects the local economy. From this an important conclusion can be drawn: because PT 1042 does not mention animals whose bones are frequently found in Central Asian graves (foremost, dogs and camels) but limits itself to the species known from Central Tibetan context, we may infer that *the text depicts a Tibetan funeral held in Central Tibet*.

3.1.4 Political geography

Besides the OTA, there are only two known OT documents that mention Mdo smad – a historical region located to the north-east of Central Tibet – one of them being PT 1042.⁷⁰ According to the OTA, a council was held there on a regular basis once or twice a year, cf.:

mdo smad gyī dgun ṽdun (113) *rgyam śī gar du ṽduste / sum paṽī śo tshigs bzun bar lo gcig*
/ (ITJ 750)

[This is] an annual report: the winter council of Mdo smad, having convened at Rgyam śī gar, adopted the dice code of Sum pas.

⁷⁰ In the Tibetan Empire, Mdo smad did not form part of Four Horns and had its own administration (cf. also Uebach 2003: 24). The attempt to define its location and extent on the basis of later documents is anachronical and should be avoided. Many local toponyms mentioned in the OTA as related to Mdo smad seem to be of non-Tibetan origin. However, concerning its word-formation, Mdo smad is a toponym formed according to the rules of Tibetan morphology; *smad* was frequently added as the second element. Generally, Mdo smad makes the impression of being a native Tibetan term.

Another OT document that contains the toponym is ITN 1093A (old shelf mark: M.I.lviii.005). The woodslip has many illegible letters and therefore its interpretation is not possible. Thomas (1935-55: 3.57b) also listed ITN 1097 (old shelf mark: M.I.lviii.009) as mentioning Mdo smad, but I was unable to trace the toponym in this woodslip. Uebach 2003 stated that “[i]n documents dating from the period of Tibetan occupation of Central Asia there is the interesting reference to the office of ‘councillor of Domä’ (i.e. Mdo smad – JB). However, she didn’t specify the documents and I suspect she thought of ITN 1093A in which the word *blon* occurs in one line with Mdo smad, but it is more than uncertain that a *blon* of Mdo smad was meant in the document.

Mdo smad was the only place outside of Central Tibet for which the OTA report councils. This fact attests to the political significance of the region. The same place recurs in PT 1042 in the following sentence:

žan lon žig mdo smad na ñam nois lags / (141) par btañ naṅ // phañs cha rī{ñ} gañ du gśegs kar gsol /

When [one] had sent an aristocrat to be a mourner in Mdo smad, [one] offered items of archery that should go to *ri gañ*.

Mdo smad is the only toponym mentioned in the ritual description of PT 1042.⁷¹ The sending of a *žan lon*, a person with a clear political status, to a place of such political and military significance as Mdo smad can itself be considered a political act. We don’t know whether this was a single occasion of one particular funeral that a *žan lon* was sent to Mdo smad, or maybe rather an established custom required each time a royal person died. Indeed, sending a *žan lon* is a strong indication that the rite described in PT 1042 concerned a royal person. Otherwise, if an important person from aristocracy died, one would rather expect a member of her own family to be sent (if at all) to the ‘second political centre’ of the Empire. The rite of sending a *žan lon* to Mdo smad is an acknowledgement of the importance of the region for Tibetan politics.⁷²

The OTA attest to Mdo smad as an important place for the politics of the Tibetan Empire. Its mentioning in PT 1042 supports the assumed relationship between the funeral ritual and the Tibetan culture and politics.

3.1.5 Language

In general, the language of PT 1042 can be said to be Tibetan throughout. Correctly formed collocations and no foreign syntactic structures prove that it was written in Tibetan and not, for

⁷¹ The second colophon of the text mentions also the place Phreyu luñ of Yur śar po. In Bialek forthcoming-a I speculate that this might have been the place where the reported funeral ritual took place.

⁷² The occurrence of Mdo smad in PT 1042 raises yet another question concerning the text and its relation to the Tibetan Empire: can we be more specific about the time of the composition of the text? In the OTA Mdo smad is mentioned as a place of councils between 692/3 and 764/5. The preserved versions of the OTA end shortly before the Tibetan second occupation of Dunhuang (ca. 787-848). The OTA do not report on such places of council (*γdun saltsa*) as Kwa cu khrom (PT 1078: 4), great *khrom* (PT 1217: 1), or *khrom* (Or.15000/439: 1; Or.15000/315: 1; Or.15000/426: r1). Therefore, the question arises: was PT 1042 composed before the conquest of the Central Asian territories or rather did Mdo smad retain its central role in Tibetan politics thereafter? We can only speculate that the conquest of Dunhuang and the neighbouring regions secured Tibetan presence in Central Asia and must have led to the decrease in importance of Mdo smad. The latter became a quasi-internal region with no urgent relevance for foreign policy or international trade. This assumption seems partly confirmed by the fact that the so-called first edict of Khri sroñ lde brtsan (issued in connection with the erection of the Bsam yas temple; Tucci: 1950: 43-4) was copied and sent to “the Bru ža land (*bru ža yul*), Žaṅ žuñ land (*žan žuñ yul*), Mdo smad, and to the regions of the Sde khams (OT *bde gams* < **bde khams*) councillors”; KhG *ja* 109v3-4, the text of the edict is transliterated in Tucci 1950: 95-97). In this short passage we see that Mdo smad followed Bru ža and Žaṅ žuñ which fact points to its secondary significance in the Tibetan politics, even though the region apparently retained enough autonomy to be included in the list. Therefore, it is possible that PT 1042 describes a funeral from a period preceding the second conquest of Central Asia, although the manuscript itself is evidently a later copy.

instance, translated from another language. Frequently used discourse markers of the spoken Tibetan language (*de nas*, *deyi yog du*) allow us to assume that the text was an oral account narrated in Tibetan vernacular and subsequently committed to paper. Its native Tibetan origin is confirmed by the lack of loanwords or syntactic calques. PT 1042 contains quite a few *hapax legomena* (like *rkyā rol*, *sku gśen*, *thugs gur*, *žal ta pa*, *zi mo*, *zug skyan*, *zo rig*, *g.yag rol* etc.) but, on the other hand, it shares some technical terms exclusively with the OTA-I (*btol* “?”, *rin* “dead body”, *rin khañ* “mortuary”) and/or other Dunhuang texts devoted to funeral rituals or afterlife (*rgyal thag brgyad*, *do ma*, *mdad*, *se gru bži*, *skyibs lug*, *dbon lob* etc.). The shared specialised vocabulary of the ritual language suggests a common cultural background of the rites. Lexicological analyses (see Bialek 2018 and Bialek forthcoming-a) demonstrate that the technical terms were native Tibetan words that accorded with the semantics and rules of word-formation of the OT language.

3.1.6 Material identity

The list of goods that were laid down in the grave, according to PT 1042, contains an object called *dmyig mañs*:

gtañ du stsold pa ni / na bza skyes kor mtshon cha sna tshogs / byes cha sta spyad / žugs cha / (103) thugs rag pos phul baṣ / dmyig mañs / rol mo cha / ṣphral du ma mchis su myiñ bruiñ baṣi dkor / (104) cha sna tshogs / phyag tsañ skyem mal paṣi cha rkyen / dan / bśos kyi phyag tsañ gi cha rkyen / žal zas tañ skyems / (105) las stsogs te / yo byad du ṣtshal baṣi cha rkyen / ril gtañ du mchi ṣo //

Regarding [the things] offered as gifts: all sorts of garment, presents of movable property, [and] weapons, travel utensils [that are] personal equipment, embers; [things] given by friends: *dmyig mañs* [game and] musical instruments, all kinds of movables that are indispensable in daily use: necessities of a cook who is a butler and necessities of a victuals’ cook, meals and beverages, among others, [all these] necessities required as equipment were going as *ril*-gifts.

The remaining objects from the list are utensils of daily use that could be found in any grave of a wealthy or influential person; *dmyig mañs*, on the other hand, is a proper name of a popular Tibetan game. It is also mentioned in other OT texts, cf.:

spuñ sad zu tse ṣdzañs kyad kyi tshad ni // rtsis gra gsum (97) žal ce gra bži yañ rna bas ñan žiñ gchod / myig mañs gra chig kyañ zla la rtse na / rgyal // (PT 1287)

Spuñ sad zu tse, as concerns the measure of [his] wisdom, was deciding while listening (lit. with [his] ears) to three schools of calculation, four [together with] the school of law, and was victorious when playing in the *myig mañs* school⁷³ against an adversary.

The word *dmyig mañs*, lit. “(one) possessing many eyes”,⁷⁴ is certainly a Tibetan term. Two factors

⁷³ Lit. “*myig mañs* corner”. On the meaning of *gra* in the compounds *rtsis gra*, *žal ce gra*, and *myig mañs gra* see Bialek (2018: 1.408).

⁷⁴ For the word-formation of the compound see Bialek 2018: 1.230. The compound is also attested in PT 1120: r12 and PT 1285: v46.

support the hypothesis that it was coined as a native Tibetan term: 1. no analogous names for the game in the languages of the region;⁷⁵ and 2. the OT word-formation with the derivative suffix *-s* added to the second element *-mañs*. This derivation was productive most probably only in the earlier phases of OT, since the number of analogous formations is limited in the language. This of course does not preclude that the game as such could not originally have been borrowed from a Chinese game. However, Hazod (2019: 43) noticed that the above passage from the OTC, that describes Khyuñ po Spuñ sad zu tse as an experienced *dmyig mañs* player, suggests that the game was already known in Tibet in pre-imperial times. If we believe the accounts given in the OTC, Khyuñ po Spuñ sad zu tse was a councillor and great councillor during the reigns of Khri slon btsan and Khri sroñ rtsan,⁷⁶ even though some doubt remains as to the exact years of his office.⁷⁷

Dmyig mañs is a well-known Tibetan board game. An ancient stone board for playing *dmyig mañs* has recently been discovered during renovation work at Rgya ma khri khañ (29°45′25.46″N, 91°39′59.99″E) in Rgya ma valley, east of Lhasa (Hazod 2014: 62).⁷⁸ Another stone with a *dmyig mañs* board was earlier discovered by Tsering Gyalbo and Guntram Hazod in the ruins of Byams pa mi γgyur gliñ likewise in the Rgya ma valley (Hazod 2019: 42 and Fig. 16, p. 127). Apart from the geographical proximity of the findings, both stone boards have the same number of grid lines: 17x17 (Hazod 2019: 42). According to Hazod, “remains of the walls of the former palace”, that have been uncovered in connection with building of a new museum at the place of the finding, allow to date this *dmyig mañs* stone to the imperial period (*ibid.*).⁷⁹ However, since no archaeological work has been conducted accompanying the excavations, the provenance and the dates of both stones must be considered unsettled.

To conclude, we know that the *dmyig mañs* game was played in (pre-)imperial Tibet (OTC), the word was a native Tibetan term, and some ancient stone boards were found at historically significant sites within the Four Horns. These are again strong indications (albeit not hard evidence) that the funeral ritual of PT 1042 was held in the Tibetan cultural context.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Its Chinese name is *weiqi*, lit. “surrounding game”.

⁷⁶ Both were *btsan pos* in the first half of the 7th century. Apart from the fact that Khri sroñ rtsan died in 649 (see PT 1288: 15), the exact dates of their reigns remain unknown.

⁷⁷ See Uray 1972: 40f., Dotson 2013: 19ff. and Hazod 2019: 39f. for a more detailed characterisation of this person.

⁷⁸ Fig. 7 on p. 63 of the same publication contains a picture of the stone with the engravings of a *dmyig mañs* board.

⁷⁹ The walls (of unknown extension) within which the *dmyig mañs* stone of Byams pa mi γgyur gliñ was found could have belonged to a *dmyig mañs gra* – an enclosed (*gra*) place in which the game was played (see the above quotation from PT 1287: 96-7).

⁸⁰ As I argue in Bialek forthcoming-a, PT 1042 is an ‘ethnographic’ account of a funeral that was observed by the author of the text. A *dmyig mañs* game laid in the tomb of the deceased might hint at his social position. We can speculate that the deceased was male, of higher social standing (aristocratic or royal), and his official duties were related to political or military activities – whatever its exact rules, *dmyig mañs* was a strategic game.

3.1.7 Titles and social groups

PT 1042 makes use not only of Tibetan kinship terms (*ḡaṇ*, *dbon*), but also of titles typical for Tibetan society: *ḡaṇ lon*, *ḡal ta pa*, *ḡa ḡbriṇ*. As demonstrated by Dotson (2004: 82), *ḡaṇ lon* denoted a social group within Tibetan society, to be specific, the aristocrats. In Bialek (2018: 2.454) I argued that the compound originally referred to persons allowed by virtue of their birth to receive the position of a *ḡaṇ*, a maternal uncle, to the heir. Thus, the term *ḡaṇ lon* was not only bound to the native Tibetan kinship system, but also to the political system of the Tibetan Empire. *ḡa ḡbriṇ* denoted a function in the retinue of a *btsan po* or another member of the royal family (see Bialek 2018: 2.442ff.). To conclude, PT 1042 uses technical terms (kinship terms and titles) that reflect the social and political structure of the Tibetan Empire.⁸¹

3.2 Does PT 1042 describe a ‘Tibetan’ ritual?

The preceding sections aimed at relating the textual evidence of PT 1042 to historical facts established from various other sources, textual, archaeological, and linguistic. In Walter’s opinion, PT 1042 “has no clear, direct relationship to the Imperium” and therefore is not an authentic text of the time (2009: 192). As with so many other statements in his book, this one is likewise supported neither by a textual analysis nor by any other data.⁸² Another unwarranted conclusion is that PT 1042 “was written down long after the Imperium fell” (*ibid.*: 194). The question of why should it have been written after the fall of the Tibetan Empire, remains unaddressed. Walter’s true concern is not about the content of PT 1042 (in fact, he does not really care about what the text says), but about the relation of PT 1042 to the organised Bon religion. However, the claim that PT 1042 depicts a Bon ritual (cf. Lalou 1952 and Chu 1991, but Haahr 1969: 366 against this idea) is as false as Walter’s assumption that it is a post-imperial fake.

I argue that PT 1042 presents one concrete funeral ceremony that was held in Central Tibet (Four Horns) during the Tibetan Empire. The text contains no indications that it was a Bon ceremony. It is however important to distinguish between the ceremony itself and the text that came down to us in the manuscript PT 1042. A detailed philological analysis of the text, that will be published together with a new translation,⁸³ has revealed that the text is based on an eyewitness report. It does not constitute one continuous text, as has been previously assumed, but consists of a descriptive part (an eyewitness report) and an explanatory part (‘field notes’ of the observer). It could likewise be demonstrated that the version of the text we have is a copy of yet another written document, maybe not even a direct copy, but a copy of a copy of a copy. Moreover, this copy contains plenty of orthographic errors and evidently lacks some parts of the original text.⁸⁴ And

⁸¹ By way of contrast, we may add that PT 1283, that contains two texts translated most probably from a Turkic language, uses neither *ḡaṇ*, nor *ḡaṇ lon* or *ḡa ḡbriṇ*, although the texts concern social and political issues.

⁸² Apparently, for Walter only elements that he can relate to the Scythian culture or Central Eurasian Culture Complex (CECC) are of truly imperial character (Walter 2009: 193).

⁸³ See Bialek forthcoming-a.

⁸⁴ The author of the text, a certain Dge dpal (l. 146), was apparently a Buddhist monk with the ordained Tibetan name, but stemmed from a Chinese family. His birth name was Meṅ Śi ḡgi (l. 147).

still, the historical value of the text cannot be denied.

In the preceding discussion I have demonstrated that many of the elements of the funeral described in PT 1042 can be related to information from other sources. Here I summarise the overlaps:

- Time schedule: PT 1042 makes detailed prescriptions concerning the appropriate time of a funeral ceremony. The instructions agree with the time frame of the royal funerals documented in the OTA. Both PT 1042 and the OTA attest to the use of two calendars, a ‘seasonal’ and a lunar one.
- Architecture: Burial mounds excavated in the Dulan region were built according to the same principles as elite tombs of Central Tibet. Their shared elements (the rectangular shape and sacrificial trenches and pits) are also addressed in PT 1042.
- Economy: Animals that participated in the funeral of PT 1042 belonged to typical Central Tibetan species, whereas funerals held in the Dulan region adapted to the local fauna, ‘exchanging’ *mdzo* for camels. This is an important hint that indicates that PT 1042 is a description of a Central Tibetan funeral.
- Political geography: PT 1042 mentions Mdo smad – a politically important region of the Tibetan Empire.
- Language: Notwithstanding orthographic errors in which the text abounds, its language is Old Tibetan, with OT *hapax legomena*, no borrowings or syntactic calques.
- Material identity: In PT 1042 a known Tibetan board game *dmyig maris* is presented to the deceased as a grave-gift.
- Titles and social groups. Typical OT titles (*žan lon*, *žal ta pa*, *ža γbrin*) and kinship terms (*žan*, *dbon*) surface in PT 1042 reflecting social strata of the Empire.

I think we can now safely state that PT 1042 contains the account of a funeral ritual that was customarily practised by elite members of Tibetan-speaking groups in Central Tibet.⁸⁵ The data used in the discussion stem from distant regions: Central Tibet, the Dulan region, and Dunhuang. Nevertheless, the degree of overlaps and similarities indicates a common cultural background, the origin of which must be sought in the Four Horns of the Tibetan Empire.

3.3 ‘The religious’ in PT 1042

PT 1042 concerns a funeral ceremony but no mention is made of the netherworld or any other destination towards which the deceased shall proceed. We are not informed what happens to the deceased after death; no afterlife is depicted. One could say PT 1042 is a purely behavioural description of actions undertaken during the ceremony, without any interest in eschatological considerations or virtual beings. And yet, a few elements indicate that ‘the religious’ was also involved in the ritual, which is not plainly exposed in the text.

As I mentioned before, PT 1042 consists of two clear cut parts. In the first part, the proper ritual

⁸⁵ As rightly observed by Haahr (1969: 357), we have no reason to assume that every funeral ceremony of an elite member followed exactly the same scheme. However, the shared features taken together are so remarkable that they allow us to recognise a Tibetan type of burial as performed in historical times. On the other hand, Haahr’s assumption that PT 1042 presents a funeral of a *btsan po* (1969: 362) seems too far-fetched.

description, the only elements that can be associated with religion are ritual specialists: various kinds of *gśen* and *bon* priests, for whom the generic term *sku gśen* is also frequently applied. The names by which they are addressed refer to their functions in the ritual. Thus it is not possible to establish whether those were professional ritual specialists or rather lay people entrusted with particular duties for the time of the ceremony only.

The situation is slightly different in the second, ‘explanatory’ part of PT 1042. Here, ritual specialists are likewise mentioned although preponderantly as *sku gśen*; more specific denotations are used only a few times: *bon po* (l. 114), *phañs bon po* (ll. 110, 112), *mjol bon po* (l. 113), *γor gyer* (l. 117). What makes this part special is the occurrence of virtual beings like *yul lha* (l. 99) “local deities”, *yul bdag* (l. 99) “local protectors”, and *bdud* (ll. 102 and 111) “demons”. The first two are listed together with humans, all of whom seem to become beneficiaries of a *thugs*-ransom, probably a ransom for the spirit of the deceased. On *bdud* we read that they were averted (lit. cut off) from objects offered to the deceased:

rgyal (read: *rgya bon*) *gyīs mīaγ thañ bcad de // gtañ du gnañ baγi rnams /* (102) *bdud gcado //*
The *bon* priests [responsible for preparing] the eight-threaded nets determined the extent of power; demons were separated [from the objects] that were allowed to be delivered.

sku gśen phañs bon po rnams kyis kyañ / gtañ du stsold / (111) *paγi rnams / spad de bdud bcad nas / sku gśen gśog thabs stsalto //*

sku gśen phañs bon po, having *spad* what one was giving as gifts, separated demons. Subsequently, *sku gśens* were given *gśog thabs*.

Though the elaborate character of the ceremony suggests a complex eschatological system shared by the group, no such thing is alluded to apart from the mention of these few virtual beings.

4. Conclusions

Lha in the official title of the Tibetan *btsan pos* and a funeral ritual with very limited references to ‘the religious’ present two different modes of the co-existence of ‘the religious’ and ‘the social’. But did the Tibetans of yore distinguish between ‘the religious’ and ‘the social’ at all? The rational answer is: they all remain quite dead and so we shall never learn what they did and did not distinguish. What we know is that written Tibetan and also modern Tibetan vernaculars do not possess a general term like the English *religion*. Instead, in OT we read about behaviours (*tshul*), customs (*lugs*), practice (*chos*), rites (*cho ga*), or principles (*gtsug lag*). The names of two modern Tibetan religions, Bon and Buddhism, have resulted from specialisation of terms that had been used in connection with various values-oriented activities of pivotal significance for the maintenance of the group coherence and thus the culture: *bon* “worship” > “Bon religion”⁸⁶ and *chos* “manner,

⁸⁶ The noun *bon* “worship” was derived by conversion from v3 of the verb $\sqrt{\text{yon}}$ “to give, offer” (v1 **don* (?), v2 **bond*, v3 *bon*): “what was offered” > “offering” > “worship”. For the deverbal derivation from v3-stems see Bialek forthcoming-b. Another member of the word-family is *yon* “gift, offering”.

practice” > “good (*bzan*) practice” > “Buddhism”⁸⁷. However, they seem to have never had a common hypernym in Tibetan. The use of the term *lha* in official title of the political rulers indicates that the spheres of ‘the religious’ and ‘the political’ were not separated, or maybe rather they were deliberately interwoven. In the present paper we have seen that the *btsan pos* were not only guided by *lhas* but also, coming from *lhas*, they were themselves *lhas*, or at least they were spoken of as being *lhas*. These concepts belong of course to the narrative level, and for now we have no means to deduce the actual practice from them. The question that needs to be answered before one can proceed with reconstructing the political system of the Tibetan Empire and the position of the *btsan pos* within it, is: were the *btsan pos* also treated and venerated as *lhas*? Any future research that would tackle the question must not restrict itself to the textual corpus but confront it with archaeological and art historical data. In textual sources we encounter competing ideologies in portraying the *btsan pos* that may point to various influences to which the Tibetan Empire and its literate elites were exposed. On the one hand, we have Khri slon btsan described as *primus inter pares* (PT 1287: 173ff.) but, on the other hand, *btsan pos* are said to be coming down from the sky. Their exalted nature seems to have been also addressed in the word *γphrul* “transformational might” – reminding one of shamans’ characteristics – that was used in the official title *γphrul gyi lha*. Yet another motif – *btsan pos* as protectors and life-giving rain – was recently identified as being of Central Asian (possibly Zoroastrian) provenance.⁸⁸ These are very different images of *btsan pos* that might not only reflect various origins of the single motifs but also distinct motivations that triggered their introduction. However, whether each of the narratives, including *btsan po* as *lha*, was reproduced in ritual seems less probable.

The two examples chosen as case studies in the paper demonstrate antithetical tendencies in the history of the Tibetan Empire: change and invariance. The title of Tibetan *btsan pos* and the funeral ceremony of PT 1042 illustrate to what extent concepts were changing in time, but could remain constant across space. On the one hand, the most prominent attribute of the Tibetan *btsan pos* (by which they were juxtaposed with virtual beings of the sky), the title *lha*, was being deliberately changed and adapted so as to justify the position of the ruler in new historical circumstances. These changes were initiated in Central Tibet during the 8th century. On the other hand, PT 1042, a text found in a place that was a Central Asian colony of the Tibetan Empire, depicts a funeral ritual with many details of which can be identified with facts and artefacts known from Central Tibet: the time frame, shape of the burial mound, general structure of the burial ground, economy based on horses, yaks, *mdzos*, and sheep etc. The ceremony described in PT 1042 was lavish and ostentatious. Its impressive form was dictated by the high social status of the deceased and/or his family, as well as their good economic condition. The person buried in this way must have been a member of a group with considerable political power or influence. Cemeteries around the Kokonor Lake, including the Reshui cemeteries, each encompass dozens of graves, thus making the hypothesis probable that

⁸⁷ *Chos* is a deverbal derivative from v4 of the verb *√tea* “to prepare” (v1 *γchay*, v2 *bcas*, v3 *bcay*, v4 *chos*). Its etymological meaning can be reconstructed as “what is established”. For further details on the word-family and the deverbal derivation from v4-stems see Bialek forthcoming-b.

⁸⁸ Cf. Bialek 2019.

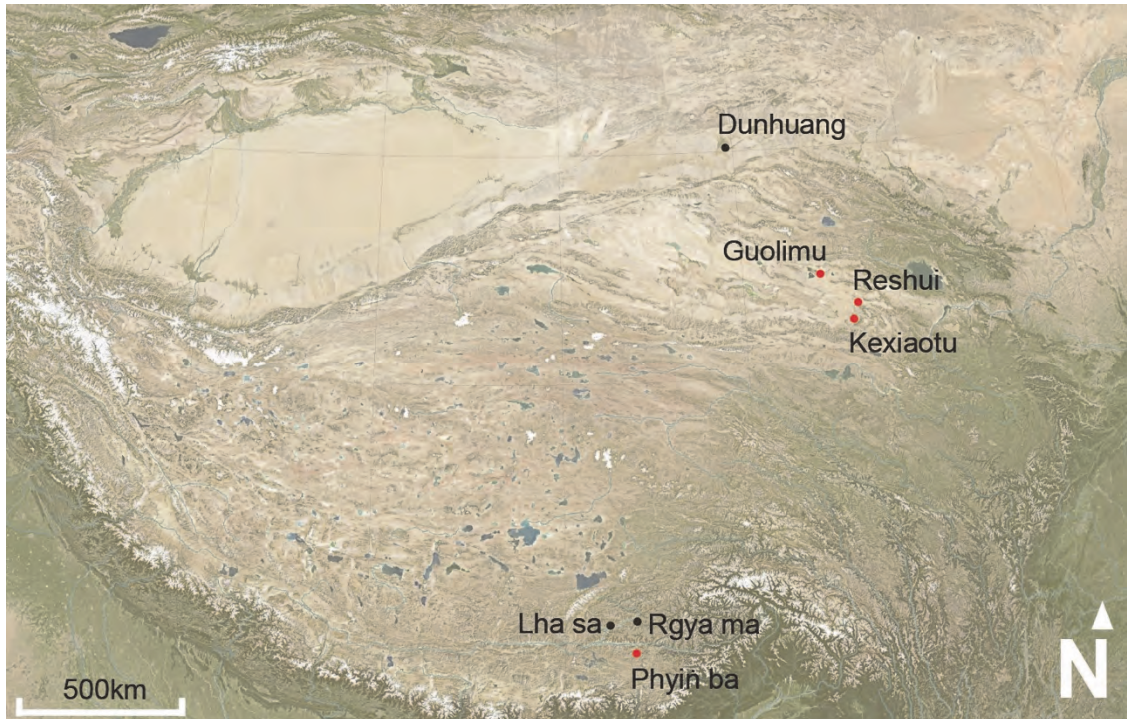
they belonged to sedentary or quasi-sedentary cultures. It is true that groups populating the regions on the Silk Road were multi-ethnic and the region itself was a melting pot for various cultural and religious trends. However, not all the groups had a comparable political and economic power at one time. Considered jointly, these facts indicate that PT 1042 contains a text of a funeral ritual that was practised by wealthy and influential Tibetans – the only group the culture of which agrees with the above description. Historically Tibetans started settling permanently in the Kokonor region after they had conquered the Ya za in 663. Sometime earlier they established an important administrative unit called Mdo smad with its own regular councils – the only ones from outside Central Tibet that are reported in the OTA.⁸⁹ Dunhuang (OT Śa cu) was occupied twice by Tibetans: briefly at the end of the 7th century and in ca. 787-848. The Tibetan administration of the latter period had a considerable impact on the administrative practice in the region even after the fall of the Empire.⁹⁰ Thus, the Tibetans left a lasting trace in this region and we have no reason to assume that they would not, as the occupying power, have brought their customs and rites there. The presence of the Tibetan-style graves at the Reshui cemeteries, burial mounds of Central Tibet, the textual witness of PT 1042, and the historical facts recorded in the OTA, all attest to a cultural continuity between very distant places on the Tibetan Plateau and even beyond, wherever Tibetans could establish their rule over a longer period of time.

Concluding, I propose an inclusive understanding of Tibetan-ity. If we can prove that a particular custom or rite were adapted and cultivated by Tibetan-speaking groups of Central Tibet. This is a sufficient reason to refer to the custom or rite as ‘Tibetan’ for the particular period in question, whatever their origins might have been. This of course should not exempt us from tracing the roots of the custom and establishing the ways and channels through which it came to be practised by Tibetans. By ‘inclusive’ I also mean that the same or very similar custom or rite might be practised by other neighbouring groups that may or may not speak a Tibeto-Burman language. In some cases, such a situation might have resulted from a borrowing from a more prestigious culture, but in others it might be due to the common history predating the splitting up of the proto-culture, e.g. a culture common to Proto-Bodish speaking communities. Certainly, the fact that a particular cultural phenomenon is described in Tibetan language is not a sufficient proof that it was also acknowledged or practised by Tibetan-speaking groups. Therefore, the confirmed relationship of the funeral ceremony reported in PT 1042 to the culture of Central Tibet should not be automatically extended to all the other OT texts discovered in Central Asia. Each text or a group of thematically and linguistically related texts should be examined in itself and set in a broader context of material and literary culture shared by Tibetan-speaking groups.

⁸⁹ The first mention of Mdo smad in the OTA comes from the year 653/4 (PT 1288: 25), but the first council of Mdo smad is reported only in 692/3 (ITJ 750: 112).

⁹⁰ Cf. Uray 1981 and Takeuchi 2004.

Appendix



Map 1: Archaeological sites of the Tibetan Empire. (● Cemeteries from the period of the Tibetan Empire; ● Historical sites related to the Tibetan Empire; Map data: Google, Landsat / Copernicus; modifications and additional data by the author, JB 2019)

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Abbreviations

Yphyoñ	Y phyoñ rgyas inscription
Bsam	Bsam yas inscription
Bsam B	Bsam yas Bell inscription
Dgay	Dgay ldan byin chen inscription
Dun	Dunhuang cave no. 365 inscription
GLR	Bsod nams rgyal mtshan. <i>Rgyal rabs gsal bayi me loñ</i> (see References)
IDP	International Dunhuang Project (see Online Resources)
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
ITJ	IOL Tib J
ITN	IOL Tib N
KhG	Dpay bo gtsug lag 1962 (see References)
Khra	Khra ybrug Bell inscription
Khri	Khri lde sroñ brtsan's Tomb inscription
Khrom	Khrom chen inscription
Lcañ	Lcañ bu inscription
Lho	Lho brag inscription
Or.	Oriental Collections of the British Library
OTA	<i>Old Tibetan Annals</i>
OTA-I	PT 1288 and ITJ 750
OTC	<i>Old Tibetan Chronicles</i>
OTDO	Old Tibetan Documents Online (see Online Resources)
PT	Pelliot tibétain
PT 1042	Old Tibetan funeral text
Rkoñ	Rkoñ-po inscription
Skar	Skar cuñ inscription
ST Treaty	Sino-Tibetan Treaty inscription
TTT	Tibetan Tumulus Tradition website (see Online Resources)
Žol	Žol inscription
Žwa	Žwayi lha khañ inscription
√	reconstructed verb root
*	reconstructed form
A	Autumn
CA	Central Asia(n)
CT	Classical Tibetan
E	East
JB	Joanna Bialek

OT	Old Tibetan
S	Summer
Sp	Spring
trslr.	transliteration
v1, v2, v3, v4	verb stems
W	1. West; 2. Winter

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Online Resources

- Gallica* (Bibliothèque nationale de France ed.). URL: <http://gallica.bnf.fr>
- International Dunhuang Project* (IDP). URL: <http://idp.bl.uk/>
- Old Tibetan Documents Online* (OTDO). URL: <https://otdo.aa-ken.jp/>
- Dbus gtsaṅ rig mdzod*. URL: <https://utsangculture.com>
- The Tibetan Tumulus Tradition* (TTT), project website: *The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet: A Historical-anthropological Study and Documentation of the Tumulus Tradition of Early Central Tibet (4th-10th century CE)*. URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/>