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Power and Religion in Pre-Modern Western Tibet: The Monumental Avalokiteśvara Stela in lCog ro, Purang*

In January 2007, together with the late Tsering Gyalpo (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po) from the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences in Lhasa, the authors of this essay were able to carry out several weeks of field research in Western Tibet.[1] In the context of this field research, which included all seven main administrative districts or circles (*rdzong*)[2] of the government district or prefecture of Western Tibet (mNga' ris sa khul) of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR, China), it was possible to carry out intensive exploration at several key sites and, depending on time and circumstances, more or less comprehensive audiovisual and occasionally also photographic documentation on selected research themes. Alongside Tsamda, Purang was one of the main areas of the joint field research in the course of which a stone stela in lCog ro (also Cog ro) village with a relief of a standing Avalokiteśvara and an inscription was examined.

In February 2010, in the course of another field trip to Purang,[3] additional documentation of the stela and its inscriptions was carried out. Based on recent (re-)discoveries of comparative stelae in other areas of historical Western Tibet (mNga' ris skor gsum) and historical texts, new findings from relevant ongoing research (also in Central Tibet, Nepal and Ladakh) as well as additional photographic documentation (not available previously, partly also from archives), this contribution discusses the monumental Avalokiteśvara (sPyan ras gzigs) stela in lCog ro, Purang, in a considerably wider, trans-regional context. At the same time, it draws on the results of additional research in Khorchag ('Khor chags) (see Tsering Gyalpo, Jahoda, Kalantari and Sutherland 2012 [2015]) and thereby also enables a stronger comparative perspective than was possible before.[4]

Historical Setting

The extensive historical Buddhist culture of Western Tibet (mNga'

[1] This field work was carried out on the basis of a research agreement between the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences (TASS) in Lhasa and the Austrian Academy of Sciences (AAS) in Vienna. The participants were the late Prof. Tsering Gyalpo, Director of the Institute for Religious Studies, TASS, Christian Jahoda, at that time collaborator on the OeNB Project 10944 "Political Space, Socio-Economic Organisation and Religious Geography in Western Tibet" (director: Prof. Ernst Steinkellner), AAS, and Christiane Papa-Kalantari. The funding of part of the travel costs for the field work by Christian Jahoda and the cooperation partner Tsering Gyalpo was assumed by the FWF research focus S87 "Cultural History of the Western Himalaya", University of Vienna.

[2] Purang (sPu rang, also sPu hrengs, etc.), Gar (sGar), Tsamda (rTsa mda'), Ruthog (Ru thog), Gergye (dGe rgyas), Gertse (sGer rtse), Tshochen (mTsho chen).

[3] Again this field work was carried out on the basis of a research agreement between the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences in Lhasa and the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Besides Tsering Gyalpo (TASS), the participants were Hubert Feiglstorfer, Veronika Hein, Christian Jahoda, Christiane Kalantari and Patrick Sutherland.

[4] See Jahoda and Papa-Kalantari 2009; Papa-Kalantari and Jahoda 2010.

1. Front (east) view of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lCog ro village, Purang District, Tibet Autonomous Region, PR China (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2004).

2. South view of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela with inscription lines 1–7 on upper part (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2004).

3. North view of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela with inscription lines 1–12 on upper part (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2004).

ris) became known above all through the research journeys by Giuseppe Tucci in 1933 and 1935, and the publications based on them.[5] This culture is inseparable from the West Tibetan kingdom and its regional sub- and successor kingdoms of Guge (Gu ge), Pu-rang and Ladakh (La dwags) founded by a descendant of the Central

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[5] Not only were major scientific publications (such as Tucci 1936; Tucci 1949) responsible for this but also above all the travel reports and popular science books (such as Tucci and Ghersi 1934; Tucci 1937; Tucci 1973), which contain many otherwise rare observations and much information, and are therefore still extremely valuable for current research. See Nalesini 2008 for an overview on Tucci's expeditions between 1926 and 1954.

Since the 1990s, a new wave of cultural-studies researches in West Tibet have been carried out in various fields, although predominantly on the archaeology, general history, the history of art, cultural and religious history, Tibetan philology and social anthropology. See for example Levine 1992; Levine 1994; Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring 1994; Luczanits 1996; Pritzker 1996; Vitali 1996; Huo Wei and Li Yongxian 2001; Vitali 2003; Heller 2004; Tshe ring rgyal po 2005; Tshe ring rgyal po 2006; Huo Wei 2007; Orofino 2007; Heller 2010; Tsering Gyalpo, Jahoda, Kalantari and Sutherland 2012 [2015]; Tropper 2016; Tshe ring rgyal po 2011 and 2014; Tropper 2018 and 2019.

Tibetan dynasty around 911 (see Jahoda, "On the foundation of the Nyarma *gtsug lag khang*, Ladakh", this volume, p. 292; see also Vitali 2003: 54–55 who—based on different sources—suggested 912 as *terminus post quem* for the establishment of the mNga' ris skor gsum kingdom).

The members of the royal line and the noble families associated with it who established themselves in this region (or had previously already lived there) were responsible for founding a large number of monasteries and temples in the time from the late 10th century onward. The outstanding founders and promoters of this Buddhist culture were the ruler Srong nge (in full: Khri lde Srong gtsug btsan) and later Royal Lama (*lha bla ma*) Ye shes 'od (947–1019; 1024 according to Vitali 2003: 55, 61) and the Great Translator (*lo chen*) Rin chen bzang po (958–1055) (see, for example, Vitali 2003: 55–56, 61, 64 and Jahoda, "On the foundation of the Nyarma *gtsug lag khang*, Ladakh", this volume, pp. 280–287).

There are reports of a few foundations of Buddhist monuments predating the major foundation phase starting in 996. One of the

earliest sources which contains evidence for this is Sonam Tsemo's *Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo* from 1167. According to Petech, the translation of a relevant section, which describes an event that took place in a place along the upper course of the Sutlej river in 992 CE, reads thus:

> "All the *yab-mched* [that is, members of the royal dynasty] of the Upper and Lower Areas met at sPeg-mkhar of the Cog-la region, and on this occasion a great oration [*mol ba chen po*][6] was delivered [...]. The hermitage of Pa[..]-sgam in the Rum region was renovated."[7] (Petech 1997: 233).

The holding of royal dynastic meetings on the occasion of important temple foundations even before 996 (that is, before the time of the foundation of the three main temples of Guge, Purang and Maryul (Mar yul, a region along the Indus river in Upper Ladakh] in Tholing, Khorchag and Nyarma)[8] is also mentioned in the *lHa bla ma Ye shes 'od kyi rnam thar rgyas pa* (Extended Biography of the Royal Monk Ye shes 'od) written by Paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan at Tholing in 1480.[9] According to this text, such a meeting was held for example in 987 in Purang where, in an authoritative speech or declaration Khri lde Srong gtsug btsan decided that a temple (*gtsug lag khang*) was to be built in the castle of mKhar ltag at sKya ru for the protection of the kingdom.[10]

Location

Just a few kilometres south of the town of Purang,[11] the present

administrative centre of the district bearing the same name, on a raised position on the right bank of the rMa bya or Peacock river (known as Karnāli in Nepal) is the municipality of Zhi sde (Zhi sde *shang*), which is named after the village of Zhi sde (Zhi sde *grong tsho*). Approximately half way between the town of Purang and the village of Zhi sde is a small farming settlement called lCog/Cog ro. This name recalls the Cog ro noble family, who according to the *Nyang ral chos 'byung* were closely allied with sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon, the founder of the West Tibetan kingdom in the second decade of the 10th century (see also Vitali 1996: 171–172). At the centre of the settlement there is a former Buddhist temple, which has long been used as a warehouse, whose floor plan makes the claimed legendary foundation by the Great Translator Rin chen bzang po seem not unlikely.

The actual aim of the visit to this settlement was to document and reinvestigate a stone stela from an earlier period with a relief portrayal of a standing Avalokiteśvara on one side and a two-part religiously motivated historic inscription[12] on two other sides, which had previously, in September 2004, been photographed by Tsering Gyalpo under different circumstances—when it was still

4. Building housing the sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela with a number of weathered stone stelae in front of it, lCog ro village, Purang District, Tibet Autonomous Region, PR China (C. Kalantari, 2007).

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[6] Although Petech (1997: 233) preferred to translate the Tibetan phrase *mol ba chen po* as "great oration", he also held "a great discussion" as a possible translation. Roberto Vitali, who quoted this passage in his *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang*, translated *mol ba chen po* as "great discussion" and also as "consultation" (Vitali 1996: 250, n. 361, and 251).

[7] "chu pho 'brug gi lo la cog la yul sPeg mkhar du sTod sMad kyi yab mched gdan 'dzom pa'i dus su mol ba chen po mdzad/ Rum yul Pa sgam gyi dben sa gsar du btsugs pa'i dus su brtsis na/ lo 3125" (cf. ST, f.316a-b; SP, f. 297b).

[8] The most common Tibetan spellings for these places are mTho lding, Tho gling and Tho ling, 'Khor chags, Kho char, Kha char and Khwa char as well as Myar ma, Nyar ma, Nya mar and Nyer ma.

[9] See Gu ge paṇ chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan 2011 for a facsimile edition of the original *dbu med* text, Do rgya dBang drag rdo rje 2013 for an annotated edition of the text in *dbu can* script and Tsering Drongshar and Jahoda, "The *Extended Biography of the Royal Lama Ye shes 'od* by Paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan: The Tibetan text," this volume, pp. 121–169, for an improved *dbu can* edition, in particular with regard to the spelling of a large number of contracted ligatures and of otherwise shortened forms (including numbers).

[10] Tsering Drongshar and Jahoda, "The *Extended Biography of the Royal Lama Ye shes 'od* by Paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan: The Tibetan text," this volume, p. 132. See also Gu ge paṇ chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan 2011: 290 (f. 9b).

[11] This town also appears on maps as Burang (Chin. Pǔlán). It is partly identical with the pre-modern sKyid thang or sKyid rang.

[12] As far as is known, the first (English) translation of the inscription and dating of the stela was undertaken by Vitali (1996: 168–169, n. 231). See also Denwood 2007: 51.

5. sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela on a stepped cement plinth (view of front/east and south face) (C. Kalantari, 2007).

6. Front (east) view of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela (C. Kalantari, 2007).

7. Front (east) view of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela (P. Sutherland, 2010).

standing in the open air (see Figs. 1–3). The following descriptions, historical comparative analyses and attached illustrations of this stela, which has so far not been publicised in the appropriate form, serve to open it up and make it known for further art-history and philological investigations. Above and beyond this, the study is an attempt to incorporate the stela in the context of the cultural and art history of the sPu rgyal dynasty as well as the early phase of the "later dissemination of Buddhism" (*bstan pa phyi dar*) in the West Tibetan kingdom. Based on the observations made by Giuseppe Tucci in Zhi sde in 1935, on the oral accounts recorded in lCog ro by Tsering Gyalpo until 2006 and on the statements of the inhabitants of the settlement interviewed on site in 2007, additional social and cultural-anthropology perspectives on this stela are opened up, which are supplemented by observations on the present-day and historic function of similar as well as simpler prehistoric stelae in the immediate and wider vicinity of Western Tibet.

Documentation and Description

The viewing and documentation of the stela, as well as a following interview with villagers on the subject, took place on 16 January 2007 and for reasons of time and because of the priority of other projects had to be carried out in only a few hours.

The stela is in a one-room shrine-like building on the northern edge of the settlement of lCog ro and seems to have been installed there sometime between October 2004 and June 2005.[13] The building is on the western side of the street and is surrounded by fields behind it. On the eastern side, in front of the building, are

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[13] This gap results from the photographic documentation by Tsering Gyalpo in the course of a visit in September 2004 (when the stela was still standing in open air, obviously already in front of the building——which seems to have been built in 2002 according to local informants), and another one in June 2005 when he revisited the site. At that time the stela had already been placed inside the building.

some more crudely made stelae (Fig. 4), which according to the villagers were previously situated elsewhere (see below).

The base of the stela is let into a stepped cement pedestal, which on the front or eastern side allows a view of the base, which was probably previously partly underground, which makes it possible to recognise a wreath of lotus leaves. Together with the 18-cm-high lotus base, on the front the stela is 185 cm high with an average width of ca. 51 cm in the lower part and 49 cm in the upper part. The sides are each ca. 18 cm wide (Fig. 5).[14]

As before, i.e. before the erection of the building, the stela is set up with the front, distinguished by the relief image of Avalokiteśvara,

facing east (Figs. 6 and 7).[15] On the two narrow sides, facing south and north, there are two Tibetan inscriptions in *dbu can* writing, which both start at about the shoulder height of Avalokiteśvara, approximately 130 cm from the upper step of the concrete base (see Figs. 8 and 9). Both inscriptions use the whole available width of the sides, up to the edge. The 19-line inscription on the southern side, which starts by giving the year and the month of the request for the erection of the stela, can be taken as the beginning of the text. That on the north side, with 24 lines, testifies to the execution of the task through reference to the confession made in the presence of Avalokiteśvara and through the dedication. While the whole surface of the two sides with inscriptions is smoothened, the reverse side facing west is only crudely hewn (see Fig. 10).

8. South-east view of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela (H. Feiglstorfer, 2010).

9. North-east view of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela (H. Feiglstorfer, 2010).

10. South-west view of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela (H. Feiglstorfer, 2010).

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[14] The width of the sides thereby corresponds to the stela in Pooh in Upper Kinnaur, whose measurements were likewise given as 18 cm by Thakur (1994: 369). On this stela, see below.

[15] The uppermost part of the stela seems to have been lost through erosion. This is evident owing to the missing part on the upper curve of the oval nimbus.

The nature of the surface of the stela[16] displays certain differences on the four sides. Particularly noticeable on the front are the butter offerings attached in many places or the stains that have clearly been caused by them, which cause the stone to appear somewhat darker and the relief to stand out somewhat more in these places. Similarly noticeable are places with red pigment, which are to be found on the right hand and right upper arm of Avalokiteśvara, in the area of the upper part of the hip clothes and from there to the right edge. On the northern side the whole lower half is marked by this red pigment. The lower part of the inscription (about eight lines), which is free from the pigment—apart from a few places in the last two lines where it somewhat covers the inscription—is particularly easily readable as a result of the contrast. On the south side, the red layer of pigment is noticeable in the whole area of the inscription, but apart from the first seven lines seems to be less intense or faded. On the back only some parts in the area of the upper ca. 20 cm of the stela are covered in red pigment, while the colour of the remaining surface largely reflects the natural character of the stone. The red pigment on its surface may point towards cultic use at some time. It is not possible to tell when this pigment was applied, whether it was possibly immediately following the completion of the stone or at a later time, perhaps even recently.[17] In this case too, knowledge of the pigment and its chemical-physical characteristics would be very useful for further conclusions. As it is known that until around 15 years ago the stela stood in the open on the road between lCog ro and Zhi sde (see Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring 1994: 4 and 5–6 for illustrations),[18] and it must therefore be assumed that it

was exposed to strong sunlight on the east and southern sides, this may possibly explain why the colour of the paint is for the most part less intense on these two sides in comparison to the northern side.

Art-History Findings

On the front of the regularly worked, cubic block of stone of the lCog ro stela there is a chiselled figurative portrayal (Fig. 5). The characteristic style provides evidence of a complex and cosmopolitan artistic layering: the figural typology reveals Central Tibetan stylistic features while Chinese-Central Asian material culture and symbols of authority and prestige are reflected in details of the costume and in the overall-layout. The form, function and meaning of this image in a West Tibetan religious-artistic context will be dealt with in greater detail in the following, which goes beyond the common scholarly consensus of "foreign influences".[19] It features a richly bejeweled bodhisattva, in the appearance of a young man, wearing a loincloth or *dhotī*. Iconographic characteristics are the right arm, which is lowered in the gesture of granting a wish (*varadamudrā*) and the lotus (*padma*), which is held in the left hand and grows upwards over the left shoulder.[20] Alongside these features the figure is above all identifiable by a motif on the crown, which highly probably represents a Buddha Amitābha figure. These features identify the figure as the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (sPyan ras gzigs dbang phyug), the bodhisattva of compassion, the supreme saviour of all suffering beings and the spiritual son of Amitābha (Figs. 6, 7 and 11). A nimbus containing a circle of flames frames the face, and an *ūrṇā* graces his forehead between the eyebrows. The bodhisattva's sumptuous princely *saṃbhogakāya* jewellery indicates supramundane splendour.[21] It is complemented by the full, ankle-length loincloth, which is arranged in schematic rounded folds and accentuated by its volume. It is decorated with curves that recall

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[16] From a geological point of view this stela seems to involve an iron-rich limestone or a calcarus, yellow-brown oxidising sandstone with rounded fracture textures (as can be seen on the back of the stela), at least as far as a provisional assessment on the basis of the photographic documentation permits. Without knowledge of the geology of the immediate and wider vicinity, a conclusion on the origin of the stone is not possible (Dr Rudi Jahoda, personal communication, August 2008).

[17] The colouring of inscriptions seems to have been a widespread feature of Tibetan inscriptions on stone and rocks dating from the 7th–9th centuries. See Dieter Schuh (2013: 144–145) who also refers to a Tibetan inscription at Skardu in Baltistan which states that the belivers are summoned to restore the colour from time to time.

[18] This publication was not known to the authors at the time of the field research in 2007. It was only discovered and consulted during the course of the literature researches for this article. The same is true for another publication that appeared in China, which contains a rubbing of the inscriptions and a free illustration of the front of the stela (without the lotus base) with a not very accurate tint, both however without detailed commentary (Zheng 2000: 173–174). Only since the completion of the manuscript did it become known that Prof. Wang Yao had given the Avalokiteśvara stela as the subject of his lecture for the 10th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS)

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in Oxford in 2003 (see Wang Yao 2003). It has not been possible to discover whether this lecture has since been published in written form.

[19] Based on the documentation and analyses of Vitali (1990), Luczanits (2004) and Heller (1997, 2006), this article attempts for the first time to assemble the various trends and regional types of this style and in particular to define the stylistic connections between the examples from Western Tibet.

[20] Here the stalk does not grow out of the ground, as is classically the case, but ends at the level of the navel.

[21] A large diamond-shaped attachment in the form of leafy tendrils adorns the upper arm ring, while the bejewelled hip ornament decorates the abdomen section and holds the loincloth (*dhotī*). A ribbon or decorative band that hangs from the hip decoration in the middle of the body and reaches down over the knee may represent a chain with hanging flower-shaped decorations or a belt that holds the *dhotī* in place. The shoulders are each covered by a straight line of beads, which are perhaps to be understood as falling strands of hair.

schematically arranged folds. The double curves at regular intervals, however, reflect decorative styles on textiles, consisting of detailed patterns arranged in rows above one another as are frequently seen in Indian and Nepalese printed textiles and the ornamental traditions in the region. The artist is here probably translating an Indian *dhotī* of fine cotton with a typical detailed pattern, which is usually shown wrapped around the body and clinging to the legs, into a Tibetan idiom distinguished by heavy, loose clothes of wool or silk brocade, which lends volume and plasticity to the figure.

The Cult of Avalokiteśvara in the Early History of Buddhist Tibet
The cult of Avalokiteśvara—and with it the ideal of sacrifice and redemption for other sentient beings and the salvation of the world—spread across the whole of India in the late Mahāyāna period (from the 6th century onward). In the Vajrayāna the bodhisattva assumes various many-headed and many-armed shapes.[22] Among its many manifestations in Tibet the deity appears as the attendant figure to a central Buddha, as for example in the sanctum of the main temple (*gtsug lag khang*) at Tabo dating from the end of the 10th century (in the latter case with one head and two arms; see Luczanits 2004: fig. 21). In the later Alchi gSum brtsegs (ca. 1200), it assumes a prominent four-armed manifestation as part of a central group of cultic figures consisting of colossal clay sculptures of the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and Maitreya (*ibid.*: 209).[23]

In the ca. 12th century Zhag cave, Avalokiteśvara is depicted in the entrance corridor in a six-armed form identifying it as Sugatisandarśana Lokeśvara. He is flanked by two standing local males and a kneeling figure, which are most likely the donors—wearing the typical attire of the West Tibetan aristocratic elite—portrayed as pious devotees. The kneeling donor appears to be being blessed by Avalokiteśvara. This iconographic type is also found at Dungkar (Dung dkar), where Avalokiteśvara is venerated as the sovereign of a *maṇḍala* (cf. Tsering Gyalpo and Kalantari, "Guge kingdom-period murals in the Zhag grotto in mNga' ris, Western Tibet", this volume, Figs. 18–19, pp. 415–416).[24]

11. Detail of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela showing the butter offerings and the red colouration (C. Kalantari, 2007).

On the basis of texts such as *Chos rgyal srong btsan sgam po'i maṇi bka' 'bum* and other sources, the introduction of the Avalokiteśvara cult in Tibet was connected by later Tibetan historians with King Songtsen Gampo (Srong btsan sgam po), who is seen as an emanation of this bodhisattva.[25]

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[22] The divinity is frequently worshipped in this form in Kashmir and also at a stela in Kashmir. See Linrothe 1999: fig. 8, 8a.

[23] On the cult of Avalokiteśvara see also de Mallmann 1948.

[24] At Khorchag a monumental Mañjuśrī in silver—commissioned by the royal family for the foundation of a temple around 1000—was complemented in the 13th century with statues of Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya, forming the famous "Three Jobo Silver Brothers" (Jo bo ngul sku mched gsum). The triad became an important focus of cult throughout Tibet and many copies were made to emulate its sacred presence (Tsering Gyalpo, Jahoda, Kalantari and Sutherland 2012 [2015]: 17–18, 24, passim).

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[25] See Kapstein 1992. Even if there was cause for critical analyses and doubts, as Kapstein mentions (*ibid.*: 84), as early as the lDan/lHan kar ma catalogue (compiled in the year 812, with supplements up to the end of the ruling period of King Ral pa can; see Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: xviii–xxii) there are Tibetan translations of texts that were of fundamental importance for the cult of Avalokiteśvara (see also Lalou 1953). In addition, on the basis of his recent

12. Standing bodhisattva with *dhotī*; Tabo (Spiti, HP, India), main temple (*gtsug lag khang*), ca. 10th century, clay, height 195 cm (P. Sutherland, 2009).

Ian Alsop (1998) described the royal introduction and transmission to Nepal and Tibet of holy images of Avalokiteśvara—regarded as tutelary deity of the first historical king of Tibet. A famous specific image of 'Phags pa Lokeśvara (Ārya/Noble Avalokiteśvara), which served as a prototype for various replicas, assumes a special position in the mythic installation of the sacred image. As Alsop described, one image was brought to Kathmandu under difficult circumstances during the reign of Narendradeva (641–680) with the help of the king's spiritual advisor. Narendradeva was contemporary with Songtsen Gampo (see Vitali 1990: 71–72; Dotson 2009: 82) and, according to the transmission, he was the inaugurator of the cult and the yearly festivals of Avalokiteśvara which still exist in Nepal (Vergati 1995: 206). He is still regarded as protector of kingship and of the prosperity of the country up to the present day. This pattern of royal transmission may have been adopted in Tibet as a means of legitimation. The *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* [Clear Mirror of the Royal Genealogies] describes a group of four sacred images; one was miraculously brought (from Nepal) during the time of Songtsen Gampo to Tibet; in a Tibetan version of the story the place where it was found and installed lies on the border between India and Nepal and can be perhaps identified as Khorchag (Alsop 1998: 89), situated in close geographic proximity to lCog ro.

An important Buddhist icon in the Potala, known as Ārya-Lokeśvara, appears to be linked to this legendary transmission; the latter image displaying strong Newari features is presumably patterned after the famous ca. 7th century prototype (Alsop 1998: fig. 15). The statue featured as a model for various replicas in Tibet: one is from Mustang, which is kept in the royal chapel in the palace of the rulers of Lo at Tsarang, south of Mönthang (sMon thang) (Lo Bue 2010: fig. 1.2.); another is kept at Nako, Kinnaur (Alsop 1998: fig. 19).

Further studies will be necessary to determine the chronological sequence and forms of veneration of Avalokiteśvara in India and Central Asia, particularly to the extent that this has a bearing on its introduction into Tibet.[26]

Stone Stelae and Reliefs in Stone in Early Tibetan Art
The bodhisattva of the lCog ro stela is depicted standing in an upright pose (*samāpada*) on a lotus pedestal. The figure fills almost

researches of the Tibetan texts found in Dunhuang, which mainly date from the 10th century, van Schaik points out that sufficient evidence can be found for the presence and growing popularity of Avalokiteśvara as early as this time and the view that there is no evidence of an Avalokiteśvara cult in Tibet before the 11th century needs to be revised in the light of these findings (van Schaik 2006: 66).

[26] On the symbolic and increasingly political importance of the Avalokiteśvara cult in Tibet in the post-dynastic period see also Sørensen 2007.

the whole oblong frontal panel of the block and is worked in shallow relief, gaining somewhat in volume against the slightly recessed background. It is carved into the surface of the stone in simple outlines with light modelling along the contours. The rendering of the powerful physique, with its stiffness, broad shoulders, splayed feet and large hands, pays scant regard to natural proportions: the head seems too big for the upper body, while the relatively short legs are covered by an ankle-length loincloth or *dhotī*. The individual parts of the body flow into one another, displaying virtually no articulation. The almond-shaped eyes and the wings of the nose are carved in harsh, straight furrows into the schematic, shovel-shaped face. A heavy crown rising from a band of pearls rests on a circlet of curls. The bangle on the upper arm is decorated with a large lozenge-shaped upper element in the form of foliate tendrils, while the jewel-studded ornament on the hips decorates the belly and covers the knob of the band which holds the loincloth in place. From the centre of the ornament on the hips the two ends of the band ending in a decorative manner in a floral element fall to below the knee. The prominence of the large decorative elements in the crown, on the upper arms, hips and legs, which are worked in detail with a relative degree of plasticity gives additional emphasis to the overall planar and ornamental impression made by the composition. The loose *dhotī* deviates from the Indian treatment of garment and appears like legs of baggy trousers contrasting to renderings of the *dhotī* on Kashmir-derived artworks in early Buddhist temples of the region from the beginning of the 11th century onwards, such as in the main temple (*gtsug lag khang*) of Tabo (Fig. 12).

In addition the characteristic features displayed by the lCog ro stela contrast distinctively with stelae (some with Tibetan inscriptions) in the Kashmir style, such as those preserved at Dras (Kargil District, Jammu and Kashmir, India).[27] It concerns free-standing cult figures whose original place of erection and function can no longer be definitively clarified. Whereas the Kashmir style reflected in these figures is distinguished by the naturalistic plasticity and the interest in movement—to be seen for example in the triple curved posture of the body (*tribhaṅga*)—by means of which the figure is emancipated from its ground, the figure of the stela in lCog ro remains static and wholly subordinate to the cubic form of the block of stone. There the figure takes up most of the expanse of stone. Its stasis and strict hieratic frontality imbue the figure of the bodhisattva with monumentality,

emphasising its dignity and extra-temporal presence, while the extended outsized hand symbolises the way the bodhisattva turns to the world of sentient beings to help them attain enlightenment. In contrast to the autonomous cultic image, here it is the monumental character which predominates, appearing as religious and political communication and medium conveying a self-portrayal of the elite. In Tibet, stone appears to be the medium *par excellence* for this function. The unity of image and religio-political text, both using almost the whole width of the block, further underlines the strategy to project sovereignty in a Buddhist-ordered realm. The stela combines a cult image for devotion with a Tibetan medium for a political-religious monument designed to establish a social landscape.

Stone was also an important material for cult images inside of temples at the time of the early Buddhist period in Central Tibet. Some of them reflect the influence of this medium transferred with artists from Nepal and India.[28] Examples of stone images from the 8th century can be found in Khra 'brug, which were, according to sources, manufactured by Newar artists (cf. Sørensen and Hazod 2005: figs. 43 and 44).[29]

In contrast, in early West Tibetan temples cult images made of stone are not commonly found. It can be concluded from early Buddhist temples in Himachal Pradesh predating the early West Tibetan temples that wooden statues must have been frequent as main cult statues. Some examples of such wooden images can be found at Pooh and at Charang (see Luczanits 2004: figs. 64–65).

However, from the 11th century onwards clay became the medium par excellence both in Central Tibet (Yemar [g.Ye dmar], Drathang [Gra/Grwa thang], Shalu [Zha lu]) and Western Tibet, although different techniques of manufacture and mountings on the walls were applied in each of these regions.[30]

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[27] See Luczanits (2005: 67), who points to the tendency to early dating (7th–10th century) of a group of rock reliefs in Mulbek, Dras and Changspa. He is one of the few authors to have previously concerned himself with the historical classification of early rock reliefs and stelae in West Tibet and the comparison with paintings in the region.

[28] In particular Pāla or Newar artists achieved great sophistication in the treatment of fine surfaces of stones (e.g. schist, sandstone) almost recalling metal.

[29] According to the transmission eight bodhisattva images are from Khotan (Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 17). The direction of the temple's main entrance towards Kathmandu further emphasises the orientation towards Nepal at that time. Concerning the reconstruction of the artistic context historical links with Nepal are particularly relevant. Activities of Newar artists in Tibet are frequently mentioned in sources. At Khra 'brug, Tibet's first temple, fragments of stone statues from the 8th century originally featuring a Buddha pentad with Vairocana in the centre survived which are reported to have been manufactured by Nepalese craftsmen. The stylistic characteristics of the lCog ro stela, with early Tibetan features appearing ultimately to be of Nepalese origin, perhaps also reflect the situation of the sanctity of the famous image of 'Phags pa Lokeśvara miraculously found during the time of Songtsen Gampo and installed in Tibet as a tutelary deity, as described by Alsop (1998).

[30] The tradition of clay sculptures must have been strong in India at that time— although little remained—as can be concluded from the Indianising Tibetan

13. Stela with image of a bodhisattva; Purang town, Tibet Autonomous Region, PR China (C. Jahoda, 2007).

The typology of the stone stela is in marked contrast to stone, wood and clay cult images for devotion in temples, which co-existed up to the 11th century;[31] the chosen material and the block-like shape of this form of image appear particularly associated with state, status and authority; it was connoted with political treaties and manifests from the earliest periods of the Yarlung (Yar lung) Empire. In this context the importance of stone effigies of animals guarding the entrance of Yarlung dynasty tombs in the Yarlung valley also needs to be mentioned.[32]

The statement contained in the inscription of the lCog ro stela and the visual "text" are subordinated to the block of stone, whose enduring quality and severe geometric form can also be seen as symbolising the everlasting duration of power.[33] The stela thereby forms a unique "web of meaning" of image, text and ritual praxis.

In terms of style and function, a related stela of a very vernacular type has been preserved on the eastern edge of Purang (Fig. 13). However, little can be said about its stylistic characteristics on account of its weathered state. A crown sits on the heavy, round head of the figure, the left hand is held against the breast and the right hand presumably hangs down, in a similar manner to that of the lCog ro image. Thus it might also represent a bodhisattva. The legs, like the thin arms, are depicted in a shortened and disproportionate fashion.[34]

Another example of this type of stela with a historical inscription has been preserved at Pooh in Upper Kinnaur[35] (Figs. 14–15; for

style of the clay sculptures at Tabo *gtsug lag khang*. In later periods, such as the cave temples at Dungkar (12th century), interactions with the sophisticated tradions of clay sculptures in Buddhist centres on the northern Silk Road in eastern Central Asia may have existed. This can be assumed not only due to stylistic commonalities but also due to their specific position in the temple: at Dungkar clay images are set apart and elevated onto a higher spiritual level on account of the position in a raised niche, which recalls niches for the main cult

images at the rear wall of cave temples at Dunhuang. This spatial arrangement of images cannot be found in early Buddhist temples in Western Tibet.

[31] The typology of the stone stela is different from devotional images in stone with carvings, typically featuring images of Avalokiteśvara, of different qualities and periods, often donated and positioned along pilgrimage paths to monasteries (cf. Devers, "An archaeological account of Nyarma and its surroundings, Ladakh", this volume, pp. 201–224, and Feiglstorfer, "The architecture of the Buddhist temple complex of Nyarma", this volume, pp. 225–257).

[32] The size of a famous stone lion of a Yarlung dynasty tomb (7th–8th century) is approximately 150 cm (Hazod 2015: fig. 6, p. 591).

[33] In this respect there is a distant connection with the famous stone statues of Turkic dignitaries with inscriptions found in Mongolia and southern Siberia (see Öhrig 1988).

[34] It is conceivable that the working of the ca. 170-cm-high stone block started with the portrayal of the large head and upper body, filling the whole width of the stela, but the proportions of the pre-prepared image bearer did not permit a complete figure. It is also conceivable that the portrait was already damaged in its production and was never in cultic use, unlike the lCog ro stela, which is still worshipped today. It is rather unlikely that the lower part weathered and was subsequently completed.

[35] Upper Kinnaur (Khu nu) is a Tibetan-speaking area of Himachal Pradesh, India, today on the border of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR, China), which

further illustrations of the front and reverse sides see Thakur 1994: 370, 372). This stela dates from a later historical phase, and Thakur not only links it with the Royal Lama (*lha bla ma*) Ye shes 'od on account of its inscription but also dates it to the latter's lifetime (1004; *ibid*.: 375). Vitali and Petech have published different readings and interpretations of this only poorly preserved and legible inscription.[36] The stela displays simplified representations of a bodhisattva figure in shallow relief on one side and on the other a *stūpa*, the style of which contrasts with the monumentality of the cultic figure in lCog ro. Tsering Gyalpo ("Brief description of the traditions related to the 'translator's *mchod rten*' existent in Kyu wang, Western Tibet", this volume, Figs. 8–13, pp. 64–66) documented and examined an important but as yet little studied monument in stone without inscriptions at Kyuwang (Kyu wang) in the Tsamda District of Western Tibet. It features an image and a *stūpa* above on each side of the block recalling the four-faced image of Vairocana at Tabo. In stylistic terms the image appears to reflect the art of Kashmir.

A group of dynastic-period cultic images with inscriptions carved onto rocks in Eastern Tibet displays typological similarities to the Purang stelae. The defining feature here is the close relationship between image and historical statement, as documented by an example in lDan ma brag (Chab mdo Prefecture) with an image of Vairocana. According to its dedicatory inscription, the rock relief was commissioned in 816—according to another interpretation in 804— ahead of the treaty concluded between China and Tibet in 821/22 (see Heller 1997: 86, 89; Heller 2006: 82, fig. 5).[37]

14–15. Stela with bodhisattva figure in shallow relief on top of inscription on one side and on the other a *mchod rten* above a standing bodhisattva figure; Pooh, Upper Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh, India (E. Ghersi, 1933, © Museo delle Civiltà - MAO "G. Tucci", Rome).

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historically belonged to the area of power and influence of the West Tibetan kingdom. According to some Tibetan sources (e.g. *Rin chen bzang po rnam thar 'bring po*, see Snellgrove and Skorupski 1980: 95, 108), Pooh (sPu) belonged to the Rong chung area on the upper course of the Sutlej, which today is largely within the TAR.

[36] According to Vitali this stela is to be seen as a royal foundation that took place only after the lifetime of Ye shes 'od. The Dragon year (*'brug gi lo*) described in the inscription may in his judgement relate to one or other year marked by this animal sign between 1028 and 1102 (Vitali 1996: 207–208, n. 301). Petech in contrast considers Devarāja, one of the sons of Ye shes 'od, as the probable author and is of the view that the Dragon year may correspond to 1024 (Petech 1997: 235).

[37] Some authors, however, date this inscription to 804 (see Dotson 2006: 115– 116). On the basis of the inscription and the local tradition, these reliefs are associated with the Tang princess Wencheng Gongzhu, one of the two wives of Srong btsan sgam po. Heller (1997: 100) showed the characteristic signs in the iconography of Vairocana in the Tibetan dynastic period. Yet another different interpretation was published recently by Yoshiro Imaeda according to whom "the year in the first sentence of the inscription does not refer to the year in which the prayers and images were made or to the year in which the inscription was written." (Imaeda 2012: 115–116). In his view, "[i]t is not impossible that the Ldan ma brag inscription (II) was erected to commemorate the nomination

In stylistic terms the schematic figurative style of the lCog ro stela would seem at first glance to have a closer affinity to the medium of rock carvings rather than sculpture. There is a distant connection with the reliefs of the Five Buddhas carved on a rock face at Shey in Ladakh (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: fig. 5) and in Satpara (near Skardu, Baltistan; see Denwood 2007: fig. 6). In terms of their frontality and the graphic qualities displayed in the rendering of the body, these reliefs, dated by Denwood to between the 8th and 10th century (*ibid*.: 50–51), can be compared with the stela but also exhibit certain elements of the aesthetics and formal idiom of the Ladakh-Baltistan region deriving from the rich Buddhist tradition of northern Pakistan and Kashmir. These reliefs are shallower and limited to graphic outlines of the figures, however they appear to be

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of Bran ka Yon tan to the High Council of Religion and State Affairs [dated by Imaeda to 804] [...]. The rock images must have been carved in order to commemorate this nomination" (*ibid*.: 117–118), which as may be concluded from Imaeda's discussion should have taken place in one of the years after 804.

16. Avalokiteśvara, banner from Dunhuang, cave 17, 9th century, Tang dynasty, distemper on silk; British Museum, London (after Kossak and Singer 1998: fig. 1, p. 4).

more precisely worked in contrast to the unsmoothed surface of the lCog ro stela, and they express the language of aesthetics and form in the Ladakh-Baltistan region. Despite the planar rendering, the fluid and deeply chiselled outlines create a certain idea of plasticity and rather naturalistic vividness of the figure which is not intended at lCog ro, where the emphasis is on volume, stasis and symmetry.

Artistic Context

Of greatest interest for the stylistic classification of the lCog ro stela in the last-mentioned sense—taking into consideration the different genres—is a well-known group of early, narrow painted silk banners with Tibetan inscriptions, discovered in Cave 17 at Dunhuang (Gansu Province)—the prominent oasis centre and Buddhist pilgrimage place on a crossroads of two major trade routes within the Silk Road network—which have been dated to the 9th century (Whitfield and Farrer 1990: 62; cf. also Kossak and Singer 1998: 4), the period of the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang (ca. 787–846) and the resulting cultural and political contacts.[38] The images on the cloth banners are probably modeled on Indian and Nepalese prototypes, wearing Indian *dhotī* and Indian jewellery. (Owing to their mobility, however, they may originally have come from other regions, possibly from Khotan, which the different type of binding of the silk would suggest; *ibid*.: 62.) These banners are among the earliest artworks executed in an independent, presumably Tibetan, style (Fig. 16) for which the disputed term "Himalayan style" has been coined by Nicolas-Vandier (1974: xviii).[39] This style differs in important aspects such as the rendering of the body and dress from the local Tang-inspired Chinese-Central Asian style of the famous (non-Tibetan) Dunhuang banners (see Whitfield and Farrer 1990: 60–63). This artistic pluralism is exemplary for Buddhist oasis centres along the Silk Road network, which had their own unique combination of languages and artistic influences brought from afar and developed locally. That these works do in fact represent a Tibetan idiom can be assumed with reasonable certainty by comparing them not only with sculptures in Central Tibet but also with dateable examples of paintings in Western Tibet. As will be shown, a group of early Buddhist paintings at Tabo shows important affinities, in particular images of the royal elite and lay adherents and related material culture designed to project authority and status.

Characteristic features that distinguish the Tibetan banners from the Chinese-Central Asian banners in Dunhuang are the frontality and planar quality of the figures and the light modelling along the contours, features which are reminiscent of the lCog ro stela, although the latter has a simpler overall appearance; however, this may be due to the decorative details dominating the painting. Of course, the material of stone naturally leads to a different visual appearance, which is often simpler or even archaic. Then again, depictions of baldachins or honorific covers of precious fabrics on the Tibetan banners attest to Chinese-Central-Asian notions of sacred space and are a frequent element in the throne depictions from Dunhuang.[40] A significant commonality is that both image and text on the reverse use almost the entire width of the elongated format.

The fluid transitions between the parts of the body, the large, powerful hands of the deities and specific naturalistic elements on the Tibetan banners, such as the small discs at the centre of the lotus base which represent the alveoli with seeds in the rootstock or rhizome,[41] as well as the delight in subtle details of costume and decoration, are also associated with the lCog ro stela and display certain parallels with a stylistic trend from Eastern India through the filter of Nepal (cf. Heller 1998: 95; fig. 78) and Central Tibet. Other features that can be compared with the lCog ro stela are the shovel-shaped face, the large, broad crown with foliate points and the large jewels on it.[42]

However, the characteristic voluminous *dhotī* of the lCog ro Avalokiteśvara contrasts with the short, tight-fitting Indian loincloths displaying small-scale patterns worn by the Tibetan Dunhuang bodhisattvas. It reminds one of heavy silk fabrics and might be a reminiscence of Chinese-Central-Asian costumes, which display a predilection for complex decorated luxury fabrics with heavy folds that conceal the shape of the body. The latter are also to be seen in early Central Tibetan sculptures in the temple at Ke ru (Keru, "Kwachu") (Figs. 17–19)[43] in the 'On region of central Tibet (sNe gdong District, lHo kha Prefecture), which was originally founded during the phase of the Yarlung dynasty. As suggested by Vitali, the

[38] The silk banners form a group of ten objects, of which seven are in the National Museum in New Delhi and three in the British Museum in London. The banners may have been produced by Tibetan artists or for Tibetan commissioners during this period.

[39] On this term see also Soper 1979: 328; Klimburg-Salter 1982: 116–117; Luczanits 2004: 226.

[40] An honour canopy of textiles also covers the above-mentioned Vairocana portrait in lDan ma brag from the early 9th century.

[41] Circular depressions with a hump in the middle, as can be seen in lCog ro, represent the alveoli with seeds in the rhizome. On this see also Heller 1997: 96, figs. 70 and 77.

[42] Soper (1979: 328) summarises the characteristics of the "Himalayan style" of the Dunhuang banners with the words "delicacy" and "nervous strength".

[43] According to research by Pa sangs dbang 'dus, the temple that Vitali equates with the Kwa chu mentioned in the historical sources is probably identifiable as Ke ru *lha khang* (see Vitali 1990: 1–35; Pasang Wangdu 2007).

17. Bodhisattva statues; Keru Lhakhang, inner sanctum (*dri gtsang khang*), 'On valley, ca. 9th century (C. Kalantari, 2010).

18. Bodhisattva statues; Keru Lhakhang, inner sanctum (*dri gtsang khang*), 'On valley, ca. 9th century (C. Kalantari, 2010).

19. Bodhisattva statues; Keru Lhakhang, inner sanctum (*dri gtsang khang*), 'On valley, ca. 9th century (after Vitali 1990: plate 7).

(heavily reworked) clay bodhisattva figures in this temple, which probably date from the 9th-century phase of decoration, can also be assigned to an early Tibetan style.[44] Again, it is the planar, static figurative style with fluid transitions in the modelling, the heavy heads decorated with large, generously proportioned crowns, and the sharp, graphically emphasised facial features with the small mouth and high eyebrows forming sharp ridges that are strongly reminiscent of the lCog ro stela. I suggest denominating this artistic idiom as the "Tibetan dynastic style".

Certain elements of this early Tibetan or dynastic style can also be recognised in later phases of Central Tibetan painting, especially as regards the frontality, stiffness and the straight legs, as they appear in a thangka depicting the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, presently in the Yarlung Museum, Tsethang. The image probably also originated in Keru and has been dated to the 11th century (Lee-Kalisch 2006: ill. on p. 244). Here the Tibetan type is combined with elements of Indian art, its probable models being Pāla-era manuscripts, which were introduced into Tibet at that time and were copied there (*ibid*.: 246).[45]

In general, it can be said of the style of the stela that the Indianised Tibetan features correspond to a type in the language of style modes that are characteristic of early Central Tibetan art, which draws from

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[44] See Vitali 1990: 20–21, pls. 5–10. The author came to the conclusion that this second phase of decoration in the temple was associated with 'Bro Khri gsum rje and dated to the years after 822 (*ibid*.: 19–22).

[45] Comparable with the stela are the straight legs and plump feet, while the delicate hands and the ball-shaped crown differentiate the two works. In all, the stela is closer to the Dunhuang examples.

20. Donors, Tabo monastery, main temple, entry hall, ca. 1000 (C. Kalantari, 2009).

Contrasting with it is religious imagery, for example, the early sculptures in the sanctum of the main temple of the same phase (see Luczanits 2004: figs. 19-28 for illustrations).[46] Characteristic are tube-shaped legs, cylindrical bodies, almost no modelling, smooth and even treatment of the body, half-closed eyes, and a marked interest in decorative elements and jewellery. Luczanits has recently convincingly defined this as the "earliest stage of Western Tibetan, Kashmir-inspired style".[47] This style was abandoned in favour of a more–sculptural figurative type during the 11th century, perhaps in direct interactions with royal workshops from Kashmir proper.[48]

As mentioned above, early Tibetan art, or the "Tibetan dynastic style", is characterised by a palimpsestic adaption. It is a result of interactions not only between Tibet and India and Nepal but also between Tibet and the many regional centres in Central Asia, such as Kashgar (Beckwith 1987: 30), Khotan, Kucha and Khocho, which Tibetan troops controlled sporadically from the 7th to the 9th centuries.[49] Each oasis had its own unique combination of religions, languages, artistic influences brought from afar and developed locally. Dunhuang in particular had a vital strategic and logistical

a complex layering of sources of Indianised, Newar-Tibetan and Central Asian inspiration. Many aspects of the Dunhuang banners and the Keru images are thus relevant for reconstructing the context of the stela. One important level of commonalities concerns form and function, material culture and elite self-fashioning, which will be discussed in the following.

From Dunhuang to Tabo: Material Culture and Courtly Prestige in Early Buddhist Temples
An important point of reference for stylistic characteristics and the embedding of the Purang stela in the history of the regional Western Tibetan stylistic developments is provided by the early paintings in the old entrance hall (*sgo khang*) of the main temple (*gtsug lag khang*) at Tabo. Among these, it is in particular the static female figures flanking the image of the tutelary deity and the assembly scenes with the depiction of the temple's founder, Ye shes 'od, in the old entrance hall (*sgo khang*) (Fig. 20) that can tentatively be assigned to this group. These early images in Tabo represent a specifically local Western Tibetan style at the end of the 10th century. It is applied to represent a non-Indian (and non-Kashmiri) Tibetan environment and is characterised by symbols of representation replete with elements of Central Tibetan and Central Asian luxury art.

[46] For further illustrations see the same author's "Indian and Tibetan Art" website: http://www.univie.ac.at/itba/pages/sites.html (last accessed Dec. 24, 2008). A related sculptural style in Ropa in upper Kinnaur, to which Luczanits has already referred (see Luczanits 2004: 59, figs 53–57), should also be mentioned.

[47] Certain constructive parallels with the Central Tibetan Keru images with regard to the wooden constructions as holders of the sculptures and the conscious "involvement" of these frameworks as part of the overall furnishing of the two temples should be mentioned.

[48] In the catalogue *The Silk Road and the Diamond Path* (1982: 118) Klimburg-Salter still compares the cella figures in Tabo with the Dunhuang banners, while the historical significance and artistic context of the figures are no longer discussed by her in later work (1997: 48). There the figures receive the not further elaborated comment: "The cella sculptures are problematic." (Luczanits 1997: 200; Luczanits 2004: 36–41) deals in detail with the earlier sculptures in Tabo. In contrast to older dating proposals, owing to iconographic and stylistic criteria as well as construction-history analyses of the site where they are erected, the author places the figures in the earliest phase of the art of the kingdom of Purang Guge, at the end of the 10th century, and notes the technological complexity of the sculptures as well as the numerous Central Asian references.

[49] Tibetan domination of the Tarim states and neighboring regions had begun in the 7th century. "The Tibetans had now conquered a fairly large expanse of territory in eastern Central Asia. The region straddled the main East-West transcontinental trade routes, and was then a dynamic, integral part of the highly civilized Buddhist heartland of Eurasia" (*ibid*.: 37). In 787, Tibet captured Dunhuang (*ibid*.: 152).
Khocho fell to the Tibetans in 791, and in this period Tibetans took Khotan. "'Bro Khri gźu ram śags, having invaded the Western Regions, subjugated Khotan and levied taxes" (*ibid*.: 155). Thus began the long period of Tibetan rule over Khotan, the neighbouring regions of the southern route through eastern Central Asia.

importance for trade, on a crossroads of two major trade routes within the Silk Road network. Dunhuang was not simply a recipient of trade, however, but had a very active export market, too, and was a producer of many varieties of silk.

The Tibetan Buddhist elite in Central Tibet continued and developed these specific transregional markers of their taste for a status and court society and its treasures within a broader geographic horizon. Precious textiles such as silks play a prominent role among these markers. The value of silk gave it particular appeal as a political and religious symbol, it was widely accepted as a currency, and it served as a medium for artistic exchange.

This political aspect of material culture is in particular expressed in the images of bodhisattvas and lay adherents depicted in the sumptuous robes of Central Asian rulers and of the Tibetan elite including the turbans and diadems of the Tibetan kings, in the 11th-century Central Tibetan temples of Drathang and Yemar.[50] Most impressive are the monumental cult images which were once housed in the temple of Yemar (destroyed in the 1950s). They were attired with precious robes tailored from silk brocades, and the artists who created them were perhaps drawing on models from silk-producing centres in Central Asia (cf. Govinda 1979: 44ff. for historic photographs). Characteristic are the static, somewhat compressed bodies, large heads and loose robes decorated with roundels known from precious silk brocades. The complex fabrics of the aristocratic elite's clothing were widespread in the oasis towns along the Silk Road. A unique ensemble of valuable Central Asian silks of Tibetan provenance consisting of a jacket and trousers should be mentioned here (Watt and Wardwell 1997: 37; cat. no. 5). The set of Sogdian and Tang-period silks presumably comes from Tibet or was manufactured in Tibetan controlled areas in the 8th century and may thereby also have been the property of Tibetan kings. The extensive importation of valuable silks into Tibet is also documented in the inscription on the Zhol *rdo ring* in Lhasa (this stela is dated by Richardson [1985: 2] to the year 764 or slightly later). This mentions the annual duty or tribute payment of 50,000 bales of silk (*dpya dar yug lnga khri*) from the Chinese rulers of this period (*ibid*.: 12–13).

The cult images of Drathang and Yemar are of strong Pāla-artistic flavour, resulting perhaps from the importation of Indian artists—purposefully engaged in the 11th century, inter alia of Atiśa. In

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[50] Illustrations of the paintings and sculptures have been published among others in Vitali (1990, chapter 2; Drathang: pls. 29ff., Yemar: pls. 18ff.). For a discussion of the political connotations of the famous pictures of gatherings with portrayals of the Buddha Vairocana at the centre in Gra/Grwa thang, see Heller 2002: 37–70.

21. Buddha assembly, Drathang monastery (Central Tibet), inner sanctum (*dri gtsang khang*), west wall, 11th century (C. Kalantari, 2010).

22. Buddha assembly, Drathang monastery (Central Tibet), inner sanctum (*dri gtsang khang*), west wall, 11th century (C. Kalantari, 2010).

23. Buddha assembly, Shalu monastery, Yum chen mo temple (Central Tibet), 11ᵗʰ century (C. Kalantari, 2010).

24. Bodhisattva, Shalu monastery, Yum chen mo temple (Central Tibet), 11ᵗʰ century (C. Kalantari, 2007).

society in Central Asia during the Tibetan period in order to project status and royalty in Central Tibet in the most effective way. One has also to mention the aspect of political theology in the sense of Tibetan kings as an emanation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. In looking at the lCog ro stela, one is reminded of the Indianising Central Tibetan mode of the bodhisattva portrayal.

Founders and their artists who created the cult images at Yemar and the Buddha gatherings at Drathang and Shalu developed a complex layering of Indianising figural types and Chinese Central Asian elite culture. The Shalu bodhisattvas (Figs. 23–24) (ca. mid-11ᵗʰ century) are represented in a Pāla idiom with corresponding clothing and jewellery. Comparable stylistic features can be seen in an early thangka featuring Buddha Amitāyus in the MET (New York, cf. Figs. 25–26; cf. Kossak 1998: cat. no. 1, p. 51); this is clearly created on Pāla models, as can be concluded by comparison with dated sculptures from Eastern India. This mode is different from the historic minor characters/lay adherents and donors with Tibetan clothing shown at Shalu and the upper section of the MET thangka (Fig. 26).[51] These mirror how society's elites dressed and were engaged in courtly receptions and outdoor pastimes such as hunting. The portrayals of the founders in the niches of the Shalu Gonkhang (*mgon khang*) represent one of these different types. They represent a local Tibetan mode with a concept of figures that is less abstracted and idealised, and presumably with contemporary attributes.

These examples are exemplary of the exchange and the mutual influence of Central Asian, Pāla, Newari and Tibetan art, which led to the development of wholly unique, unmistakeable art forms and to regional Western and Central Tibetan styles. In particular, depictions of valuable fabrics played an important role as identity-forming features in early Tibetan art.[52]

contrast, details of cloths and ornament are reminiscent of images of elite culture in Central Asia, in particular Dunhuang during the Tibetan period. Of course precious textiles which were traded to Tibet are good candidates for such a transfer of codes associated with authority and courtly splendour. This conscious pluralism of style is best studied on the basis of the well-preserved Buddha gatherings in Drathang (Figs. 21–22). They consciously drew from codes of court

[51] In gathering and Buddha-preaching portrayals in Drathang the bodhisattvas display a Pāla-style type of face combined with Tibetan forms of clothing. In addition, smaller accompanying figures are also portrayed that are reproduced in a Sinicising style with Tang-period jewellery and costumes. This reflects a cosmopolitan situation during the period of the "second dissemination of Buddhism" inherited from the imperial period. In this period diverse traditions co-existed in Central Tibet (Ü [dBus] and Tsang [gTsang]) integrating artistic trends from the Pāla dynasty of India and Nepalese art as well as models from the major Buddhist centres of Khotan and Dunhuang.

[52] Textiles in paintings are signs of status, identity and individuality, and often lend the figures portrait-like features, even if the type of figure frequently follows stereotypical models. Accordingly, the precise—and very probably naturalistic—reproduction of textiles was often given great attention. Moreover, textile motifs and throne portrayals are fascinating evidence of the passing on of the courtly Tibetan luxury culture in the "ruling sphere" of the Buddha as the sovereign of the spiritual sphere as well as of the political intentions of the founders who are associated with these temples and their furnishings.

with royal workshops of oasis centres along the Silk Road in Central Asia.

Comparable sartorial conventions can be seen in assemblies or social gatherings of donors (including social interactions like drinking of wine) depicted on a ca. 11th century Pāla-style thangka in the MET (Figs. 25–26).

In particular large lotus rosettes constitute popular decorative elements in the Tang-era cave temples at Dunhuang which mimic sumptuous textiles, both on the ceiling and as painted honorific covers. They also adorn a number of baldachins on the Tibetan banners from Dunhuang mentioned above. The baldachins and costumes in the entrance hall at Tabo presumably mimic Central Asian luxury textiles, conforming to the tradition of the courtly tastes of the aristocratic elite during the time of the Tibetan Empire. Such luxury textiles created in courtly workshops in Chinese Central Asia painted in a Western Tibetan temple reflect the desire of the rulers to project authority and court society and its treasures in the most effective way.

In view of the illustration of textiles in Tabo, which exceed the throne portrayals in the frescos there and define the ruler's space, it should be mentioned that tents made of valuable material—in

25. Thangka featuring Amitāyus attended by bodhisattvas (MET, New York) (after Kossak and Singer 1998: cat. no. 1, p. 50).

26. Thangka featuring Amitāyus, detail of monks with offerings, upper left corner (after Kossak and Singer 1998: cat. no. 1, p. 50).

Characteristic elements of material culture in the earliest paintings in the entrance hall (*sgo khang*) at Tabo that point to Tibetan courtly culture in Central Asia are sumptuous robes with overlong sleeves of the ruling elites decorated with patterns which allude to sumptuous luxury textiles and the throne scenes of the royal founder Ye shes 'od, surrounded by baldachins decorated with scattered flowers (Fig. 20) (see Papa-Kalantari 2007a: 201; 2007b: 162ff.).[53] These appear to be inspired by luxury textiles associated

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[53] Ye shes 'od together with his son Nāgarāja on the left-hand side are shown enthroned on a high wooden seat (in *lalitāsana*, royal ease) below a baldachin. The robe has lapels with additional epaulettes on the shoulders (comparable to the *sgo khang* at Shalu). Ye shes 'od and Nāgarāja are separated from the following figures by a closed umbrella as a sign of power (cf. Jahoda and Kalantari 2016: 94).

27. Shalu monastery, Yum chen mo temple (Central Tibet), details of ceiling ornament (11th century) (C. Kalantari, 2007).

28. Shalu monastery, Yum chen mo temple (Central Tibet), details of ceiling (11th century) (C. Kalantari, 2007).

29. Shalu monastery, Yum chen mo temple (Central Tibet), details of ceiling (11th century) (C. Kalantari, 2007).
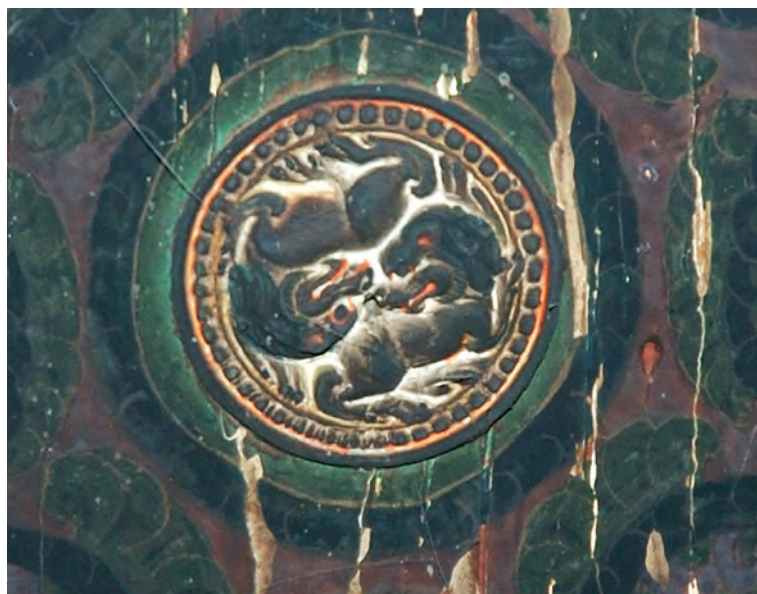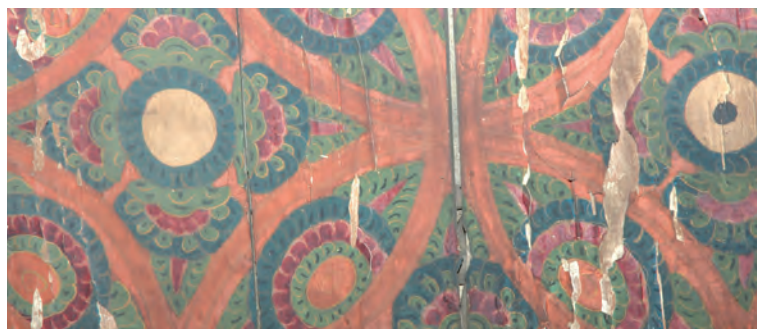
their function as mobile residences and thus an ephemeral room of high prestige—possibly played an important role as insignia of the Tibetan kings since the earliest times, as can be presumed from the burial objects in the Yarlung graves.[54] Precious cloths representing codes of court society and Tibetan rulers were then also used to define Buddhist sacred space as can be seen in images of local protectors at Tabo as well as ceilings mimicking precious textiles. Accordingly, the tutelary deity is shown in a sacred space defined by a textile.

Similar aesthetic preferences and a refined culture of luxury cloths, as in the early paintings of Tabo, are also reflected somewhat later in the ornamental culture of the wall and ceiling paintings of the early temples of Shalu (Central Tibet, ca. 1045). The Yum Chenmo temple (Yum chen mo *lha khang*) at Shalu displays textile décor of large complex rosettes with naturalistic birds and playing children between pomegranates, which represent popular decorative elements on the silk damasks of the late Tang, the Liao and the Northern Song dynasties (10th–12th century; Figs. 24, 27–29; see also Watt and Wardwell 1997: 45, cat. no. 9, and 49, cat. no. 11). In the refined ceiling ornaments in the Yum chen mo temple affinities can be found with the depictions seen on the murals at Drathang (Figs. 21–22), which also feature single leaves in various contrasting colours and fanciful blooms combining different types of flowers and fruits.[55]

The intention behind this complex layering is not a simple question of "artistic influence", but they have political aims, namely a conscious elite self-fashioning of ruling houses who deemed themselves heirs to a past grandeur in Central Asia and sought to connect with the Tibetan Empire in Central Asia. A comparable phenomenon has been recently discussed by Flood (2017), who demonstrated that from the beginning of the 12th century Buddhist elite culture in Ladakh adopted symbols of status and power of local rulers on the borders of the Muslim world—the heirs of the sophisticated artistic traditions and innovations in Iran and beyond.

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[54] On this see Papa-Kalantari 2007a: 190; 2008: 235. Interesting in relation to this is also a monumental luxury silk fabric with large medallions and lion decoration on a red background in the Abegg Foundation, which has a Tibetan inscription and possibly is to be seen as a burial object that should be classified in the imperial context. For illustrations and a description see Otavsky 1998: figs. 5 and 6; further, see Heller 1998: 95–118 for a detailed analysis of the inscription and the art- and cultural-history context.

[55] Foliage and lotus flowers are not canonical lotus blossoms with pointed lotus petals, but they show small, round petals in fan-like arrangements like bunches of flowers.

Dating

The meagre number of surviving sculptures from the time of the Tibetan kings (7th–9th century) and the early phase of the "later diffusion of Buddhism" in the kingdom of Purang-Guge (10th/11th century) means that a definite temporal attribution of the lCog ro stela based exclusively on stylistic analysis remains insecure. Nonetheless, the sum of the stylistic, epigraphic and historical evidence does permit a tentative assignment of the stela to a phase of the early Tibetan style, in sculpture and in painting in Central Asia and Central Tibet in the 9th century. Within this development the stela is most closely related in style to the Central Asian examples from Dunhuang and Keru, and thus a tentative dating to the end of the 9th or beginning of the 10th century can be proposed.

Historical evidence for political and thus also artistic relations between regions of Central Asia and Western Tibet can be associated with the donor of the stela named in its inscription, a member of the prestigious 'Bro clan. This clan was present at Dunhuang, and also makes an appearance in Keru, and could thus have played a major role in the distribution of Buddhist artefacts such as votive banners or thangkas belonging to this style[56] in Upper gTsang or Western Tibet, the probable origin of the clan, according to recent research. It is certainly possible that the stela originated in Central Tibet, as claimed by local tradition. The existence of another related stela in Purang (see Fig. 13), however, may indicate that there was a local artistic tradition with strong ties to Central Tibet, thus confuting the thesis that it was imported into this region.

It can be said that, as a whole, the stelae at Purang are simpler in style and more archaic in appearance than the early Tabo images (end of 10th century), and are thus of an earlier date than Tabo.[57] However, both reflect a local variant in a common, independent tradition of the early Indianising Tibetan style in Central Tibet, drawing on sources of Tibetan art which flourished in Central Asia. Although created in different regions, in previous research it was subsumed under the general term "Himalayan Style". The stela can rather be defined as a local current of a strong Central Tibetan, Pāla-inspired style which I denominate "Tibetan dynastic style" due its complex layering and elements of luxury art designed to project power and prestige within a greater geographic horizon. Certain elements of this stylistic trend flourished in different regions and with local characteristics but they developed relatively independently.

Conclusion

A discussion of the early Tibetan style that goes beyond mere enumeration of influences from neighbouring cultures such as India, China or Nepal is still in its infancy. There are individual studies of a number of early temples and monasteries in the Western Himalayas, but the reconstruction of the historical development of a characteristic Tibetan art and research into the mutual stylistic relations of these artefacts in the Western Himalayas prior to the 13th century have not advanced very far as yet.[58]

The results of the present study allow us to establish a bridge between the stylistic development of early Buddhist art during the time of the Yarlung dynasty in Central Tibet and the oldest Buddhist foundations in Western Tibet, such as Tabo in the 10th century. The lCog ro stela represents an important missing link in this reconstruction. A constant feature is the desire to project court societies as wealthy and pious Buddhist donors. The models of these strategies in early Tibetan art were court societies in Central Asia and their treasures. Tibetan artists drawing on this language of elite culture effectively developed codes of their taste and grandeur within a broader geographic horizon. Not only luxury art and prestigious textiles and robes play an important role but so do the representations of social interactions, such as assemblies of monks depicted in elaborate settings and holding offerings, as depicted in an early Central Tibet thangka (Fig. 26). The latter are also central features to project authority in Islamicate- inspired donor assemblies at Alchi representing members of the 'Bro clan (Kalantari, forthcoming).

The present analysis aims to embed the stela in terms of its art and history in a distinctive early Tibetan style in the Western Himalayas, but it also offers the opportunity to pay due tribute to the originality of this type. For it is the unique characteristics engendered in this dialogue between various cultures that endows the objects belonging to this style of early Tibetan art with their originality. In this style, it is evident that Indian and Central Asian models were consciously adapted and transformed to form a new and quite distinctive tradition.

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[56] Owing to the existence of a stylistically unique portrayal of a Vaiśravaṇa in Nako in the western Himalayas, representing a "foreign" type in the region, which might have been spread through banners from Dunhuang, the author suggests a transfer of styles over long distances along the pilgrim and trade routes (Papa-Kalantari 2010: 102).

[57] As there are no other known examples of this type from this period of sculptural form, the stela gives a certain idea of what the clay sculptures of Tabo and Ropa may have looked like in their original condition.

[58] The definition of styles from the perspective of Tibetan literature and the comparison of preserved works with descriptions in these historical treatises remains in its early stages however.

This research reveals that the characteristics of early Tibetan art are not the product of an immature or even primitive style but the result of deliberate stylistic choice and are thus the defining features of an art form of extraordinary longevity and diffusion in Tibet. The task of future research will be to elucidate the development of regional variants and their relationship to one another.

The early phase of this type occurs at Dunhuang, Khotan, Central Tibet and in Western Tibet as early as the 9th century at the time of the Tibetan Empire, and continued to exist, with various different regional characteristics, until at least the end of the 10th/ beginning of the 11th century. Whereas North-West Indian and Kashmiri stylistic elements became dominant in the royal Buddhist centres of Western Tibet at the end of the 10th century, in Central Tibet in contrast, with the active engagement of Indian artists, a unique amalgam of Tibetan and Pāla-style models emerged during the 11th century.

In the Western Himalayas, this early Tibetan style was superseded in the 11th century by a courtly artistic idiom—created in direct interactions with royal workshops in Kashmir—that suited new religious requirements and the need for an outward display by the religious and political elite and found expression in the more sumptuous decoration of the temple and monastery complexes endowed by this elite, for which huge resources, probably from gold deposits must have been made available.[59] Luxury art as a marker of the elite's taste and status was then also inspired by the court culture of Kashmir[60] and—from the 12th century—by small Iranianising kingdoms on the border of the Islamic realm.

Text Edition of the Inscription
Editorial Marks[61]

@	*yig mgo*
-i	*gi gu log*
M	*rjes su nga ro*
O	combination of subscripted *'a chung* and superscripted *na ro*
_	uncertain reading
=	illegible letter or illegible ligature at the start of a letter
[=]	damaged area where there was possibly a letter or ligature
.	*tsheg*[62]
[.]	damaged area where there was possibly a *tsheg*
/	*shad*
:	*nyis tsheg*
xx$_x$	subscripted letter presumably to save space[63]

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[59] The presumably most important sources for the furnishing of the religious buildings seem to have been the rich gold deposits. Further it is known that under Ye shes 'od the socio-economic organisation in the whole domain was subject to a thoroughgoing transformation and a permanent system of the funding of the monasteries was established (see Jahoda 2015: 53–54, 148–151).

[60] Precious silks with large rosettes and other Iranicate motifs, in particular with pearl borders (transmitted by the Sogdians), were introduced to many oasis states, among them Khotan, which also found their way into the Buddhist art of Khotan (Watt and Wardwell 1997: 24), and also inspired textile representations on Kashmir bronzes.

[61] The transliteration of the inscription is based on the Extended Wylie Transliteration Scheme (EWTS) of the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library (THDL) and of the *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* (*JIATS*), which represents a further development of the system developed by Turrell Wylie (1959).

[62] A *tsheg* is transliterated with a dot. Thus, implicitly the absence of a *tsheg* in a number of instances at the end of a line following the transliteration of a syllable is indicated by the absence of a dot. The "editorial policy" is thus different from that applied, for example, by Iwao et al. (2009: xix), who transliterate a *tsheg* with a space. The problem is clearly that consequently on the basis of their edition of this inscription (*ibid*.: 48–49) one has to assume the existence of a *tsheg* everywhere where one expects according to a predefined rule a space to stand for a *tsheg* (which is, however, not the case).

[63] This phenomenon of the last letter of a syllable being written below the preceding letter (or ligature) for "economy of space" was also stated by Iwao et al. (2009: xvii) who mention *nga* in *dang* and *'a* in *bka'* as examples. Why, however, "in such cases, *dang* and *bka'* are restituted without mention of this peculiar paleographical feature," (*ibid*.) is problematic as space and its use (economic or otherwise) should certainly be seen as an important feature of inscriptions. In addition, in their edition this rule seems to come into conflict with another one—"When the letter ཝ is written beneath a consonant, it is considered as *gtags-yig*, not as a long vowel sign" (*ibid*.: xviii). For example, in the case of *mtha'* (line 6, south side, and line 18, north side; see Fig. 32 and Fig. 44), this is not restituted in this way as one would expect but transliterated as *mth'a*.
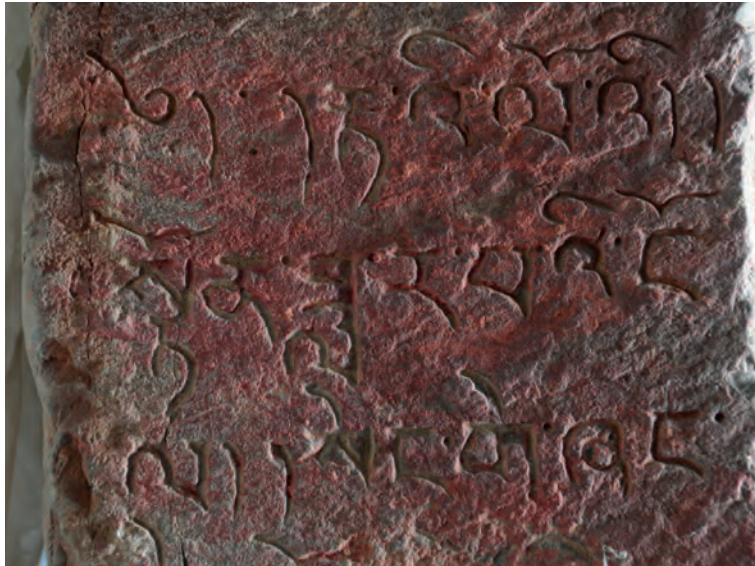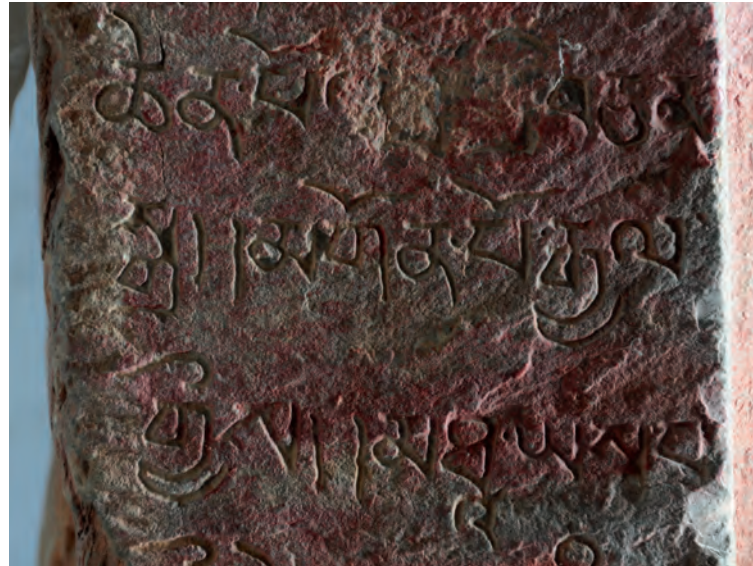
South Side[64] (see Figs. 30–38)[65]

1   @/ : / rta . ʼi . lo . ʼi //

2   ston . zla . ra . ba . ʼi . ngo

3   la // seng . ge . zhang .

4   chen . po [.][66] ʼbro . khri[67] . brtsan

5   sgra // mgon . po . rgyal .

6   gy-is // mtha,[68] . yas . pa

7   ʼ-i . sems . can . thaMs .

8   chad . dang // thun . mong

9   du . bsngos . te / /

10   ʼphags . pa // spyan

11   ras . gz-igs / /

12   dbang . phyug . gi / sku

13   gzugs / / rdo .

14   ʼbur . du . bgyis

15   nas / / bzhengs

30. Detail of inscription, south face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines 1–3 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

31. Detail of inscription, south face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines 4–6 (P. Sutherland, 2010).
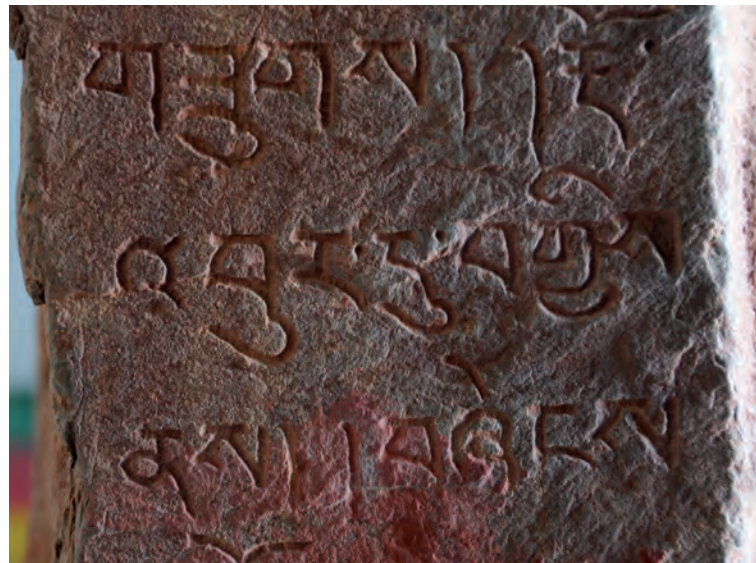
32. Inscription, south face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, overview upper part, lines 1–13 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

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[64] Iwao et al. (2009: 48) and Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang ʼdus (2011: 210) locate the inscriptions on the west and east face of the stela. As has been verified by Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po as well as the authors on the spot, also based on information provided by local villagers, the stela used to be set up in the past (as now) with the image of Avalokiteśvara facing east while the inscriptions were on the south and north sides.

[65] See also the website https://www.univie.ac.at/Tibetan-inscriptions/ for excellent digital close-ups of the inscription (stills based on a video recording) taken by Kurt Tropper in 2010.

[66] Iwao et al. (2009: 49) read a double *shad* after *chen po* for which there is no evidence (and no space).

[67] Here, as on the other side of the stela, are exactly the same two syllables, i.e. in each case the root letter (*ming gzhi*) is poorly legible, or it seems that the inscription has been damaged just at this point. Iwao et al. (2009: 49) read [---], that is, unknown number of illegible letters. In my view, based on inspection in situ and photographic documentation (under differing light conditions) *ra tags* and *na ro* in the case of *ʼbro* and *ra tags* and *gi gu* in the case of *khri* are clearly readable. My 2007 photograph of these lines (inv. No. CJ2007_03860031) also allows a considerably good reading of the root letter *ba* in *ʼbro*.

[68] Iwao et al. (2009: 49) read a double *shad* after *chen po* for which there is no The text of the inscription rendered in Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang ʼdus (2011: 211), which simply seems to reproduce the version published by Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring (1994: 4–6), has *mtha* (without *ʼa chung*).
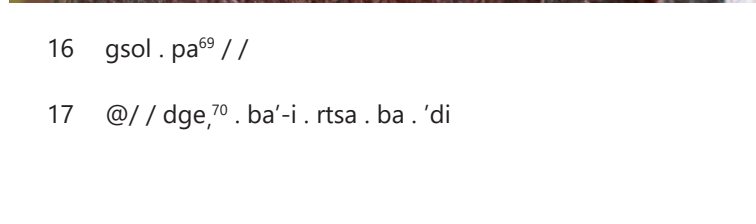
33. Inscription, south face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, overview lower part, lines 9–19 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

34. Detail of inscription, south face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines 7–9 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

35. Detail of inscription, south face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines 10–12 (P. Sutherland, 2010).
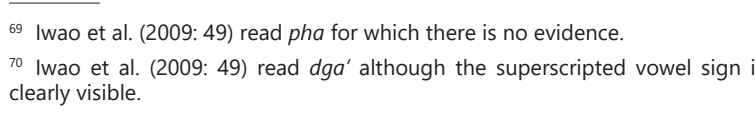
36. Detail of inscription, south face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines 13–15 (P. Sutherland, 2010).
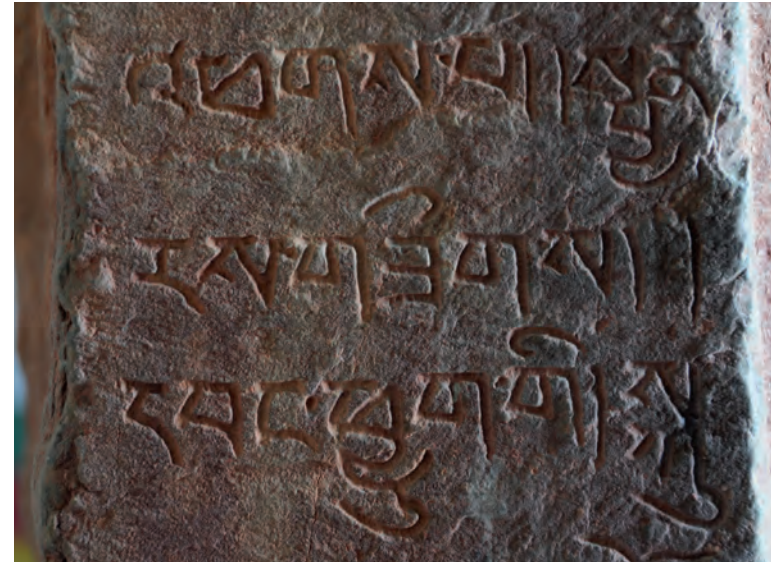
37. Detail of inscription, south face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines 16–18 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

16 gsol . pa[69] / /

17 @/ / dge,[70] . ba'-i . rtsa . ba . 'di

18 skye . 'gro . ma . lus . pa

19 kun ky-i . don . du . bsngO /[71]

[69] Iwao et al. (2009: 49) read *pha* for which there is no evidence.

[70] Iwao et al. (2009: 49) read *dga'* although the superscripted vowel sign is clearly visible.

[71] Iwao et al. (2009: 49) transliterate this as *bsng'o* (which is problematic for the reasons given above) while I think that *bsngO* should be read here, which should be interpreted as an abbreviated form of *bsng[o .] 'o*.

North Side (see Figs. 39–46)

1   @/ : / na . mo . 'phags

2   pa . spyan . ras. gz-ig$_s$

3   dbang . phyug . g-i . spyan .

4   sngar // sdig . pa . thaMs .

5   chad . n-i . 'chags[72] . so /[73]

6   bsod[74] . nams ⹁ thaMs

7   chad . ky-i . rjes . su . yi. rang

8   ngo / / nyon . mongs pa da$_{ng}$ /[75]

[72] Iwao et al. (2009: 48) read *'tshags*, which cannot be totally excluded as a possible reading.

[73] Iwao et al. (2009: 48) have a double *shad*, for which there is no evidence based on our documentation.

[74] Based on the 2007 in situ inspection and photography by both authors, *msod* (as read by Iwao et al. 2009: 48) can be excluded (the prefix is clearly *ba* and not *ma*).

[75] In this line, economic use of space must certainly have been the reason why after *mongs* and *pa* there is no *tsheg* and why *nga* was subscripted to *da* at the end of the line.
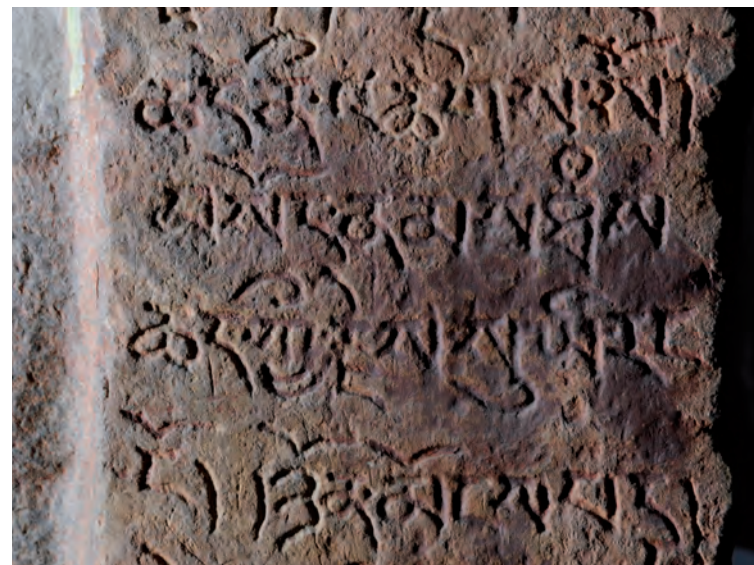
9   shes . bya . '-i. sgrib . pa .

10   rnam . gnyis . ni . byang . /[76]

11   bsod . nams . dang /

[76] Iwao et al. (2009: 48) have a double *shad*, for which there is no evidence based on our documentation.
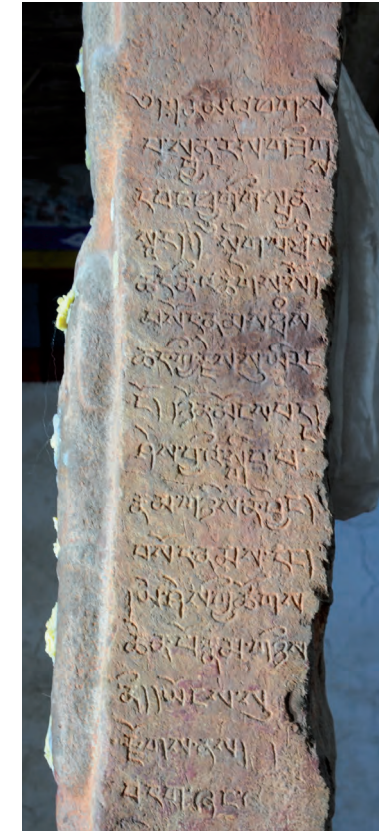
38. Detail of inscription, south face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, line 19 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

39. Inscription, north face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines 1–4 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

40. Inscription, north face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, overview upper part: lines 1–16 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

41. Inscription, north face of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines 5–8 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

42. Inscription, north face of sPyan
ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela,
overview lower part: lines 10–24
(P. Sutherland, 2010).

43. Inscription, north face of sPyan
ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines
9–12 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

44. Inscription, north face of sPyan
ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines
13–16 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

45. Inscription, north face of sPyan
ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines
17–20 (P. Sutherland, 2010).

46. Inscription, north face of sPyan
ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara) stela, lines
21–24 (P. Sutherland, 2010).
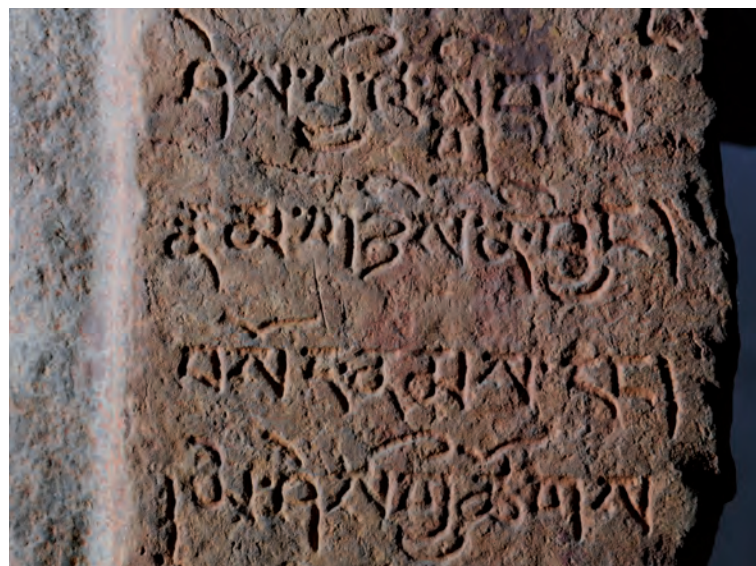
12   / ye . shes gy-i . tshogs

13   chen . po . rnam . gny-is

14   n-i // yongs . su

15   rdzogs . nas / /

16   bdag . zhang . '=[=]
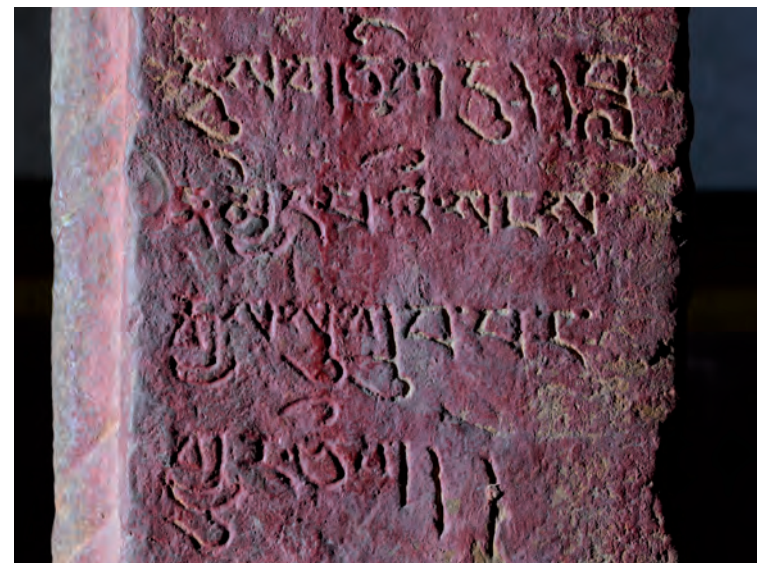
17   =i . brtsan . sgra . mgon .

18   po . rgyal . dang / / mtha,

19   yas . pa . '-i . sems

20   can . thams . chad //

21   dus . gcig ̱ du // bla ̱

22 na . myed . pa . '-i. sangs .

23 rgyas . su . grub . par[77] .

24 gyur . c-ig / /[78]

Translation
In the first half of the first autumn month in the Year of the Horse, 'Bro Khri brtsan sgra mGon po rgyal, *seng ge* (lion)[79] and great *zhang*,[80] dedicating equally among all the num-

_____

[77] Also the reading *bar* seems possible.

[78] In the version of the inscription published in Tibetan *dbu can* script by Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring (1994: 4–6; reproduced in this way by Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus 2011: 211–213), apart from some insignificant differences in the case of individual *tsheg*, which are perhaps based on an earlier better legibility, there are some mistakes, which presumably are due to a lack of care on the part of the editing of the publisher and which have here been corrected. Thus for example on the south side in line six the clearly visible subscripted *'a chung* at *mtha'* is missing, or a particularly noticeable subscripted *'a chung* at the end of line 19. Likewise on the north side of the stela a clearly legible *shad* at the end of line eight and at the start of line 12 as well as a double *shad* at the end of line 15 are missing. Neither does the poor and actually uncertain legibility of 'Bro Khri both on the south and the north sides show in their reproduction. The fact that the existing poor legibility in 2007 existed previously is testified to by the illustration in Zheng (2000: 172), which took place relatively near to the time of the documentation by Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring in September 1993 (Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring 1994: 4). In some cases, Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring were conversely able to read some "simple" *tsheg* and a double *tsheg* (between the double *shad* which separates the syllables *sngar* and *sdig* in line four of the inscription on the north side), which in 2007 were neither recognisable on site nor from the photos. In other cases, *tsheg* are visible at least from photos, even if uncertainly.

    The text of the inscription was reproduced by Roberto Vitali (1996: 168) in a simplified, transliterated form, i.e. without consideration of its ancient palaeographic features. His basis for this seems exclusively to have been the text published in Tibetan script by Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring. (In the photos of the two inscriptions accompanying their article the Tibetan text is illegible.)

[79] According to Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring (1994: 17) the term *seng ge* (lion) is a great honorary title. This title should presumably even be regarded as being specifically related to the 'Bro clan (see below).

[80] Describing someone as *zhang chen po* means that this is a great or significant person among the *zhang po* (literally the maternal uncle or the [classificatory] mother's brother, actually related to the ruler on the mother's side or from the clan of the [classificatory] mother's brother, who in the time of the monarchy exercised functions as a minister or another high-ranking official). In the imperial period there were four such clans ('Bro, mChims, Tshes pong, sNa nam), from which queens and the mothers of the *btsan po* came and which to this extent appeared as "bride-givers" to the *btsan po* line and were thus among the most powerful and politically influential (see for example Dotson 2004; Hazod 2006).

berless sentient beings [the merit therefrom accruing], requested that a relief made of stone with an image of Ārya-Avalokiteśvara ('Phags pa sPyan ras gzigs dbang phyug) be set up.[81] This root of virtuousness shall be dedicated to the benefit of all sentient beings without exception!

Namo! In the presence of Ārya-Avalokiteśvara ('Phags pa sPyan ras gzigs dbang phyug) I confess to all [my] misdeeds. There is a joy over and above all merit. As far as the obstacle of the afflictions [*nyon mongs pa'i sgrib pa*, Skt. *kleśāvaraṇa*] and the obstacle of the knowable [*shes bya'i sgrib pa*, Skt. *jñeyāvaraṇa*], these two things, are concerned, they will be removed. As far as the great accumulation of merit and wisdom, these two things, is concerned, it will be brought to perfect completion, and then I, *zhang* 'Bro Khri brtsan sgra mGon po rgyal, and all the numberless sentient beings shall one day attain unsurpassable Buddhahood![82]

Historical Classification
The question of how this stela should be classified historically cannot be easily answered on the available evidence and can turn out differently depending on different disciplinary and methodological perspectives, which results in differing implications for more far-reaching questions. As mentioned above, from an art-historical perspective through various references to the art of Central Asia (in particular of Dunhuang) and Central Tibet, this stela can on the one hand be placed in a broader, supraregional comparative context. On the other hand, it can be located in a regional stylistic development history and chronology of early West Tibetan art. One of the main questions of historical classification naturally concerns the dating of the stela, which from an art-historical perspective should be dated to the 9th century or beginning of the 10th century.

    A dating of the stela using scientific methods, for example by an analysis of the pigment on the surface, is preconditional on further researches (and permission). Provisionally, therefore, in addition to the art-historical findings there remains the palaeographic and content evidence provided by the inscriptions.

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[81] The expression *gsol pa* in line 16 also seems to permit an interpretation in the sense of *gsol mchod*, so that the request by 'Bro Khri brtsan sgra mGon po rgyal for the erection of the stela can also be seen as being connected with a sacrificial ritual in which the divinity (*yul lha*, *gzhi bdag*) who lives in and rules the area is asked for permission or the blessing for the erection.

[82] For a somewhat differing English translation see Vitali 1996: 168.

Palaeographic Evidence

The detailed comparative investigations of the script and textual features of the inscription carried out by Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring (1994), where they differentiate in their analysis into the field of calligraphy (*yig gzugs*), the mastery of writing (*'bri rtsal*) and the style of the content (*brjod bya*), led them to the conclusion that it was created during the time of the imperial kings (*btsan po*). The comparative basis of their investigation were the historically most important written records from the time of the monarchy, as they are to be found above all on the *rdo ring*, on bells and in the texts found in Dunhuang. The two authors devoted great attention above all to the palaeographic features and, on the basis of eight palaeographic or orthographic features that were characteristic of these written records,[83] arrived at the conclusion that clear parallels with the inscription on the Avalokiteśvara stela in lCog ro can be noted. They further state that in view of the calligraphy the inscription on the stone stela from Western Tibet corresponds with that of the stone stelae from the royal period, in contrast to which the corresponding features during the "later dissemination of Buddhism (in Tibet)" (*bstan pa phyi dar*), i.e. from ca. the fourth quarter of the 10th century,[84] differ greatly.

A comparison of the Avalokiteśvara stela inscription with the calligraphic features of the inscriptions on old stelae of the royal period and on rocks shows the greatest similarities with the bSam yas and in particular with the mTshur phu stone stelae (*ibid*.: 16).[85] In a further parallel they see between the lCog ro and mTshur phu stelae—the fact that each were commissioned by an individual minister for personal ends—they consider it conceivable that both were erected at about the same time. According to this, it would have been at the end of the 8th century or beginning of the 9th century, most possibly during the time of *btsan po* Ral pa can/Khri gTsug lde btsan (*ibid*.: 16) (815–841, data according to Dotson 2006: 416). Based on different indices, namely of the content—title and clan of the person who commissioned it named in the inscription

(see below)—however, they also consider that they could have been created during or after the time of *btsan po* Khri Srong lde btsan, and also during the time of Khri lde Srong btsan (Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring 1994: 17–18).

Text-Content Evidence

Regardless of the assessment based on art-historical or palaeographic comparisons, the best way of establishing a time window for the creation of the stela would be through the identification of the person who commissioned it and in connection with the Horse year (*rta'i lo*) mentioned at the beginning of the inscription on the south side of the stela. However, the identity of the commissioner is not known from any of the currently available historical sources.[86] Because of this fact, the particular Horse year unfortunately cannot be ascribed to a particular historical period. What is important, however, is that the name of the commissioner, it appears, is given in full in the inscription and includes all usual parts of the name. This fact can be utilised to draw further conclusions.

During the period of the Tibetan Empire (7th–9th century), references to people, above all those of a high social rank, were composed of the following elements, which were combined and also abbreviated: *rus* (clan),[87] *mying/ming* (person name or individual

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[83] This includes among other things the way in which the *yig mgo* is written, the use of *nyis tsheg*, the use of *gi gu log*, the use of *ya btags* with *mi*, *mig*, *ming*, *me*, *med*, etc., the use of *da drag* after *na*, *ra* and *la* and the use of *'a chung* in the genitive, which is separated from the previous syllable by a special *tsheg* (*sbrang bsad*) (Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring 1994: 7–9).

[84] Differing dates are to be found in the contemporary Tibetan sources for the start of the *bstan pa phyi dar*. For Western Tibet (sTod mNga' ris) based on the data in *mNga' ris rgyal rabs* Vitali assumes it started in 986 (Vitali 1996: 186).

[85] See also the meticulous paleographic study of Tibetan inscriptions and texts dating from 7th–9th centuries by Dieter Schuh (2013), which is based on a wide range of samples (including the lCog ro inscription).

[86] In search of the (*seng ge*) *zhang* (*chen po*) 'Bro Khri brtsan sgra mGon po rgyal mentioned twice in the inscription, various online text editions (e.g. Old Tibetan Documents Online) were searched, and numerous reference works and the corresponding indexes were checked, including works by Palmyr Cordier (1909, 1915), Marcelle Lalou (1933, 1939), Giuseppe Tucci (1950), Paul Demiéville (1952), Hugh E. Richardson (1967, 1985), David Snellgrove and Tadeusz Skorupski (1977, 1980), Roberto Vitali (1996) and Brandon Dotson (2004), all without significant result. Only in the case of *mdo blon ched po* 'Bro *zhang* b[rts]an sgra ya sto, who appears in a Tibetan document found in Dunhuang (IOL Tib J 1368: line 32; see Old Tibetan Documents Online for a transliteration of the text and a photo of the document), is there a partial correspondence. Apart from this, the events described in this document are to be dated at the earliest to the early 8th century (see, e.g. Uray, 1978: 541), so that it can be assumed without doubt that it concerns two different people.
The identification of the commissioner of the stela, 'Bro Khri brtsan sgra mGon po rgyal (named as *seng ge* and *zhang chen po*), with 'Bro Seng dkar, who according to *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs* (see Jahoda, "Paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan's chapter on the history of mNga' ris in *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs*: Notes on the author and the content", this volume, p. 79, and Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, "Relating the History of mNga' ris as set down in writing in Paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs skye dgu'i cod paṇ nyi zla'i phreng mdzes*: The Tibetan text", this volume, p. 102) offered the Nyi gzungs palace in Purang to sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon in 911, is tempting but difficult to argue. His designation as zhang chen po (south face, ll. 3–4) and zhang (north face, l. 16) in the inscription——expressing his status as "bride-giver" to the royal line (as stated in *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs*)——may be taken as supporting this hypothesis.

[87] Membership of a particular clan or family, as *rus* is usually translated, which

name), *thabs*, also *gral thabs* (title, rank), and *mkhan* (a kind of nickname). In addition, the membership of an ethnic group or of an administrative unit (such as *stong sde*) might also appear (see Richardson 1967; Uray 1978; Uray and Uebach 1994). With regard to the person who commissioned the stela, this means that his clan can be identified as the 'Bro and he is to be seen as a member of this famous family in Tibetan history, despite the uncertain though also probable reading of the root letter in both places. His individual name can be considered to be mGon po rgyal,[88] his nickname or the name by which he was known (see Richardson 1967: 11–12) seems to have been Khri brtsan sgra. Neither are in Richardson's published (although also incomplete) name list of functionaries during the period of the Tibetan Empire. In the case of the title, there is a noticeable difference between the inscriptions on the southern and northern sides: on the north side it is shortened to *zhang*, probably because of the I-form of the statement wishing to avoid self-importance, while on the south side marking the beginning of the text, in which the commissioner is as-it-were officially introduced, he appears preceded by the honorary title *seng ge* and the addition of *zhang* of *chen po* in double extended form.[89]

Vitali takes the honorary title *seng ge* as the basis for a discussion of the relationship between this part of the name and the 'Bro clan, and determines it as a specifically inherited rank or mark of prestige of particular members or sub-units of this clan, which was also used by the 'Bro clan members in sTod, i.e. in Western Tibet. As examples he gives Seng dkar ma, the wife of Srong nge (the later Royal Lama [*lha bla ma*] Ye shes 'od), the translator 'Bro Seng dkar Śākya 'od and a 'Bro Seng dkar sTod pa bla ma Ye shes who was active in Central Tibet (dBus) in the 11th century (Vitali 1996: 169).[90] The suggestion, as in Vitali's account, that there is a quasi internal connection (based on direct clan relationship) between the honorary title *seng ge* in the case of the inscription on the Avalokiteśvara stela, between an honorary title *seng ge dkar mo'i gong slag* (or perhaps a mark of rank called *seng ge dkar mo gong glag*, see Dotson 2006: 118) linked to an 8th-century 'Bro functionary, and a 'Bro Seng dkar clan name first provable only in the 11th century and for this only through two examples,[91] seems not entirely certain in view of these isolated indicators and needs to be supported by further evidence. In addition, the concept of sub-clans or sub-groups of clans seems to be contradictory, if one assumes an obvious territorially widely dispersed unit in the case of the Seng dkar "group" while comparably in the case of the Zangs kha sub-clan of the lCog ro clan the former

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can be described as exogamous but not as local units, is here exclusively passed on through the father and indeed both to sons as well as to daughters.

[88] In this form the name is first documented for later periods and thus seems unusual in this historical context. The name part mGon po is a form that as far as is known first spread in the 11th century and precisely in connection with the Avalokiteśvara cult (Guntram Hazod, personal communication, August 2008). Nevertheless, it is perhaps worth noting that in the early 10th century *mgon* (*po*) first occurs as a defining component in the name of the founder of the West Tibetan kingdom, sKyi lde Nyi ma mgon, and his three sons, dPal gyi mgon, bKra shis mgon and lDe gtsug mgon, together also described as sTod kyi mgon gsum.

[89] According to Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring (1994: 17) the expression *zhang chen po*, *zhang blon che ba* or *zhang blon chen po* only emerged in the period of Khri Srong lde btsan. To this extent, in their opinion the person named in the inscription on the Avalokiteśvara stela could perhaps have been a great minister active during or after the ruling period of Khri srong lde btsan. In the inscription of lDan ma brag (804/816) a "blon chen zhang 'bro phri [khri] gzu' dam (ram) shags" is mentioned (see Heller 2003: 396). The information provided by Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus (2011: 213) follows their view and adds on the presence of the 'Bro clan in Upper mNga' ris that one great 'Bro lineage (*rus rgyud*) appears to have settled there after a military campaign waged by the Great Minister (*blon che*) 'Bro chung bzang 'or mang against Khotan (Li yul) via the Khri sde administrative district in Upper Zhang zhung during the reign of Khri lde gTsug btsan/Mes 'ag tshoms (704–755). He speculates that eventually famous ministers appeared from this 'Bro lineage (*ibid.*).

Above and beyond this, looking through the above-mentioned reference works and text editions available online produced the result that *zhang chen po* occurs a total of four times in a two-part document (Pelliot tibétain 16, IOL Tib J 751) and indeed each time in the same way: *blon chen po zhang khri* (*khr-i*)

sum rje dang/ zhang chen po lha bzang (28b4, 37a4–37b1, 41b1, 41b3; see Old Tibetan Documents Online). This document contains a collection of prayers that relate to the erection of a temple called *gtsigs kyi gtsug lag khang* in De ga g.yu ts(h)al (following the treaty agreed between China and Tibet in 821/22). Recently this temple was identified by Kapstein as cave 25 of the Yulin grottoes in Anxi (these grottoes are ca. 120 km east of Dunhuang) (Kapstein 2004). According to Uebach, the *zhang chen po* lHa bzang mentioned, also given as *chen po zhang* lHa bzang (26b2, 27a1), is identical with the lHa bzang klu dpal known from other sources (Uebach 1991: 501), who is mentioned by Vitali as the brother of 'Bro Khri sum rje (see Vitali 1996: 203–204, 207). In each case, the activities of the *blon chen po zhang khri* (*khr-i*) *sum rje* and *zhang chen po* lHa bzang recorded in the document (27a1), who are also named in it as the great founders (*yon bdag chen po*) who had this temple erected (probably in 823), are to be dated to the period of the rule of *btsan po* Khri gTsug lde brtsan, better known as Khri Ral pa can, specifically in the 820s (Kapstein 2004: 100–101).

[90] "Seng.dkar.ma is not a proper name but a title deriving from a symbol of rank particular to the 'Bro-s (the *seng.ge dkar.mo'i gong.slag*, i.e. "the white lioness fur collar"), which some members of the clan wore as a sign of their greatness. The title was also used by the 'Bro-s of sTod. The clan affiliation of Ye.shes.'od's wife is doubly significant because, on the one hand, it confirms the close associations of the 'Bro-s with the mNga'.ris skor.gsum royal family in no lesser way than that of the great Ye.shes.'od, and, on the other, it is the earliest instance around *bstan.pa phyi.dar* documenting the presence of the Seng.dkar group among the 'Bro-s of sTod." (Vitali 1996: 178).

[91] Even if the name Seng dkar ma might actually be based on a clan name Seng dkar, this should not automatically be read as equivalent to a clan 'Bro Seng dkar.

is regarded as a close territorial unit.[92] Apart from this, the question arises of how such sub-clans were described in Tibetan. The fact that there was a historical process of differentiation of clans during the period of the great Tibetan kingdom and also in later periods of West Tibetan history is indisputable. Thus for example for Spiti, according to a written source, of the more than 36 named clans (*rus*) there are five—Khyung mgo pa, Khyung rus pa, Khyung dkar pa, Khyung dar nag pa, Khyung jo rus pa (quoted after Yo seb dge rgan 1976: 325.12–13)—that in Vitali's view can be regarded as sub-clans or sub-divisions of a higher Khyung clan, but which actually formed five independent clans and were counted as such.[93] The term (*b*)*rgyud pa* on the other hand is to be seen as a subcategory of *rus* or *rigs rus*, which describes the patrilinear *local* lineages or members of them deriving from a common ancestor (a *rus/rigs rus/pha rus*).[94]

The origin and spread of the 'Bro clan has been repeatedly discussed in numerous older and more recent works. Usually this has happened as part of the analysis of particular political, military or religious activities and functions of members of this clan in the period of the greater Tibetan Empire in areas of Central Tibet and Central Asia (e.g. in the region around Dunhuang) (see i.a. Tucci 1950; Demiéville 1952; Vitali 1990, 1996). There is later evidence of the religious activities of members of this clan in Ladakh too (e.g. the foundation of the monastery of Alchi in the 12th century). An inscription in Alchi records members of the 'Bro clan, starting with a 'Bro sTag bzang, who came from Guge Purang (see Denwood 1980: 148; Vitali 1996: 201–202, n. 290). However, according to Vitali there

were no indications of a continuous connection between the Buddhist activities of the 'Bro clan in sTod (Purang) and that in Ladakh.[95]

According to recent research, the regional origin of the 'Bro clan should be seen as being in sTod or sTod khul, i.e. in an area in WesternTibet. This was also the area where they achieved their status (*go gnas*) (Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring 1994: 17).[96] Dotson comes to a similar conclusion on the basis of a re-analysis of the details in the post-dynastic historical textual sources (such as *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* of mKhas pa lde'u). Thus, according to these, in his view the origin of the 'Bro clan is to be seen as linked to Upper gTsang (gTsang stod) or Gug cog, one of the core regions of Western Tibet, where the presence of members of the 'Bro clan is verifiable. They also maintained this geographical link after the collapse of the kingdom (Dotson 2012: 180f.).

Vitali sees the erection of the Avalokiteśvara stela in lCog ro in connection with or as a consequence of a conquest of Purang by 'Bro soldiers, which took place under Ral pa can (Vitali 1996: 198–199, n. 298) or under a Buddhist conversion carried out there under *zhang* sKyid sum rje—who according to Vitali was probably one of the 'Bro clan ministers (*ibid*.: 167, n. 229)—and which was instigated by *bande* Chos kyi blo gros not later than 836. In addition, in the time of Ral pa can—whose mother ('Bro bza') Khri mo legs was a member of the 'Bro clan, which is why she not only nominally but in the actual sense had a *zhang* connection with the ruler—the 'Bro were the only clan in sTod who could boast this title (*ibid*.: 166–167, 169).

During the time of Ral pa can the 'Bro clan provided high-ranking functionaries at the rank of minister (*zhang blon*). The 'Bro also exercised this function as ministers under 'Od srung and under his son dPal 'khor btsan. A minister by the name of 'Bro gTsug sgra lHa sdong is mentioned under the latter. To this extent, the connection between the Central Tibetan royal line and the 'Bro clan, as it existed in the time of Ral pa can, appears to have continued into the time of 'Od srung and beyond. Thus the grandson (*tsha bo*) of 'Od srung, sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon, the founder of the West Tibetan kingdom according to the *La dwags rgyal rabs* and other chronicles, was married to a woman from the 'Bro clan ('Bro bza' 'Khor skyong).[97]

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[92] "The case of rTse.lde's minister [Zang kha ba rje blon gTag zig] helps to clarify that Zangs.kha has to be read as a clan name, and its belonging to Cog.ro [lCog ro] ultimately makes Zangs.kha a subdivision of the Cog.ro clan. Finally, since Zangs.kha was a sub-clan of Cog.ro and Cog.ro is a territory found in Pu.hrang. smad, people belonging to Zangs.kha were Pu.hrang.pa-s." (Vitali 1996: 172).

[93] See Jahoda 2017 for a preliminary discussion of clans in pre-modern Spiti.

[94] Based on relevant details in historiographic texts, it is known that during the period of the Tibetan Empire, the clans distinguished themselves from one another by emblems. These emblems possibly already came from a pre-imperial period. The connection between such old, clan-specific emblems, the insignia or symbols that decorate the banner of the administrative-military units known as *ru* (whose leader or *ru dpon* was again appointed by particular clans) (see Dotson 2006: chap. 3, *passim*), and the differentiation between the clan lines (often expressed with the aid of colours) (e.g. dBra *dkar nag khra gsum*), which derive from older, middle and younger ancestor brothers, and above all the historical development of these connections and the change in significance of these emblems according to historical context (e.g. after the end of the monarchy, in the West Tibetan kingdom and its successor kingdoms Guge, Purang and Ladakh) has not yet been systematically researched. A first basic work in this respect is Guntram Hazod's compilation of the historical territorial structure in early and imperial Tibet on the basis of contemporary and post-dynastic text sources (Hazod 2009).

[95] "There is no evidence to show whether support of Buddhism in sTod by the 'Bro clan continued without interruption from *bstan.pa snga.dar*, when the 'Bro-s erected a Buddhist *rdo.rings* in Pu.hrang." (Vitali 1996: 201, n. 290).

[96] Further evidence—burial mounds in Khrom chen, lHa rtse County—indicating the original location of this clan in the lHa rtse area was found by Pasang Wangdu (see Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus 1994: 633f. and also Blo bzang nyi ma 2011: 208ff.). Pasang Wangdu confirmed his view in a personal communication, Vienna, Oct. 2011.

[97] See Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring 1994: 13, 18; see also Gu ge

As Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring also state in summary, with regard to the Avalokiteśvara stela in lCog ro this means that very little can be said with real certainty either about the time of the erection of the stone stela or about its creator, even if the paleo- and orthographic features of the inscriptions provide a certain historical attribution[98] and the art-historical findings together with the other clues mentioned all in all make it possible to assume the 9th century as the most probable dating for its creation, most likely around Fire Horse year 826 or Earth Horse year 838 (as suspected by Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus 2011: 210) or in one of the following Horse years (perhaps even as late as the early 10th century).

Whether this stela falls within the starting phase of the West Tibetan kingdom and thereby is perhaps the only remaining example of the patronage of Buddhist art in Western Tibet from the time before Ye shes 'od, or whether it represents, as it were, a bridge between the old Tibetan Empire and the Central Tibetan royal line on the one hand and the West Tibetan kingdom on the other, or belongs in the final phase of the old monarchy (and thereby is so far the only relic testifying to the presence of Buddhism in this period in Western Tibet),[99] will thus have to remain open and should not only provide a stronger impetus for further clarification of the historical

significance and classification of this stela, but also for further research into similar artworks and written records, in particular also for further stelae.

Oral Tradition
There are also some details on the question of the origin (and thereby implicitly the creation) of the Avalokiteśvara stela in the local oral tradition in Purang, which might be relevant to further research and should therefore not be ignored. Apart from this, the local population express concepts and perspectives which contribute to their understanding of the function this stela has had for them in recent times and has today. When the two Tibetan scholars Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring arrived in sPu hreng (Purang) on 10 September 1993, according to their report, in answer to the question about old remains (*gna' shul*) local administration officials mentioned a famous stela (in the area) with a so-called *self-created* sPyan ras gzigs relief, which was in the Purang District on a bend in the road between the villages (*grong tsho*) of (l)Cog ro and Zhi sde south of the rMa bya gtsang po (Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring 1994: 4).

Further information in this relation has been collected by the late Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po. According to this, there was a small administrative unit in Zhi sde called lCog ro, which was supposed to have been the residence area of a minister (*blon po*) of sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon called lCog ro Legs sgra lHa legs. After he had arrived there and had brought this area under his control, the teaching of the Buddha spread widely there. It was known that members of the old Central Tibetan royal (*btsan po*) line exercised their rule from this area from then onwards. It is said of the stela (*rdo ring*) with the 'Phags pa sPyan ras gzigs dbang phyug relief that it was brought from Central Tibet (dBus gTsang) by the lCog ro clan.[100] According to the older generation of the local population, the image of 'Phags pa sPyan ras gzigs dbang phyug was invited to dKar dung (in the upper rMa bya gtsang po valley) from dBus gTsang. It is also said that owing to a badly made oral delivery of the invitation it remained in lCog ro. It is also said that the stela forms the border between Zhi sde[101] and Khri sde (Tshe ring rgyal po 2006: 142).[102]

In the course of the documentation of the stela in 2007, there

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Tshe ring rgyal po, "Relating the History of mNga' ris as set down in writing in Paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs skye dgu'i cod paṇ nyi zla'i phreng mdzes*: The Tibetan text", this volume, pp. 102–103.

[98] See Kurt Tropper's note on the dating of the wall inscriptions in the great circumambulatory corridor (*skor lam chen mo*) of the Zha lu monastery: "at present the dating of Tibetan documents solely on the basis of their palaeography and orthography cannot be considered to be more than a rough approximation." (Tropper 2007: 942).

[99] Nevertheless, it seems to be clear that it falls within the period of the "Early Spread of the Buddhist Teaching (in Tibet)" (*bstan pa snga dar*), which according to Vitali was officially proclaimed as the state religion, among others also in Zhang zhung, with the dissemination of a copy of the edict of bSam yas by Khri Srong lde btsan (Vitali 1996: 165, n. 222). From the sources, it is difficult to judge whether and to what extent this edict was carried out in Zhang zhung, which can at least partly be identified with areas of Western Tibet, and whether the influence of the Early Spread of the Buddhist Teaching actually also reached Western Tibet. One indicator that Western Tibet in the late 8th century may have been a site of Buddhist activities and a meeting place for teaching and translating activities and an attraction point for Buddhist pilgrims are reports about the Indian monk-scholar Buddhaguhya (Sangs rgyas gsang ba in Tibetan sources), who is supposed to have stayed in the Kailas area in the second half of the 8th century (see Dargyay 2003: 366f.; Cutler 1996: 55f.). Further indications lie in the fact that bKra shis mgon, the father of Ye shes 'od, is mentioned in the *mNga' ris rgyal rabs* (Vitali 1996: 51.5–6) as the founder of a Maitreya statue and of wall paintings in the g.Yu ra/sgra temple that was supposed to have been on the bank of the rMa bya river in Purang (see *ibid.*: 164–165). Actually, someone other than bKra shis mgon could be seen as the subject of this passage, in which he is not explicitly named, e.g. sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon (Luciano Petech, personal communication, December 1996).

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[100] The moving of a *rdo ring* is discussed by Hazod in the case of the famous Zhol *rdo ring* in Lhasa (Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 602f.).

[101] In the 13th century Zhi sde was a Tshal pa territory (Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 140).

[102] The function of the *rdo ring* as boundary stones (*sa brtags rdo ring*) to mark political or territorial borders is also mentioned by Bellezza (2008: 71).

47. Stelae, Log pa village, Purang District, Tibet Autonomous Region, PR China (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2010).

place where the stela was found[104] was at this place in lCog ro. The other three stelae (*rdo ring*) (see Fig. 4) were found further to the east in the settlement. Earlier there was a simple enclosure around the *rdo ring*. In 2002 this house was built for the *rdo ring*. As today, the original orientation of the *rdo ring* (with the Avalokiteśvara relief) pointed eastwards. The name of the place where the *rdo ring* stands is "Martolo".

During the New Year festival—here called the *btsun mo'i lo gsar*, "New Year Festival of the Queen", and celebrated on the tenth and eleventh days of the eleventh month—butter is offered. During the festival, as part of which there is a ceremonial procession around the whole village, there is also a joint procession around the *rdo ring*.

Function

These details show that the Avalokiteśvara stela has a special significance for the population of the village and that it has a living cultic function. The erection of its own building for the stela as well as the moving of three other *rdo ring* can be regarded as a sign of official estimation of this stela as a monument of historic importance. This goes together with the fact that the stela, which has been documented on the eastern border of the town of Purang (Fig. 13) and since the Cultural Revolution was used as a bridge over a stream, with the smooth back facing upwards, has been moved and re-erected not far from its earlier location (which was below an old settlement of cave houses).

Based on the compilation of information on Tibetan *rdo ring* by Alexander Macdonald (2003), the observations in Western Tibet by Giuseppe Tucci in 1935 (i.a. in Zhi sde) (Tucci 1937) and the monumental compendium by John Bellezza (Bellezza 2008: 69–148), it can be deduced that there is a partial connection between the *rdo*

were discussions with individual village people in lCog ro. There are currently 43 houses or families in the village, one of them also called Cog ro (Cog ro *mi tshang*). The local territorial deity of the village (*yul lha*) (also exerting a protective function) is gNyan chen thang lha (also known as one of Tibet's oldest and most famous mountain deities).[103] According to the village people, the original

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[103] In this respect it is worth noting the indication made by Hazod that in the imperial period the Cog ro clan had close territorial connections with 'Dam shod, the Central Tibetan province at the foot of gNyan chen thang lha (Hazod

2009: 200). From the 7th century the sGro (= 'Bro) clan is also recorded in neighbouring 'Phan yul (*ibid.*: 195), where gNyan chen thang lha was widely worshipped as the supreme *lha*. According to Hazod, these kinds of divinity were often taken along on migrations, divisions or refoundations. This may be seen as an indication that the area around lCog ro in Purang was an imperial or even older territory of the 'Bro clan, which at a later period was controlled by the Cog ro clan (Guntram Hazod, personal communication, August 2008). As Samten Karmay has shown, the cult of local and mountain gods has played a major role for the social structuring of local communities and clans (e.g. as ancestor mountains) in Tibet since the early 7th century, but also in the legitimation of large political confederations (also precisely in the case of gNyan chen thang lha or Thang lha ya bzhur) (Karmay 1996: 60f.).

[104] The discovery or rediscovery of this stela possibly not so long ago (although at least before September 1993)—the article by Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring (1994), which was not known at the time of the interview, does not mention such a discovery however—seems quite plausible in the light of the (re-)discovery of a further stela (see Fig. 13).

ring (i.a. also known as *mon rdo*)[105] from archaic or prehistoric periods and those examples from historic periods, which are not infrequently decorated with inscriptions or reliefs, at least in the recent past in the cultic behaviour of the local population. This includes offerings (such as butter) and reciting prayers (Macdonald 2003: 91–92). To him this seems to correspond to the overlayering of older concepts by a Buddhistically marked mythological perspective, as Tucci was able to record in the case of three *rdo ring* in Zhi sde.[106] In this context it is also necessary to mention the existence of three stelae (Fig. 47) near Log pa, a village ca. 5 km from lCog ro. On account of the comparability in terms of material (the stone looks quite similar to that used in lCog ro) and dimension (height and width), the lCog ro stela may be seen as representing a Buddhist adaptation of older local variants of stelae.

In the case of the Avalokiteśvara stela in lCog ro, which, as its art-historical and calligraphic features suggest, seems to be in the tradition of the *rdo ring* from the royal period in Central Tibet, the intended function consists in the public religious confession of a high-ranking person, in this case the worship of Avalokiteśvara. Alongside this personal religious motive announced by the commissioning person, other aspects and functions can also be seen. Owing to the rank of the commissioning person, it can be assumed that this stela did not just have the function of a personal manifesto but that it also had a political significance (corresponding to the rank and area of power of the person who commissioned it). Whether this was limited to its effect as an example, as is also expressed in the dedication of the service, or perhaps supported through other measures, or whether it also had the significance of a normative political edict, cannot be judged without closer knowledge of the circumstances (not least owing to the uncertainty as to whether this stela originally came from this area).

To this extent it is also not certain, although it can be assumed as probable, that, like most other comparable stelae in Central Tibet, it was in the power centre[107] of a region (at this time most probably ruled by members of the 'Bro clan).[108] The latter can also be assumed because it was erected on the orders of a noble who was allied with the ruling royal family, as the research into the title in connection with the clan membership of the commissioning person shows without doubt.

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[105] See also Aldenderfer 2003, 2007.

[106] "Attirano la mia attenzione certe pietre piantate per terra, dinanzi alle quali la gente si genuflette e mormora preghiere: sopravvivenze di culti megalitici, e sicuramente prebuddhistici che il Lamaismo ha accolto nella sua tolleranza sincretistica. Le leggenda ne ha trasformato il carattere; sono divenute tre pietre lanciate dal Kailasa per rendere omaggio a Khojarnath ['Khor chags]. Una religione sovrapposta ad un'altra." (Tucci 1937: 46). These three *rdo ring* appear to be depicted on a black-and-white photograph in the Tucci photo archive of the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale "G. Tucci" (Neg. M.N.A.O.R. – Dep. 6082/23), which shows three standing stones of a somewhat crude construction and which according to the details in the archive was taken by Tucci's companion Eugenio Ghersi in Zhi sde mkhar.

[107] As the kings and ministers in general acted as leaders in the centre of regions, according to Tshe ring chos rgyal and Zla ba tshe ring (1994: 17) most stelae of the royal period were in the centre of these territories, which does not mean, however, that stelae etc. were not also erected in other regions and border areas (for example, such as with India). This aspect of centrality was, for example, present symbolically in multiple forms in the case of the erection of the *rdo ring* at the old royal graves in 'Phyong rgyas (i.a. as *axis mundi*, on the basis of the dedication ceremony as a magical, power-giving centre), as was analysed by Tucci (1950: 32f.). Above and beyond this, the *rdo ring* in 'Phyong rgyas also marked a territory, that of the dead, that was strictly demarcated from that of the living (Guntram Hazod, personal communication, August 2008).

[108] Not least also if it is assumed that the erection of the stela also simultaneously served as a territorial marker that defined the area around its location as land belonging to the 'Bro clan.

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