Wisdom and Tradition in Imperial Tibet: Apropos of *Gtsug lag* Once More

Matthew T. Kapstein

(École Pratique des Hautes Études,
PSL Research University, Paris)

> Among the terms for practices in pre-Buddhist Tibet to be found in contemporary documents there is actually none that suggests anything more than "tradition"; it more precisely speaks of "good tradition" (*lugsang*), "tradition of the ancestors" (*yabmelug*) or "tradition of heaven and earth" (*namsalug*). A somewhat more specific term is *tsug* (or *tsuglag*), which depending on context relates to certain "sciences" (divination, astrology), to wisdom or it simply means "custom" as also the more common term *chö* (a word probably deriving from *chaba*, to make, construct). Both *chö* and *tsuglag* were then used for the religion of the Buddha. When the first Buddhist temples were built in the seventh century they were called *tsuglag khang*, "house of *tsuglag*". It was a wise (= *tsuglag*) decision that also signals the intention of a more gradual adoption of the new religion.
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> Hazod 2015: 44.

With these words, our friend and colleague Guntram Hazod, to whom it is a pleasure to dedicate this modest essay, introduces the main lines in the interpretation of *gtsug lag*, a key—and sometimes contested—term in the vocabulary of Old Tibetan religion and statecraft. Thanks to the sustained attention it has received in the study of early Tibetan documents, including inscriptions, historical writings, and scriptures and treatises of various kinds, the concept of *gtsug lag* is now better known than it was some decades ago. However, there remain unresolved puzzles in regard to it, and some of the proposals that have been put forward in recent research merit, I believe, reconsideration. Without pretending that the present offering will settle the matter, I hope nonetheless that a measure of clarification will be found in these remarks.[1]

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[1] In preparing this essay, which fulfils the promissory note in Kapstein 2026, n. 42, I have benefitted from responses to a version presented at the conference "The Transmission of Buddhism to Imperial Tibet," organized by Meghan Howard

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1. Preliminaries

The word *gtsug lag* is not, in principle, obscure; it belongs to that part of the Old Tibetan lexical stock that was preserved in Classical Tibetan and never fell out of use. The first published Western dictionary of Tibetan, the so-called "Serampore Dictionary" of 1826, already entered *gtsug lag*, correctly enough, as meaning "science, knowledge, learning, intelligence, intellect."[2] However, in Tibetan usage, the term was often employed in explicit relation to Buddhism, which sometimes may have coloured its sense. Dge bshes Chos grags, for example, takes it just as a synonym of *sde snod* (Skt. *piṭaka*), and the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* amplifies this only slightly in saying that it means *sde snod* or *gsung rab*, i.e., scripture.[3] To these curt definitions we may add the interesting remark of Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, who states that *gtsug lag* denotes books of astrology and the minor sciences (*rtsis dang rig gnas chung ba'i dpe cha*), an observation that is certainly pertinent to the history of the term.[4] Nevertheless, the overall impression gathered from these and other lexicons is that, despite its currency, the original meaning of *gtsug lag*, whatever it may have been, was in fact occluded long ago. Consider, for instance, the explanation given in a prominent astrological treatise, the *White Beryl*, by the Fifth Dalai Lama's great protégé Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705). This was cited in Sarat Chandra Das's Dictionary at the beginning of his entry on *gtsug lag*, where it is explained as "that which has come out of the head of the most holy, *i.e.*, the result of his intellect, and has been placed in the hands of his inquirer."[5] This has the hallmark of a folk etymology,

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Masang at Yale University, May 2-3, 2025, as well as from the correspondence of colleagues whose suggestions and assistance proved essential: I thank Charles Li, Jonathan Silk, and Alexander Zorin for their generous help in clarifying the history of the study of the *Mahāvyutpatti* and the relations amongst its several editions, as summarised in Appendix II below. Dan Martin has my gratitude for sharing with me his notes on *gtsug lag*. Brandon Dotson graciously provided copies of several of the works consulted, which were otherwise unavailable to me at this time. I note, too, the fine entry on *gtsug lag* in Bialek 2018, vol. 2, pp. 392-402, which affords an apposite counterpoint to the approach taken here. Thanks, too, to the editors of the present volume for their careful reading.

2 Schrœter 1826, p. 24. A half century later, Jäschke 1977 [1881], p. 433, defined *gtsug lag* as "sciences" or "scientific works," as was followed in Missionaires Catholiques 1899, p. 782, whose use of the Latin *scientia* clarifies, I think, the meaning of "science" that had been intended by their predecessors.

3 Chos kyi grags pa 1957 [1949], p. 673; Zhang 1985, p. 2194.

4 Dung dkar 2002, p. 1665; cf. *Dag yig gsar bsgrigs*, p. 616.

5 Das 1902, p. 1002, where the entry is headed by a cross indicating that Das considered the term to be *brda rnying*, an archaic term in old orthography. Das's citation of the *White Beryl* may be found in Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1996, vol. 1, pp. 237-238, where we read: *kong tse 'phrul gyi rgyal po ni … gsungs shing mi yi yul du dar*། །*de la gtsug lag ces brjod pa*། །*gtsug ni mi 'gyur 'byung ba lnga*། །*lag ni rtogs byad*

coined to account for a word whose origins and exact sense were no longer quite clear. Other glosses sometimes also seem fanciful; Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, without citing a source, notes, for instance, that *gtsug lag* may be taken to mean the *dharma*, which is the *gtsug*, together with the two hands, *lag*, namely, *buddha* and *saṃgha*.[6] But this is certainly far-fetched.

In the contemporary study of the early Tibetan documents, by contrast, the focus has been not so much on Tibetan lexical definitions, as on what can be gleaned from the most ancient sources themselves. For *gtsug lag* is of relatively common occurrence in the surviving collections of Old Tibetan texts. The corpus forming the Old Tibetan Documents Online (OTDO) database, which represents a selection of the relevant materials drawn primarily from the Dunhuang manuscripts and the surviving imperial inscriptions, yields 66 instances (including the variant *gtsugs lag*).[7] Of these, 45, or about two-thirds, are found in the compound phrase *gtsug(s) lag khang*, formed with the addition of *khang*, a house or building, and meaning a monastery or temple. In canonical Buddhist usage, *gtsug lag khang* is the Tibetan equivalent of Sanskrit *vihāra*.[8] Although we will have occasion to mention this word again, my main concern here will be with *gtsug lag* when it is used as a discrete term. Besides the documentation in the OTDO, occurrences of *gtsug lag* found in other imperial-period texts and documents will be seen to offer additional evidence bearing on the use of the expression in early medieval Tibet. It may be worth stressing at the outset, however, that in no case of which I am aware can *gtsug lag* itself, without the addition of *khang*, be taken to mean monastery, contrary to what has been sometimes affirmed.[9]

[= *byed*] *lo zla'am* | |*lag ni g.yab mos btang gcod phyir* | |*yang na 'phags pa'i gtsug nas bton* | |*zhu byed lag tu bzhag pas brjod* | | "Confucius, the king of marvellous powers, taught [the treatises on elemental divination], whence they spread in the human world and were called *gtsug lag*. *Gtsug* means the five elements, unchanging, while *lag* refers to the years and months that bring understanding, just as the hand makes meaningful gestures. Alternatively, [*gtsug lag*] is so-called because it is what comes from the *gtsug* of those who are exalted and is placed in the hand of the suppliant." As was first noticed by Stein 2010 [1985], p. 183, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho also discusses the meaning of *gtsug lag* in his *Vaiḍūrya g.ya' sel*, on which refer to Appendix III below.

6 Dung dkar 2002, p. 1665, sub *gtsug lag khang*: *gtsug ni chos dang* | *lag ces pa sangs rgyas dang dge 'dun te*…. Though the source is not named, this nevertheless partly resembles one of the glosses in Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's *Vaiḍūrya g.ya' sel*.

7 Old Tibetan Documents Online (https://otdo.aa-ken.jp/), results of search for "gtsug lag," 20/02/25.

8 Sakaki 1916-1925, no. 9152; Ishihama and Fukuda 1989, no. 9087.

9 Sakaki 1916-1925, vol. 2 (index), p. 241, lists nos. 5046 and 1415 as instances of *gtsug lag* alone corresponding to Skt. *vihāra*, but this is an error. No. 5046, which gives not *vihāra*, "monastery," but *vihara*, "pastime, diversion," is examined in Appendix

Two well-studied texts from Dunhuang in which *gtsug lag* is used are those now known as the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and the *Prayers of De ga g.yu tshal.* Parts of the latter were edited and translated as early as 1928 by F. W. Thomas and the former just over a decade later by Bacot and Toussaint. In 1957, Thomas's posthumous study of the highly interesting text he called *The Decline of the Good Age* added another important, early witness, in addition to which the term was also noted in imperial epigraphs (as discussed in section 2 below). What is most striking about the treatment of *gtsug lag* in these pioneering contributions to Old Tibetan scholarship is that their authors took no special note of it. Thomas, in the corrections accompanying his series *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan*, published in 1955, records *gtsug lag* as meaning "wisdom," but nevertheless, in his 1928 edition of the prayer in which he recorded it, he unnecessarily emended the term to *gtsug lag khang*, despite the fact that the passage in question makes better sense without any such modification.[10]

In their reading of the two occurrences of *gtsug(s) lag* in P.T. 1287, containing a large part of the so-called *Old Tibetan Chronicle,* Bacot and Toussaint translate the first as "le grand code" (*gtsug lag chen po*), but only paraphrase the second, rendering the entire phrase in question as "les divers édits codifiés du Tibet" (*bod kyi gtsugs lag bka' grims ched po*).[11] In *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, I translated this as "the Great Legislation that was the Sacred Authority of Tibet."[12] Although I would not suggest that this be taken as the last word here, at the very least it has the merit of making the place of *gtsug lag* explicit and underscores that, whatever else it may mean, it is in this case placed in apposition with the law. The *lex regia*—for this is the true sense of *bka' khrims*—is thus among those things that may be designated *gtsug lag.*

Gtsug lag is used with greater frequency, however, in *The Decline of the Good Age* (IOL Tib J 733),[13] one of a group of documents that recount

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II below. In no. 1415, *gtsug lag* translates Skt. *śāstra,* with the alternative translation of *bstan bcos* also given. In this entry, Sakaki's reading of *gtsug lag bstan bcos* should be corrected, as per Ishihama and Fukuda 1989 (where the same entry is no. 1419). to *gtsug lag gam bstan bcos.*

10 Thomas's 1928 study of the *Prayers of De ga g.yu tshal* is republished in Thomas 1951, pp. 92-109. I refer to the text given on p. 98 at B 1.3, *bod rje blon kyi gtsug lag nyi ma dang 'dra bar nam zhar mi 'gyur*, translated, p. 104, as "may the monastery of the lords councillors of Tibet be imperishable like the sun." The emendation of *gtsug lag*, "wisdom," to *gtsug lag khang* here is briefly explained in Thomas 1955, p. 42, as required owing to an error in the original text. However, following Thomas's usage as closely as possible, the passage clearly says, "may the wisdom of the lord [i.e., the *btsan po*] and councillors of Tibet be imperishable like the sun." There appears to be no error and hence no need to emend the text at all.

11 Bacot et al. 1940, pp. 114 & 118 (text), 152 & 161 (translation).

12 Kapstein 2000, p. 54.

13 Thomas 1957, pp. 45-51.

versions of a legend in which the initially good order of the world turns bad. It has sometimes been considered as representing pre-Buddhist Tibetan beliefs, though I am doubtful about this.[14] Thomas, while insisting that "the text has no inkling of Buddhism," nevertheless also acknowledged the possibility that it was somehow indirectly influenced by Buddhism or other currents of thought present in Central Asia. Its myth of decline, it seems to me, resonates with the widespread prophecies of the "decline of Dharma" that were prominent in the Buddhism of the period of its composition, and, as Thomas himself admitted, we cannot categorically exclude influences within it from beyond Tibet.[15] But however this may be, the juxtaposition of *chos* and *gtsug lag* that we find in this text—"religion" and "wisdom" in Thomas's rendering—is repeated elsewhere in the Old Tibetan corpus, notably in the imperial inscriptions, including contexts in which *chos* surely does refer to the Buddhist religion, the Dharma.[16] Unless it is assumed that *gtsug lag* is in effect synonymous with *chos*—a possibility that perhaps cannot be altogether excluded—there remains some uncertainty about just how the two are to be distinguished.

2. A term of art in the study of early Tibet

In 1971, in a long and difficult article consecrated to the religio-political myths of early Tibet, Ariane Macdonald first addressed the precise meaning of *gtsug lag* and at the same time recontextualized it as a central theme in the study of the old Tibetan state and its institutions. Part of Macdonald's method consisted in isolating key terms that were employed in the old sources in connection with the monarch—terms including *lha*, *chos*, *'phrul*, *byin*, *gtsug*, and *gtsug lag*—and to treat them as proper nouns, naming precise attributes of or associated with the ruler. The last two emerged from her analysis as fundamentally untranslatable designations pertaining to the pre-Buddhist court religion.

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[14] Macdonald 1971, p. 357 et seq. describes this legend as representing "le système chronologique de la religion indigene." Stein 2010 [1985], pp. 171-176, by contrast, is more circumspect about its purported indigeneity.

[15] As Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 175, cautions, "It is certainly necessary to think of the apocryphal Chinese (Daoist and Buddhist) *sutras* on the terminal epoch…" On the prophecies of the decline of the Buddhist doctrine that were current in East and Central Asia during the period that concerns us here, see Nattier 1991. The story we find in "The Decline of the Good Age" is perhaps more suggestive, however, of the well-known early Buddhist legend of the Mahāsaṃmatarāja, the "Great King by Acclamation," who was elected to rule after the primal state of harmony and joy deteriorated; see, for instance, Collins 1993.

[16] This is particularly evident in the tomb edict of Khri Lde srong btsan, to be discussed in the following section.

It will not be possible, in the space available here, to do justice to the intricacies of Macdonald's arguments about this. Suffice it to illustrate her approach through a small number of examples. In her treatment of the *Prayers of De ga g.yu tshal*, one of the texts first brought to light by Thomas, for instance, she holds that, "the Gtsug or Gtsug-lag, defined as the law of the gods (*Lha'i chos Gtsug-lag bzang po*, fol. 33b), vast and extended like the sky (*yangs-shing rgya-che la chos Gtsug ni,* fol. 28b) is the system of government utilized by Khri-gtsug-lde-btsan. It is surely a question, then, of a key concept whose presence in a theory of power begins to be revealed."[17] And turning to the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, she translates an important passage concerning the emperor Khri Srong lde btsan as saying that in his time "thanks to the good Law (*chos-bzang*), the empire was great; as the king maintained it in the land, between heaven and earth, he made the great Gtsug-lag, which made of him the sovereign of men and animals, a model for governing men."[18]

For Macdonald, therefore, *chos* and *gtsug lag* may differ in nuance, but in the context of the Tibetan monarchy they refer to one and the same divine law, elsewhere designated, she maintains, as the "system of the *Phywa* deities, of the mountains of heaven."[19] Notwithstanding the intricacies of the original ideas developed in her paper, much of the subsequent work on the religio-political system of the old Tibetan empire has reflected aspects of its enduring impact.

The transformation of Tibetological interpretations of *gtsug lag* that was thus engendered may be illustrated by citing two translations of one and the same inscription, the great stele at the tomb of Khri Lde srong btsan (r. 804-815) in Yar lung, where these two phrases are found: *chos lugs bzang po ni gzhar gtsug myI 'gyur* and *g.yung drung gi gtsug lag chen po bzhin du*.[20] In Tucci's rendition, published in 1950, the first reads: "The good religious manners began to be established (so that they could) never change," where he takes *gtsug* to be a variant stem of the verb *'dzugs*, "to plant, establish, insert."[21] The second he renders,

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[17] Macdonald 1971, pp. 339-340, translated by the present writer. In copying Macdonald's Tibetan transliterations, I have adopted Wylie instead of the Pelliot system she employed, but have retained her use of capitalisation and hyphenation, as I have also done when citing other authors below.

[18] Ibid., p. 349.

[19] Ibid., p. 351.

[20] These are from, respectively, lines 2-3 and 5-6 of the inscription, as given in Richardson 1985, pp. 84-91.

[21] The regular future stem of *'dzugs* is *gzugs*, with *btsugs* always given as the past stem. *Gtsug(s)* is irregular for either, although this is known from some inscriptions; see n. 52 below. In the present instance, however, Tucci's reading of *gtsug* as a verb is improbable. Btsan lha 1997, p. 696, considers *gtsug* in this case to be an adverb, similar to *gtan nas* or *rtsa ba nas*, to be construed together with *gzhar* and the

"according to the great doctrine of the *gyuṅ druṅ*," but leaves this unexplained. In describing the physical condition of the *rdo ring* itself, he mentions that it is engraved with "rough designs" of "*gyuṅ druṅ*, *svastika*," but this is of little help in understanding the text.[22]

Turning to Richardson's reading of the edict, it is at once evident that the change in understanding post-Macdonald is far deeper than just the choice of words. Here, the first passage reads, "His religious customs were good: the order of the world was unchangeable" and the second, "in accordance with the everlasting great order of the world."[23] Following Macdonald, *gtsug* is now often taken as a contraction of *gtsug lag*, and, although not regarding it as naming the royal religion, as Macdonald had, Richardson does take it as a proper noun designating the Tibetan imperial conception of the world-order, though elsewhere he adds the caveat that it defies "exact translation."[24] And Li and Coblin, in their work on the imperial inscriptions, perhaps seeking to synthesize the pre- and post-Macdonald views of the matter, define *gtsug lag* as used in the inscriptional corpus, as "wisdom, knowledge; the entire body of indigenous, pre-Buddhist beliefs; statecraft (when referring to the principles underlying the king's rule)."[25]

As these examples suggest, although Macdonald's explorations of the conceptual order of the old Tibetan state have been influential, subsequent researchers seem generally to have demurred at her suggestion that *gtsug lag* is to be taken as an untranslatable proper name for the pre-Buddhist court religion. This was in fact one of the principal points raised by Stein in his extensive critique of Macdonald's interpretation. The refusal to translate, in such cases, amounts to a mystification of the term, an unwarranted transformation of it into a signifier of an occult something that we can never quite grasp. By contrast, Stein holds that we *must* risk translation, for only in this way can we begin to approach the meaning we seek without the assumption of untranslatability issuing in endless deferral.[26]

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following negative. *Gzhar gtsug myi 'gyur* would thus mean roughly "never changing at all."

22 Tucci 1950, pp. 36-37.

23 Richardson 1985, p. 87.

24 Ibid., p. 39.

25 Li and Coblin 1987, p. 442. My own previous view of the matter, despite general agreement with this, differed in part: "[*tsuklak* means] roughly 'wisdom,' above all the special capacity whereby a monarch knows to bring proper order to his subjects … [It is] a virtue that surely contributes to the aura of sacrality associated with the Tsenpo, but not a body of doctrine, tradition, and ritual of the type that we might call a religion." (Kapstein 2006, pp. 45-46.)

26 Stein 2010 [1985], p. 126: "[Macdonald] writes these expressions [*gtsug* and *gtsug lag*] always in capital letters. However, they are never proper names; they are words which must be translated. The refusal to do this is a source of error."

Stein's own explanation of *gtsug lag* was based on an extensive review of the early sources in which the word was used, together with close consideration of relevant Chinese parallels, always an issue of special interest to him, for he was particularly attentive to the use, in these texts, of "formulae which subtly combined indigenous elements, expressions borrowed from China, and Buddhist expressions."[27]

In summarising the principal conclusions of his arguments, Stein returns to consider one of the stock phrases in which *chos* and *gtsug lag* are paired: *chos lugs bzang po gtsug lag che ba*. This he translates as "good custom and grand art of governance."[28] Though he regards the first element, *chos*, as "hardly defined," his recapitulation of his observations on the second merit citation at length:

> [G]*tsug lag* is well defined by numerous texts. It comprises a rather broad range of meanings, such that it is impossible to adopt a single and same translation in all cases. It designates a wisdom, an art, a science, a *savoir-faire* (and the writings which speak about it). For the king, notably for Srong btsan sgam po, it clearly concerns the art of governance and a political wisdom. There also, the authors could subtly play on an assimilation of the ancient wisdom of the first mythic kings with Buddhism (sometimes called *gtsug lag bzang po,* and not *chen po*). Since 814 (*Mahāvyutpatti*), *gtsug lag* designates the sacred texts of Buddhism. In the same era, it was also employed by the Indian paṇḍits. It then designates the morality and the good conduct of the laity (synonymous with *mi chos*) being used as preparation for Buddhism (*lha chos*).

And to this he adds, "Never in a single case does the word *gtsug* designate a supreme religious principle, such as the 'World Order.'"[29]

3. Gtsug lag *in the* Criteria of the Authentic Scriptures

The concept of *gtsug lag* received renewed attention in *Buddhism and Empire* (2009), Michael Walter's ambitious study of the political and sacral culture of early Tibet. Against Macdonald, Walter argued that the term probably did not reach back to pre-Buddhist beliefs or institutions, and like Stein he held that it was used flexibly, covering a large range of specific meanings according to context. However, he

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[27] Stein 2010 [1985], p. 188. See also Coblin 1991, pp. 317-318, on the use of *gtsug lag* in the *Shangshu* paraphrase. Walter 2009, p. 147, n. 46, asserts that *gtsug lag* "at least once … stands for *xien* (sic!) *wang* 先王 'customs of the ancient rulers.'" I have not been able to locate the text to which he refers, however, and *xianwang*, if I am not mistaken, designates the sage kings of the past, rather than specifically their customs.

[28] Stein 2010 [1985], p. 189.

[29] Ibid.

parted company from the latter and seemingly rejoined the former in treating *gtsug lag*, in some cases at least, as a unique, personal attribute of the monarch, saying, for instance, that "there is always a positive relationship between rule and a true *gtsug lag*," "Khri Srong Lde Brtsan has also defined his *gtsug lag* to include Buddhist concepts," "the special *gtsug lag* of Tibet was dependent on the greatness of the btsan-po," and finally, "I believe that *gtsug lag* was the transmitted […] power which consisted of a superior ability to protect, guide, and conquer that made btsan-pos valuable as leaders. It was seen to descend upon them from their ancestral *lha* in *gnam*."[30] These formulations, it seems to me, conferred a mysterious, almost talismanic quality on *gtsug lag*, reflecting once more Macdonald's influential assessment of it as a fundamentally religious idea specific to early Tibet and pertaining above all to the monarch.

In developing his view of the matter, Walter based himself on an important text attributed to the court of Khri Srong lde btsan, the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, or *Criteria of the Authentic Scriptures*,[31] a difficult treatise of fifteen chapters treating topics in the theory of knowledge and scriptural interpretation. His emphasis on this work in the present context was appropriate, for *gtsug lag* is used there with greater frequency than it is in any other Old Tibetan source that has so far come to light. The sixteen instances in which it occurs demonstrate the importance of the concept and at the same time offer substantial evidence of just how it was understood.[32] However, aspects of the interpretation that Walter proposed, as seen in his words cited above, are not in fact supported by what we find in the text.[33]

Walter devoted particular attention to a passage from the third chapter, the chapter on the demonstration of proof statements (*gtan tshigs sgrub pa*):

> *rtags yod pa gang zhe na | yang na* [Walter reads *ni*] *mi las bla mar gyur pas gtsug lag tu gyur ston to*, "If one asks, 'What are your proofs?', then,

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30 Walter 2009, pp. 226-228.

31 Walter remarks incidentally (2009, p. 226) that "neither Stein nor MacDonald (*sic!*) were aware that there exists a treatise [the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*], attributed to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan…." This assertion unfortunately demonstrates only that Walter was not a careful reader of either: in fact, Macdonald 1971, pp. 367-369, examines the use of *gtsug lag* in the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, focusing upon the preamble of the text; Stein 1980 is entirely based upon the same work, and mentions *gtsug lag* on pp. 332-333, so it is quite clear that he was "aware" of it. Why he did not explicitly reference it in Stein 1985 is puzzling, however.

32 Walter 2009, p. 108.

33 My comments on the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* in the present essay expand upon the Appendix to Kapstein 2026. In Appendix I below, I survey all the passages in that text in which *gtsug lag* is used.

> because they are superior to (those arguments put forward by) human beings, they are shown to have become *gtsug lag*."[34]

There are some problems here, not the least of which is an arbitrary truncation of the Tibetan text, which reads:

> *rtags yod pa gang zhe na | yang na mi las bla mar gyur pas gtsug lag tu gyur pa ston to cog smon pa'i tshig lta bur 'ol ma chags par smra ba ni gang yang mi 'byung ste |* […] *'ga' zhig las nor bar gyur to |*

This sentence is not to be read, *pace* Walter, as concluding with the verb *ston to*, "they are shown," but rather begins with a clause employing the phrase *ston to cog*, a verbal noun meaning, "all that is taught/ shown to be." The introductory question, translated by Walter as "what are your proofs?" has been taken out of its specific context; in fact, it pertains to the seventh topic in a list of the "seven aspects of ascertainment"(*gtan la phab pa'i yan lag rnam pa bdun*) required for teaching "that brings about comprehension for those who have not yet understood" (*khong du ma chud pa rnams la khong du gzhug pa yin*).[35] Each topic in the list is introduced with a catechistic inquiry: "if one asks, 'what is X?' then …". The topic here is the last one in the list, *rtags yod pa*, "presence of proof," or "of a warranting reason or sign" (Skt. *liṅga, hetu*), so that the question asks for the definition of this and not for the proof of some specific thesis.[36] The response, which is several pages in length and in parts obscure, begins with a discussion of what *cannot* be accepted as proof. The passage given above may thus be rendered:

> If one asks, 'what is presence of proof?', on the one hand, it does not emerge at all [from] irrelevant statements,[37] for instance words of prayer, [viz.] whatever is taught to be *gtsug lag* by those who are

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[34] Walter 2009, p. 108 and 268, n. 17.

[35] *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, p. 481. The seven topics are summarised below in Appendix I, para. 3a-c.

[36] *Sandhinirmocanasūtravyākhyāna*, Derge Tengyur, Toh. 4358, vol. JO, fol. 144a3, introduces *rtags* in similar terms (*rtags gang zhe na*) as a topic to be explained and answers with a summary of the three logical warrants according to the Dharmakīrtian theory of inference: identity (*tādātmya*), causality (*tadutpatti*), and absence (*anupalabdhi*). This text is of interest in the present context as it is attributed to Byang chub rdzu 'phrul, a name for Khri Srong lde btsan, or more plausibly to the early imperial translator Cog ro Klu'i rgyal mtshan. Although it is no doubt somewhat later than the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, its treatment of topics in the tenth chapter of the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* warrants comparison with it. The question of authorship is examined in Steinkellner 1989, pp. 236-241.

[37] I am assuming that *'ol ma chags pa*, which I have been otherwise unable to locate, is equivalent to classical *'ol ma mchis pa*, defined in Zhang 1985, p. 2537, as *spyod yul du ma gyur pa*, Ch. *bu xiang gan* 不相干, "irrelevant, besides the point."

> [revered as] gurus among men […] for on account of some [such dubious authorities] one turns to error.

The ellipsis is filled in the text by the enumerations of other types of unproven statements, before turning to illustrate those considered sound. Although the exact meaning of this difficult passage remains in some parts elusive, *gtsug lag* is clearly understood here to refer to what is accredited by one's cultural authorities, the gurus. But because this covers anything at all held to be authoritative for one culture or another, the mere fact of being *gtsug lag* for someone confers no special authority upon it. This accords very well with an aspect of the use of the term in the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* that Walter elsewhere rightly discerned, writing, "there is thus no reason to consider it a 'non-Buddhist' concept, *or* a Buddhist concept" (*emphasis* in original).[38]

That the term *gtsug lag* is, in its actual employment, neutral with respect to sectarian adherence is evident throughout the *Criteria of the Authentic Scriptures*. In the opening verses, the bodhisattva Samantabhadra is praised for "reciting fine *gtsug lag*." And in his preamble, the author, said to be Khri Srong lde btsan, affirms that he does not withhold "homage to the *gtsug lag* of the gods of the world due to hatred" and that "the Buddha's Dharma is the heart of all *gtsug lag*." Later, in a passage that I will examine in more detail below, it is said that one of the "ornaments" of a disputant of the doctrine is "knowledge of the *gtsug lag* of self and others," i.e., Buddhists and non-Buddhists. And in the important paragraph on Manichaeism studied by Stein, *gtsug lag* refers both to the scriptures of the various religions from which Mani drew his inspiration, as well as to the "impure" doctrine he created.[39] I believe, then, that, far from being an occult power of some sort, or a term for the ancient autochthonous religion, or a unique possession of the monarch, *gtsug lag* can be understood here as akin to what we mean by such phrases as "sacred lore," or "hallowed tradition," as well as the oral or written texts in which these are codified and transmitted. The extended use of the term in connection with specific sciences and branches of knowledge, such as medicine and divination, and also the arts of governance, thus seems unexceptional. *Gtsug lag*, in short, is culturally authoritative knowledge, or "science," *scientia*, as the nineteenth-century lexicographers had it. Though Stein was certainly correct to insist on "a rather

[38] Walter 2009, p. 228.
[39] Stein 1980, p. 333. On the passages mentioned here, see also Appendix I below.

broad range of meanings," the clear and compact core of this untidy semantic field nevertheless begins to come into focus.[40]

4. Adventures in etymology

In the latest contribution to the investigation of *gtsug lag*, Beckwith (2023) has argued that this term, which he takes to mean just "monastery," is ultimately derived from *dera*, the Aramaic word for a monastery, via a meandering etymological path through "pre-Middle Chinese." This follows an earlier article in which Beckwith posits Aramaic origins for the principal terms for "monastery" used throughout East Asia.[41] Others, who are better qualified to address the issues in historical linguistics this raises, have already contested his hypothesis and I have nothing to add to this debate.[42] But to address just Beckwith's extension of the thesis to Tibet, it appears to me at the outset to be a needless trip down a linguistic rabbit-hole, provoked in part by the misunderstanding that the term by itself means "monastery," which it does not.[43] Nevertheless, the word *gtsug lag* perhaps does somehow seem strange, and this, together with the impression that the main Tibetan explanations for it are folk etymologies, may well impel the search for a foreign source. It will be worthwhile, therefore, to examine the possible derivations of *gtsug lag* that do not treat it as a loanword but consider it to be of Tibetan origin.

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[40] Bialek 2018, vol. 2, p. 399, proposes that the "original meaning" of *gtsug lag* is "principles," taking *gtsug* to represent the "highest level of existence" and thus analogous to the notion of the first or chief source we find in Latin *principium*, an explanation that seems to me to be dubious. Disregarding this derivation, however, and although Bialek is certainly correct that most uses of *gtsug lag* can perhaps be accommodated within the broad category of "principles," I believe that *gtsug lag* has a greater degree of specificity that this suggests. For *chos*/*dharma* may also be included among "principles," in which case phrases such as *chos bzang gtsug lag che* are merely pleonastic. And certainly, there are many contexts in which we can speak of "principles"—the "principles of Tibetan cooking," for instance—in which *gtsug lag* would probably not make good sense in Tibetan. That its semantic field is notably diverse remains evident, however, in the curious idiom *gtsug lag dang po*, the "original *gtsug lag*," said to mean *'khor ba*, *saṃsāra* (Das 1902, p. 1002, col. 2), where the idea of a first principle may appear to be in play. But this is an expression of vanishingly rare occurrence; all that seems known of it is summarised in Appendix IV.

[41] Beckwith 2014.

[42] Vovin and Sagart 2016; Orlandi 2019.

[43] Refer to Appendix II, on the oft repeated, but erroneous, citation of the *Mahāvyutpatti* in this context. Beckwith 2023, however, does not cite the *Mahāvyutpatti*, but instead (p. 4, n. 4), refers to Walter 2009, who does not in fact assume that *gtsug lag* alone may mean a temple or monastery.

Stein, in an appendix devoted to the etymology of the term,[44] explained it, as do the Tibetan folk etymologies, as derived from *gtsug*, the crown of the head, or sinciput. It is easy to see why this may be attractive; for the symbolism of the crown as the source of wisdom is widespread and made fully explicit in Buddhism in the treatment of the *uṣṇīṣa* (Tib. *gtsug tor*) as an attribute of the Buddha that was itself divinised. As the *dhāraṇī* Uṣṇīṣavijayā (Tib. *gtsug tor rnam rgyal ma*), for example, its cult became ubiquitous throughout East and Southeast Asian Buddhism and prominent in Tibet as well.[45] Indeed, the remarkable headdress seen in the iconography of the Tibetan emperor Srong btsan sgam po, a royal turban concealing the Buddha Amitābha within, appears to offer virtually a visual confirmation of the crown's association with divine wisdom and law.[46] It may well be the case, therefore, that in the Old Tibetan documents concerning the monarchy, where we find such phrases as *gtsug myi 'gyur*, the "unchanging *gtsug*," it is most natural to take it as referring to the imperial crown.

However, in the case of *gtsug lag*, the problem that we now face is the interpretation of the second element, *lag*, considered as the everyday word for "hand" in the folk-etymologies: wisdom is said to be that which passes from the authoritative crown to the humble hand of the recipient. Stein, however, took *lag* in its broader meaning of "limbs," and proposed that *gtsug lag* might therefore be related to the conception of a complete body, comprising all of its parts, head and limbs, and thus a totality. As a parallel of sorts, he suggested the expression *dbu zhabs*, "head and foot," i.e., the whole "from head to toe," as we would say.[47]

I must confess that I find none of this to be compelling. It seems to me quite impossible, if *gtsug lag* is taken to be a compound of two nouns, as in both the traditional folk etymology and Stein's modification thereof, that a native speaker of Tibetan could avoid understanding the second element *lag* as meaning anything but "hand."

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[44] Stein 2010 [1985], pp. 182-187.

[45] See, for instance, Copp 2014 on the "Incantation of Glory" in China; Cicuzza 2018 on related materials from the Pali tradition in Southeast Asia; and Lokesh Chandra 1980 on the iconography of the goddess Uṣṇīṣavijayā throughout East and Central Asia.

[46] A notable example is the statue of the emperor in the "meditation cave of the Dharmarāja" (*Chos rgyal sgrub phug*) beneath the Potala Palace in Lhasa; refer to Béguin 2019 and fig. 4 for a photograph of the statue in question.

[47] Stein 2010 [1985], p. 185. Bialek 2018, vol. 2, pp. 392-492, though differing with Stein in points of detail, substantially agrees with his derivation of *gtsug lag* from *gtsug* in the sense of "crown": "we can assert that *gtsug lag* was a collective term denoting abstract 'things' that originated from the 'crown', i.e. the highest level of existence" (p. 399). I am not convinced, however, by her hypothetical etymology of the term from **gtsug gi lag* "branches [that originate from] the crown" (p. 393).

Consider, for instance, what seems to be in fact the closest parallel compound, *kha lag* (hon. *zhal lag*), "mouth and hand," that is, "food," what is passed from the hand to the mouth to be consumed. The metaphorical basis for the term in this case is quite clear. But the effort to explain *gtsug lag* similarly as formed of two nouns seems merely a contrivance without a similarly plausible conceptual metaphor to support it. That this poses a problem was plainly indicated by the late Michael Hahn:

> [P]olysyllabic terms [in Tibetan] […] are based on certain rational and intelligible principles, [although] in several cases these principles have become obsolete, as with many other languages of the world. Then, usually, speculations begin to thrive, speculations which, like those of Indian Buddhist etymologists, may later adopt the status of rational principles when such terms are to be translated into foreign languages. […] What now, if *gtsug lag* goes back to a related kind of analysis or speculation? If this be the case then we should look for a completely new kind of approach because the attempts of Sde-srid saṅs-rgyas rgya-mtsho and STEIN have seemingly led us into a kind of blind alley. If we analyze *gtsug lag* at face value, i.e. taking *gtsug* as *gtsug* and *lag* as *lag* or *lag pa*, then we will inevitably end up where both scholars ended up.[48]

Unfortunately, Hahn's own effort to resolve the problem, which I think merits serious attention, has been mostly ignored in subsequent research.[49] Turning to Tibetan methods of coining neologisms based on the Sanskrit system of word-analysis, *nirukti* (Tib. *nges tshig*), which is often of an etymological or pseudo-etymological character ("speculations" as Hahn would have it), he proposed that *gtsug lag* be understood not as a noun-noun compound, "crown and limb," or "crown and hand," as it seems to be when taken "at face value." On the contrary, he thought we should view it rather as a verb-verb compound, from the verbs *'dzug(s)*, "to pierce, penetrate," and *klog*, "to read, recite." Taking the first, as it appears in *gtsug*, to be a variant future stem, and the second, *lag* to be a defective perfect or future stem (← *bklags* [on analogy to *nams* ← *bsnams* in the word *bsod nams*]), Hahn went on to argue that *gtsug lag* should be understood literally to mean, "that which has been (or: is to be) recited in order to be penetrated or impressed upon the mind." And he adds that this "is the most general expression of what was understood by the term *śāstra* in the Indic and

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48 Hahn 1997, pp. 351-352.

49 Walter 2009, p. 267, n. 15, mentions Hahn's article, but to say only that it contains "philological observations." Bialek 2018, vol. 2, pp. 393, 395, 399, refers to Hahn's hypothesis and clearly rejects it, though without explaining her reasons for doing so in detail. Beckwith 2023 does not cite it at all.

especially Buddhist context of that time."[50] In this regard, it is important to recall that *śāstra* refers not only to texts, but to the departments of knowledge, the "sciences," they represent. *Arthaśāstra*, for example, thus denotes both particular books and the entire domain of wealth-acquisition and governance, or what we might think of as politics and economics.

Hahn lamented the fact that *gtsug lag* was not among the terms defined in the *Two-Fascicle Lexicon* (*Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*), "the work," he says, "which could have given us the best insight into the formation of *gtsug lag*," and the source of his understanding of the strategies adopted in coining Tibetan compounds based on *nirukti* explanations.[51] Although I believe that Hahn's approach was essentially correct, there are some refinements to it that I would nevertheless suggest. Rather than taking *gtsug* as a peculiar form of the future stem of *'dzugs*, we should take stock of the inscriptional evidence attesting to its use as a variant of the *past* stem.[52] And besides meaning "to pierce" or "to penetrate," *'dzugs* covers also "to plant, establish, insert, point out." I would modify, therefore, Hahn's interpretation of the compound to read, "that which has been imparted (lit. planted, established), [i.e., by a teacher or ruler to a disciple or subject], and is then to be repeated [by the latter]." This corresponds very closely to what we mean by a tradition, or, in Indic terms, a *śāstra.*[53] This explanation of the etymology of *gtsug lag* has, I think, the additional merit of conforming closely to what has been concluded earlier regarding the meaning of the word as seen through its usage.

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[50] Hahn 1997, p. 354.

[51] Hahn 1997, pp. 352-353. On methods of Tibetan translation based on Sanskrit grammatical analysis, see now also Verhagen 2015.

[52] Li and Coblin, pp. 361-366, 442, record the use of *gtsugs* as a stem form of *'dzugs* in an inscription in Mogao cave 365 dating to 834 (*shing pho stag lo*). To this we may add Inscription II at 'Bis khog, dated 806, where the spelling is *gtsug:* Iwao et al. 2009, p. 55, line 5.

[53] There is, of course, no question about the interpretation of the root *śās,* meaning "to instruct." The *taddhita* suffix *tra* usually forms a noun with an instrumental sense. In some *nirukti,* however, it is treated more freely, as in the famous example, *manas trāyate iti mantra*, "*mantra* is so-called because it protects the mind," where *tra* is taken to stand for the verb root *trai.* In the present case, *tra* may perhaps have been interpreted as representing the root *tṝ* in the meaning " to master." Tshul khrims rin chen 2005, vol. 11, plate 321, however, citing Amarasiṃha, gives this as the *nirukti* of *śāstra: śāsana 'chos pa| traya'am tāraṇa skyob pa*, "*śāsana* meaning 'to form,' *traya* or *tāraṇa* meaning 'to protect,'" and by way of explanation then adds: *gdul bya rnams kyi rgyud nyon mongs pa dug gsum las bslab pa sum ldan du 'chos pa dang| ngan 'gro dang srid pa'i sdug bsngal las skyob*, "the minds of disciples, afflicted with the three poisons, are [trans]formed into possessors of the three lessons [of morality, meditation, and wisdom], and [thereby] protected from the torments of evil destinies and the world." This, of course, is more a commentarial gloss than a strict etymology.

And because *gtsug lag* is well documented as having been employed as a translation term for *śāstra* and was probably the original term coined in Tibetan for this purpose, before *bstan bcos* was later adopted, Hahn's argument, perhaps modified slightly as I have proposed, offers what I believe to be the best explanation for the origin of this puzzling term.[54]

Returning now to the *Criteria of the Authentic Scriptures*, we find an instance of *gtsug lag* that I think decisively favours this interpretation. In the same chapter on the demonstration of proof statements, to which we have referred earlier, there is a list of the "five ornaments of disputants" (*smra ba'i rgyan lnga*), the first of which is "knowledge of *gtsug lag* of self and others" (*bdag dang gzhan gyi gtsug lag shes pa*).[55] The entire list of five corresponds closely to a similar list given in Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, so closely in fact that we can be certain that it is translated directly from a Sanskrit source.[56] In the version in the *Criteria of the Authentic Scriptures*, however, the vocabulary employed differs slightly from what we find in the canonical translation that probably dates to the early ninth century. In the specific phrase that concerns us, for instance, the canonical version, instead of *gtsug lag*, uses *gzhung lugs*, "textual traditions." Referring to the Sanskrit source, the term that occurs here is *samaya*, which has a very wide range of meanings, including "time, conventional usage, rule, promise, vow," etc. In the extant Sanskrit commentary, however, it is glossed as *siddhānta*, a "philosophical tradition," a "systematic body of knowledge," and it is this that justifies the Tibetan translation.[57] In the version of the passage incorporated into the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, it was the convention that had already been adopted for *śāstra*, i.e., *gtsug lag,* that was thought to best capture this; and, indeed, throughout the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* we find *gtsug lag* used in this way.

The etymology of *gtsug lag*, therefore, as well as its actual usage, point to the background of the term and the concept that it represents in the perennial Indic category of *śāstra* as authoritative and systematized knowledge, together with the written and oral means of

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[54] Hahn 1997, p. 354, summarizes the formal similarities of *gtsug lag* and *bstan bcos* as alternative translations of *śāstra.* Namgyal Tsetan 2024, p. 89, citing the Tibetan translations of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, also considers *gtsug lag* to have been supplanted by *bstan bcos.*

[55] *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, p. 487.

[56] The relevant portions of the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and its commentary are given below in Appendix I, para. 3d. As this also corresponds to a passage in the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra,* as has been noted by Dpal bzang dar rgyas 2021, p. 157, we cannot be quite certain about which of these texts the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* is in fact following here. It appears to me unlikely that either had been already translated into Tibetan in full prior to its composition.

[57] Refer to Appendix I, para. 3d. below.

its transmission. This would include, of course, the ruler's special mastery of the arts of governance, or, in the Indian context, the domains of *arthaśāstra*, *rājanītiśāstra*, etc.

5. Conclusions

What I have proposed here has so far left undecided whether *gtsug* alone may be used as a contraction of *gtsug lag*, as Macdonald suggested, and, if this does sometimes occur, how we are to decide when *gtsug* means *gtsug lag* and when *gtsug* means just *gtsug*, whether used as a noun ("crown, crest") or an exceptional verbal stem ("planted, established, pierced, imparted"), or perhaps even an adverb (see n. 21). The distinction is not always quite clear. In the Old Tibetan documents and inscriptions that most interest us, we find three expressions in which *gtsug* by itself has sometimes been taken to be an abbreviation of *gtsug lag*: *gtsug myi 'gyur*, the "unchanging *gtsug*"; "*gtsug che*," the "great *gtsug*"; and *chos gtsug*, when evidently employed as a contraction of *chos dang gtsug lag* and thus not requiring further comment. In the first, the "unchanging *gtsug*," the phrase closely parallels another expression used to extol the Tibetan monarch, *dbu rmog brtsan po*, "firm helmet." As "unchanging crown" is virtually a synonym of this, and the contexts in which *gtsug myi 'gyur* occurs permit this interpretation, I suggest that *gtsug* in this case usually means "crown," in which case it is not a contraction of *gtsug lag*.[58] On the other hand, *gtsug che* apparently alternates with *gtsug lag che*, a shortened form of *gtsug lag chen po*, and this becomes *gtsug che* following common principles for the simplification of Tibetan compounds.

Because both *gtsug lag chen po*/*gtsug che* and *gtsug myi 'gyur* may be used in apposition or in conjunction with *chos bzang*, the "excellent religion/Dharma," it may suggest, following Macdonald, that *gtsug* generally is to be read as *gtsug lag* in this context. But I do not believe this to be so. Whereas, for instance, China is described in the treaty inscription of 821/822 as *srid dang chos bzang* | | *gtsug lag che*, "excellent in government and religion, and of great learning," elsewhere,

[58] Note, however, the *Prayers of De ga g.yu tshal*, cited in n. 10 above, where we read *gtsug lag nyi ma dang 'dra bar nam zhar mi 'gyur*, "may the wisdom … be imperishable like the sun." The similarity of phrasing here with the nearly contemporaneous tomb inscription of Khri Lde srong btsan, line 3, may lead one to take *gtsug* in the latter as standing for *gtsug lag*. In the text of PT 1287, line 476, *pyva 'I ni gtsug myi 'gyur*, however, it seems that *gtsug* can only mean crown or crest. These examples suggest that some of the uncertainties we find here stem from semantic ambiguities that appeared early on.

religious excellence (*chos bzang*) appears identified as the monarch's unchanging *gtsug*, his metaphorical crown.[59]

The compound *chos bzang* itself may well have originated as an early translation of *saddharma*, later *dam pa'i chos*, and, although it often does not refer specifically to Buddhism, under the later empire it probably does.[60] With this in mind, let us return to the opening of the tomb edict of Khri Lde srong btsan, considered above in connection with Tucci's and Richardson's interpretations. Following my present proposals, it should read:

> (1) $ | | *btsan po lha sras* | *'o lde spu rgyal* | | *gnam gyI* (2) *lha las myI'i rjer gshegs pa* | | *chos lugs bzang* (3) *po ni gzhar gtsug myI 'gyur* | | *mnga' thang chen po ni nam zhar* (4) *kyang byIn myi nyam ste* | | *chab srId ni phyir zhIng che* | *dbu rmog* (5) *ni yun du brtsan pa'I* | | *g.yung drung gi gtsug lag chen po* (6) *bzhin du* | | *lha sras khrI lde srong brtsan myI'i rje* (7) *mdzad pa* | |
>
> The *Btsan po*, the son of the gods, 'O lde spu rgyal, descended from the celestial gods to be the lord of men. The excellent tradition of Dharma was [his] forever unchanging crown. His great sway was such that his splendour never declined [and his descendant], the son of the gods Khri Lde srong btsan, acted as the lord of men in accord with great and true wisdom, whereby his dominion further increased and the [royal] helmet was ever firm.

The unchanging crown and firm helmet of the monarchy thus signify the extension of its stable and beneficent power, born from the religious excellence and genuine wisdom it embodies, in this case no doubt the "sacred authority" of the *lex regia* enacted by Srong btsan sgam po. Thus, *gtsug lag*, if the etymology proposed by Hahn is essentially correct, as I believe it is, nevertheless could never be quite dissociated from the idea of the crown. It was perhaps to avoid the resulting ambiguity that new translations for *śāstra* and *samaya* were coined, so that *bstan bcos* and *gzhung lugs* came to replace *gtsug lag* in most Buddhist usage after the eighth century. The same ambiguity may have also encouraged Tibetan writers to drop the unusual stem form *gtsug(s)*, which is not recognized in standard classical Tibetan. One result of this disambiguation of the literary language, however,

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[59] Although, if Btsan lha 1997's interpretation of *gtsug* as an adverb here is to be accepted (see n. 21 above), the formula, when using *gtsug* alone and not *gtsug lag*, would mean that the monarch's "religious excellence was never changing at all." However, in the light of the passage from PT 1287 cited in the preceding note, I consider this to be unlikely.

[60] Note, for instance, the curious expression in IOL J Tib 733, line 20: *gna'i gtsug lag gi chos bzang po ltar byas na*, "if one acts in accord with the fine religion of the ancient hallowed traditions…"

was that the true origins of *gtsug lag* were lost, although its general significance of course remained well known.

But there is a more general conclusion that seems to be warranted as well. In the study of early Tibet, we tend to assume a binary distinction between Tibetan Buddhist civilisation and what is often referred to just as "pre-Buddhist." This, however, simplifies a much murkier picture; for, before the adoption, during the early ninth century, of what we now think of as classical Tibetan Buddhist usage, there was a lengthy period, extending at least back to the early eighth century and quite possibly even earlier, to the time of Srong btsan sgam po, during which Tibetans were gaining exposure to Buddhist ideas and beginning to create ways to express them in Tibetan, certainly translating some texts as well. Indeed, it is only if we imagine a prolonged period of gestation, spanning much of the eighth century and perhaps part of the seventh, that we can begin to resolve what otherwise appears as a remarkable enigma in Tibetan cultural history, namely, the formation of a standardised and sometimes highly technical vocabulary of some ten thousand stipulated items and the translation, mostly from Sanskrit, of over seven hundred works, often of considerable length and difficulty, in just a few decades following the foundation of Bsam yas and its translation academy during the 770s.[61] But assuming that there was a long phase of experimentation culminating in the concerted efforts of Khri Srong lde btsan's reign, we still know very little about how the conventions established during the earlier period differed from those that were subsequently fixed by the successive official acts of language reform and standardisation.[62] As a

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[61] In Ishihama and Fukuda 1989, the critical edition of the *Mahāvyutpatti*, 9492 terms and phrases are entered. The *Ldan dkar ma* palace catalogue of Buddhist canonical texts, probably dating to 812, but perhaps slightly expanded later, lists 736 titles (Lalou 1953, Hermann-Pfandt 2008), the large majority having been translated from Indic originals. Of course, Tibetan traditions affirm that the first translations of Buddhist works do predate the founding of Bsam yas, and scholarship about the early history of Tibetan translation, from Simonsson 1957 on, has generally been clear that the "classical" standards of the ninth century were the products of a prolonged process. Nevertheless, it appears to me to be often the case that, in speaking of the Tibetan adoption of Buddhism, a simple story of "before and after" is sometimes still presupposed.

[62] It is known that the *Sgra sbyor 'bam po gnyis pa* was issued twice, in 783 or 795 and in 814, although, because complete copies of both versions are not available, the changes, if any, in the lexical parts of the work remain uncertain. Refer to Panglung 1994, Scherrer-Schaub 2002, and Verhagen 2015. A further source of complexity in the assessment of supposed earlier and later translations of Buddhist texts stems from the problem posed by alternative Indo-Tibetan and Sino-Tibetan modes of translation; see Stein 2010 [1983]. In some cases, translations from Chinese may appear archaic owing to the use of conventions that depart from the standard Indic-based lexicon.

result, when we encounter locutions that seem to have been forged during the earlier phase but were later replaced—examples would include the early use of *g.yung drung* for classical *yang dag pa*,[63] *gtsug lag* for *bstan bcos* or *gzhung lugs*, and perhaps also *chos bzang* for *dam pa'i chos*—we are inclined to read them not as properly Buddhist usages but rather as elements of the culture of an archaic, pre-Buddhist Tibet. This, I believe, is an illusion. A challenge we face as historians of early Tibet, therefore, is to clarify to the degree possible the nature of Tibet's Buddhist culture in its nascent phase, before the ninth century, and its relations with whatever may be known of the archaic Tibetan culture that came before, as also with the canonical, "classical" forms that later followed and have held sway down to the present day.

Appendix I

The Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma *on* gtsug lag

Surveyed here are all instances of *gtsug lag* in the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, the *Criteria of Authentic Scriptures*,[64] in the contexts in which they occur. I have briefly reviewed previous research about this text, which is attributed to the emperor Khri Srong lde btsan and now generally believed to have been issued by his court, in a recent publication, to which interested readers may refer for additional background.[65] Page references to the Tibetan text are given below in parentheses citing the edition found in volume 115 of the *Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* as detailed in the bibliography. Because variant readings, besides infrequent and very minor differences of spelling, are almost absent from the text, it appears that the versions known from the available Tengyurs all derive ultimately from a single prototype. This seems also confirmed by the occurrence of shared errors in all versions.[66] In the translations

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[63] The replacement of *g.yung drung* by *yang dag pa* as the translation of Skt. *samyak* is attested in the archaic version of the Tibetan *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra*, on which see Hakamaya 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988. In the first of these articles, pp. 180-179, Hakamaya argues convincingly that "both the old and new Tibetan versions were based on a common Sanskrit original," in which case the problem of an alternative Chinese-sourced translation raised in the preceding note does not obtain.

[64] The phrase *bka' yang dag pa* occurs as a translation of Skt. *samyagājñā*, "authentic directive/order/command," in the old translation of the *Ratnameghasūtra*, one of the first Buddhist scriptures translated into Tibetan and pre-dating the *Mahāvyutpatti*. I am grateful to Yi (Allan) Ding for pointing this out during his presentation to the May 2025 conference mentioned in n. 1.

[65] Kapstein 2026, appendix. The fullest study of the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* to date is the thesis, in Tibetan, of Dpal bzang dar rgyas dol po (2021).

[66] An instance of this is the erroneous reading *'jigs pa* for *mi 'jigs pa* in passage 3d below, n. 75.

given here, which, in view of the obscurities of the text, are sometimes no more than tentative sketches, I have translated *gtsug lag* according to context as "scriptures," "sacred doctrine," "dicta," etc., *italicizing* these words in all cases for emphasis. The use of *gtsug lag* to refer to medicine and other sciences, or to the arts of governance and law, is not in evidence in the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, with the exception of a single occurrence of the term in connection with astrological knowledge in the last citation (para. 6).

1. The verse eulogies with which the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* begins are addressed to Buddha Śākyamuni, the eight major bodhisattvas, and the wrathful divinities Acala and Trailokyavijaya, and thus recall the depictions of Buddha Vairocana and his maṇḍala that characterise Tibetan imperial iconography under Khri Srong lde btsan and his successors.[67] Here *gtsug lag* occurs just once, in the verse honouring the bodhisattva Samantabhadra:

> bcom ldan kun tu bzang po sras kyi gtso ||rgya mtsho'i spyod la gus par phyag 'tshal te||
> dge bas khyab pa'i *gtsug lag* bzang brjod pa||'jig rten kun la phan gdags legs par bsgrub|| (467)
>
> I respectfully salute lord Samantabhadra, chief among [Buddha's] sons, whose practice is oceanic;
> Reciting fine *dicta*, pervaded by virtue, may you achieve benefit for all the world!

2. The preamble to the text, a passage that represents the emperor's speech in the first person in a manner that seems consonant with the surviving edicts in which he announces his adoption of Buddhism, has been much discussed among Tibetologists.[68] *Gtsug lag* occurs here three times, always meaning roughly "scriptures, sacred texts," whether those of Buddhism or other religions.

> spyod pa so so'i *gtsug lag* las byung ba mthong na bde bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa ni gzhan gang dang yang mi 'dra bar bzang la rgya che ba nyid du bdag gis khong du chud de| sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la 'di skad du bstod pa yang bdag gi sgor byams pa'i phyir snying du sdug ste bstod pa yang ma yin| 'jig rten gyi lha dag gi *gtsug lag* la bsngags

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[67] On these verses, see also Stein 1980, p. 331; Kapstein 2000, pp. 61-62.

[68] Tucci 1978 [1956-1958], part 2, p. 122; Macdonald 1971, p. 367-369; Stein 1980, pp. 331-333; Walter 2009, p. 226. My translation of the entire preamble, from which the translation given here is excerpted, may be found in Schaeffer et al. 2013, pp. 119-121. On allusions to philosophical topics in the conversion edicts, refer to Kapstein 2011.

> par mi smra ba yang de dag gis bdag la gnod pa byas pa'i phyir zhe sdang ba yang ma yin te | […] 'jig rten gyi lha dang mi la yon tan dang mthu yod pa kun kyang yun ring po'i dus nas dkon mchog gsum la bsnyen bkur byas ba'i dge ba'i rtsa ba las ma byung ba med de | *gtsug lag* go cog gi snying po ni sangs rgyas kyi chos so zhes bya ba la sogs pa rnam pa du mar gsungs pa'i rjes su bsams te brtags na | (468)
>
> If you see the sayings and actions reported in various *sacred texts*, the teaching of the Sugata is unlike any other in its excellence and extent, and thus I have comprehended it. Regarding my praise of the Buddha's teaching in these words, I do not praise it because I have been pleased by kindness on my behalf, nor is my withholding of homage to the *sacred texts* of the gods of the world due to hatred caused by harm they have done me. […] As for all those worldly gods and men who possess positive attributes and power, this has not failed to arise owing to the fundamental virtues of sustained service offered to the Three Precious Jewels. Thus, if one reflects upon and examines statements of many sorts, such as that the Buddha's Dharma is the heart of all *sacred texts* […]

3. The third chapter of the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, treating the demonstration of proof statements (*gtan tshigs sgrub pa yan lag gi le'u*), is among the most technical and difficult sections of the entire work.[69] It merits a thorough investigation to trace in full detail its apparent relations with early Yogācāra scholasticism, a challenging project that goes far beyond the limited aspirations of the present essay. It will be convenient to treat the four passages in which *gtsug lag* is used in this chapter in separate paragraphs. The first three, 3a-3c, are found within the discussion of the "seven aspects of ascertainment" (*gtan la phab pa'i yan lag rnam pa bdun*) mentioned earlier (n. 35). I have not yet succeeded in finding a clear parallel to this list in available Indian Buddhist sources, though its stated purpose, "to bring about comprehension for those who have not yet understood" (*khong du ma chud pa rnams la khong du gzhug pa yin*), together with its structure, broadly allies it with descriptions of dialectical method as known from Yogācāra sources.[70] In all events, the seven aspects, literally "limbs,"

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[69] This chapter in fact concerns the third of the four *yukti*, "probative reasons" (Tib. *rigs pa*), derived from the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* and undergirding the structure of the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* overall, as was first noted in Tucci 1978 [1956-1958], part 2, pp. 122ff. However, in the standard usage later adopted, *gtan tshigs sgrub pa* was replaced by *'thad pa sgrub pa* (Skt. *upapattisādhana*). For a general account of the four *yukti*, refer to Kapstein 2001, ch. 13.

[70] Refer to Wayman 1958. As will be seen below in para. 3d, however, there is some reason to suppose that the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* was an important source for our text; for its treatment of debate and dialectics, see Walpola 2001, pp. 248-252 (although here *vāda*, "discussion, debate," is oddly translated literally as "talk"). Nevertheless, the treatment of dialectics in the *Bka' yang dag pa tshad ma* just

are given as (481): (1) *gleng bslang ba,* (2) *mthun pa,* (3) *mi mthun pa'am 'gal ba,* (4) *grub pa'i mtha' rdzogs par bya ba,* (5) *mtshan nyid gsum gyi don dang 'dra ba,* (6) *lung bstan pa,* and (7) *rtags yod pa.* This list, however, is surely defective, for the exposition actually given in the text treats the seven as (481-486): (1) *gleng bslang ba*, (2) *mthun pa dang mi mthun pa*, (3) *grub pa'i mtha' rdzogs pa*, (4) *mtshan nyid gsum gyi don dang ldan pa*, (5) *drang ba*, (6) *lung bstan pa*, and (7) *rtags yod pa.* As the term with which we are concerned, *gtsug lag*, is employed in connection with the second, third, and seventh topics of this exposition, the present discussion is limited to just these three.

3a. The first topic, "raising an issue for discussion" (*gleng bslang ba*) corresponds to the *pratijñā* (Tib. *dam bca' ba*), the "assertion of a thesis" recognized as the point of departure in classical Indian theories of debate. The second, "similitude and dissimilitude," seems to refer to the categories of *sārūpya* and *vairūpya* as known from Asaṅga, though not defined just as they are here:[71]

> mthun pa dang mi mthun pa gang zhe na | gang las gleng bslang ba'i gzhir bcas pa de dang mu stegs can gang la bstan pa de'i *gtsug lag* tu mthun par sgrub pa'i mtha' 'gro ba las 'byung ba bzhin du bstan pa'am | gzhan du chos bzang ngan gyi khyad zhugs pa dang | rgya che chung mi 'dra bar bstan pa yin te […] (481)
>
> What are similitude and dissimilitude? [Similitude] is that which is, as the basis of the issue raised, proven to be similar with what the *tīrthaka*s teach in their *scriptures* and so indicated as such, or otherwise [dissimilitude] indicates qualitative distinctions of dharmas, and differences of extent […]

3b. *Grub pa'i mtha' rdzogs pa*, perhaps to be understood as the "system (*siddhānta*) in full," I find to be an obscure topic, and I am not at all sure that I have grasped it correctly. It may allude to one of the reasons for defeat in debate defined in the *Nyāyasūtra* (5.2.23) of Gautama, namely, the fault of imperfectly conforming to the system one seeks to defend and thereby becoming inconsistent (*apasiddhānta*) in one's defence of it.[72] If that is so, then the present topic may be seen as an endorsement

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partially overlaps with these sources. One can only speculate about the degree to which it may have been based on oral instruction prior to the translation of the necessary textual materials. It is a mystery, too, if it was inspired in part by the need to adjudicate actual disputes, such as the famed debate between Kamalaśīla and Heshang Moheyan at Bsam yas.

71 For Asaṅga's definitions, refer to Wayman 1958, p. 33.

72 The relevant sūtra and its main commentaries are translated in Jhā 1984, vol. 4, pp. 1769-1770, where Jhā renders *siddhānta* as "standpoint." The sūtra is cited by

of the opposite approach, to expound to one's system as a coherent whole and not just in part.

> grub ba'i mtha' rdzogs pa gang zhe na | so so'i phyogs bzung ste | yang dag pa gang yin pa'i yul bstod na grub pa'i mtha' phyogs 'ga' tsam gyis mi brtsad par *gtsug lag* 'byung ba'i mdo che ge thog thag tu bskrun te | […] *gtsug lag* gi mdo bskrun pa de'ang gang zhe na | chos so cog gi thog ma'i mtha' dang mtha' ma'i mtha'i lo rgyus dang […] 'di rnams bskruns pa'o | (481-482)
>
> What is the "system in full?" Having taken up [their] respective positions, [the disputants], if they extol some given object as genuine, must not debate just about [their] systems in part, but should adduce (*bskrun*) thus-and-such a sūtra (*mdo*),[73] from which emerges [their] *scriptural authority*. […] And what is "adducing a sūtra as a *scriptural authority?*" It is to adduce these matters: the history of the beginning and end of the whole doctrine [lit. "all doctrines"] and [the key features of the cosmology, eschatology, and soteriology of the system discussed].

3c. The seventh topic, *rtags yod pa*, has been introduced in section 3 above.

> rtags yod pa gang zhe na | yang na mi las bla mar gyur pas *gtsug lag* tu gyur pa ston to cog smon pa'i tshig lta bur 'ol ma chags par smra ba ni gang yang mi 'byung ste | […] 'ga' zhig las nor bar gyur to | (485)
>
> If one asks, 'what is presence of proof?', on the one hand, it does not emerge at all [from] irrelevant statements, for instance words of prayer, [viz.] everything that is taught to be *sacred tradition* by those who are [revered as] gurus among men […] for on account of some [such dubious authorities] one turns to error.

3d. The chapter on proof statement does not treat only the seven topics listed above. Additional issues relating to disputation are also introduced, some of which, as in the present instance, may be clearly identified with Indian sources. The "five ornaments of a disputant" (lit. "of a debate") are given here with, for comparison, the full parallel

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Dharmakīrti in his *Vādanyāya* and discussed in much detail by Śāntarakṣita in his commentary upon it (Dvārikādāsa 1972, pp. 125-129), so that it is not impossible that this was indeed in the background of the topic that concerns us here. Aspects of Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā philosophy are also considered elsewhere in the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, perhaps reflecting the intellectual influence of Śāntarakṣita and his disciple Kamalaśīla in the Tibetan court.

[73] Sūtra (*mdo*) is perhaps used here as it is in Brahmanical traditions to refer to a systematic work, often aphoristic in form, providing a complete account of a given tradition or discipline.

passage from the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* in both Tibetan and Sanskrit. Although the vocabulary employed in the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* differs in some respects from the canonical version—as we have already seen in its use of *gtsug lag* for Skt. *samaya*, instead of *gzhung lugs* as we find in the canonical translation—the correspondences between them are evident throughout:[74]

> smra ba'i rgyan gang zhe na| rnam par lngar shes par bya ste| bdag dang gzhan gyi *gtsug lag* shes pa dang| tshig 'bru dang ldan pa dang| 'jigs pa dang brtan pa dang des pa'o| (487)
>
> What are the ornaments of a disputant? They should be known to be five: (1) knowledge of the *doctrines* of self and others; (2) [pronouncements] endowed with [the appropriate] verbal form [lit. syllables]; (3) fearsomeness;[75] (4) reliability; and (5) dignity.
>
> Asaṅga, *Abhidharmasamuccaya, Mngon pa kun btus:*
>
> smra ba'i rgyan ni bdag dang gzhan gyi gzhun lugs shes pa dang| tshig zur phyin pa phun sum tshogs pa dang| mi 'jigs pa dang| brtan pa dang| mthun par byed pa'o|| [Derge Tengyur, vol. RI, Toh. 4049, fols. 118.6-199.1]
>
> vādālaṃkāra ityucyate| sa punaḥ ṣaḍvidhaḥ|[76] svapara-samayajñatā vākkaraṇasaṃpad vaiśaradyaṃ pratibhānaṃ sthairyaṃ dākṣiṇyaṃ ca|| [Prahlāda Pradhāna 1950, p. 105]

4. From chapter six, "Rang gi rigs kyi dpe," "Corroborating Examples":

> so so'i skye bo rnams la thub pa dag gis *gtsug lag* tu bstan pa ni| gang 'jig rten lam ma grub pa bsgrub cing khong du ma chud pa khong du gzhug pa'i phyir ston pas na| mngon sum gyi dmigs pa yang rung| rjes su dpag par shes par bya ba yang rung| the tshom sel ba'i grogs su rang gi rigs kyi dpes bstan par bya'o| (501)

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[74] Note, in particular, *tshig 'bru dang ldan pa* for *tshig zur phyin pa phun sum tshogs pa* (Skt. *vākkaraṇasaṃpad*) and *des pa* for *mthun par byed pa* (Skt. *dākṣiṇyam*).

[75] This should be no doubt emended to read *mi 'jigs pa*, "fearlessness," as it does in the canonical *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, though there is no such variant recorded here. As all known versions of the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* share this error, it is probably to be explained by a syllable skipped and never corrected by the scribe of the ancient manuscript that was their common ancestor.

[76] The Sanskrit text mentions six ornaments, adding *pratibhāna* (Tib. *spobs pa*) to the list of five. This is most likely a late insertion, as it is found neither in the canonical Tibetan translation [Toh. 4049] nor in the commentary [Toh. 4053]. In the Sanskrit edition of the latter (Tatia 1976, p. 153), however, the editor notes its occurrence in the Chinese version.

> Concerning what has been taught as *sacred scripture* to ordinary persons by the sages, because it is taught so that the world that has not achieved the path, achieves it, and that has not mastered it, masters it, therefore, it should be taught through corroborating examples so as to facilitate the removal of doubt, whether [pertaining to] the objects of perception or those that may be known inferentially.

5. From chapter eight, "Shin tu rnam par dag pa'i lung," "Exceedingly Pure Transmissions":

> yong ni mi las bla mar gyur ba'i *gtsug lag* dpyad pa la tshig gi tha snyad kyi grub pa 'ba' zhig gi kha dor du mi rung ste| lung las 'byung ba dang mthun par bsgrub dgos pas na| sgrub pa dang bsgrub par bya ba kun kyang lung dang sbyar ro || (507)
>
> In sum,[77] in investigating the *sacred doctrine* (*gtsug lag*, Skt. *ārṣa*) of [the Buddha] who is the Teacher (*bla ma*, Skt. *guru*) among men [or: who is superior (*bla ma*, Skt. *uttara*) among men], it is not appropriate to dispute only the establishment of verbal conventions. Because it must be proven that there is accord with what comes forth from the transmissions (*lung*, Skt. *āgama*), the entire proof (*sgrub pa*, Skt. *sādhana*) and probandum (*bsgrub par bya ba*, Skt. *sādhya*), too, are [to be] collated with the transmissions.[78]

6. From chapter thirteen, "Yongs su ma dag pa," "Entirely Impure [Teachings]." This is the passage studied in Stein 1980, on the Tibetan imperial rejection of Manichaeism. Stein translated just the first part (down to "… but not established") and there are some difficulties in the interpretation of what follows this. The Chinese origins of this brief section were clearly demonstrated by Stein as well, though, as he remarks, *par sig*, by which Persia is designated, represents an Indian form of the name (< *parṣika*), evidently replacing the original Chinese.

> par sig g.yon chen mar ma ni| g.yon mi bzod pas *gtsug lag* kun dang mi mthun pa gcig bya ba'i phyir *gtsug lag* kun nas drangs te| byas pa lta bu ched du mi mthun par sbyar na| *gtsug lag* gzhan gyis grub pa'i mtha' yod par gyur te| ma grub pa la sogs pa'o| […] *gtsug lag* de 'dra bar ston pa'i ye shes rnam par ma dag ste thams cad mkhyen pa ma yin par yang lung gi mtshan nyid las shes so|| de'i lung rnam par ma dag

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[77] Throughout the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*, we find sentences beginning with the expressions *yang na*, *yang ni*, or *yong ni*. It is not certain that these are all as intended, and it is possible that there have been errors in some cases. Bialek 2018, vol. 1, p. 321, n. 3, suggests that, for the last, we should understand, "as regards *yoṅ*," but I am at a loss to make sense of this. My own suggestion, "in sum," is admittedly uncertain, but seems to fit the context.

[78] A more thorough analysis of this passage is given in Kapstein 2026, n. 46.

> pa yin par yang de'i ye shes sgrib pa dang bcas par gyur pa las so|| rnam par ma dag pa'i lung de dag ni 'phags pa rin po che dpal la skar mkhan gyi *gtsug lag* sun phyung pa […] la sogs pa sangs rgyas pa las phyi rol tu gyur […] (536-537)
>
> The Persian charlatan Mar Mani, with intolerable deception, so as to fabricate something dissimilar to all [other] *sacred traditions*, drew on all *sacred traditions* for [his] fabrication and so composed [one that was] dissimilar. It was thus a system formed of other *traditions*, but not established [in itself] etc. [79] […] The gnosis taught in such *traditions* is impure; that they are not [derived from] the omniscient one is known from the characteristics of their transmitted doctrine (*lung*). That their transmitted doctrines are impure follows from their gnosis being corrupted. Those impure transmitted doctrines are outside of those of the Buddhists, like the astrologer's *traditions* that were rebuked in the *Noble Ratnaketu[dhāraṇīsūtra]*.…[80]

Appendix II

Gtsug lag *in the* Mahāvyutpatti

The *Mahāvyutpatti*, the great polyglot Buddhist lexicon that was composed in connection with the imperial Tibetan translation projects of the early ninth century, is often thought to include three Sanskrit terms as equivalents of *gtsug lag*: *ārṣa*, *śāstra*, and *vihāra.* In fact, it only uses the first two in this sense, though it also includes *vihāra* rendered as *gtsug lag khang*.[81] Stein and Hahn both noted that the use of *gtsug lag* for *ārṣa*, meaning scripture or tradition "derived from the *ṛṣi*s," cannot

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[79] Stein 1980, p. 333, discusses this passage only down to this line. The second clause, *g.yon mi bzod pas*, which I have translated "with intolerable deception," was I think misinterpreted by Stein, who reads "n'ayant pas supporté le mensonge (fourberie)." But the point is that Mani was a deceiver, not that he was reacting to the deceptions of others.

[80] The *'phags pa rin po che'i dpal* mentioned here is probably the canonical *'phags pa rin po che'i tog gi gzungs*, the *Ārya-ratnaketu-dhāraṇī-sūtra* (Toh. 138), in which case the astrologer referred to is Jyotīrasa, the interlocutor of the fourth chapter. As Yi (Allan) Ding has kindly called to my attention (n. 64), the early translation of the *Ratnameghasūtra* indeed attests to the use of *rin po che'i dpal*, instead of *rin po che'i tog*, for *ratnaketu*. Concerning this scripture, Kotyk 2017, p. 59, says, "The Buddha's response to astrology in the **Ratnaketudhāraṇī-sūtra* is outright rejection." In his rejection, verses 4.92-4.94 of the Tibetan text, the Buddha answers Jyotīrasa's exposition of astrology by arguing that dogs and other sorts of animals, whose destinies were not happy, shared the birth-sign Puṣyā with the Buddha himself, implying that astrological prognostications are of little worth.

[81] Sakaki 1916-1925, nos. 9096, 9152 (= Ishihama and Fukuda 1989, nos. 9033, 9087). *Vihāra* also frequently occurs elsewhere in the *Mahāvyutpatti*, but in the meaning "dwelling, abiding," rendered *gnas pa* in Tibetan.

be explained as a coinage based on the Sanskrit etymology; it must therefore have been adopted to translate the Sanskrit term owing just to a perceived similarity of meaning.[82] In this, it resembles the use of *gtsug lag* to translate *samaya* in the sense of "textual tradition" (*gzhung lugs*), discussed in section 4 above. And nothing need be added here to what has been said earlier regarding the use of *gtsug lag* for *śāstra.* The notion that *gtsug lag* alone might translate Skt. *vihāra*, however, seems widespread and is often attributed to the *Mahāvyutpatti* as well.[83] This is in fact an error, whose origins must be sought in the editorial history of the *Mahāvyutpatti* itself.

In the Tibetan index to Sakaki's edition of the *Mahāvyutpatti*, *vihāra* is listed under *gtsug lag* with reference to entry no. 5046 (Sakaki 1916-1925, vol. 2, p. 241). This refers not to a terminological entry, but to one of the topical rubrics dividing the work into thematic sections, of which, in Sakaki's edition, there are 283 in all: "CCXXII. Brāhmaṇa-vihara-karmāṇi [藏] Bram-ze-ḥi gtsug-lag daṅ las-kyi miṅ-la," "222. the *gtsug lag* and activities of the Brahmans." There are two problems this raises: first, the Sanskrit term we find there is not in fact *vihāra*, "monastery," but rather *vihara*, "pastime, amusement"; and, second, the Sanskrit versions of the topical rubrics in the *Mahāvyutpatti* are late additions to the text and probably back translations from Tibetan to Sanskrit. They cannot be taken, therefore, as reliable evidence of usage during the early ninth century when the *Mahāvyutpatti* was composed. We may consider these points in turn.

The 222nd section of the *Mahāvyutpatti*,[84] in accord with its title, gives a miscellaneous list of terms relating to Brahmanism, including the four Vedas (Sakaki nos. 5047-5050), a variety of arts and sciences (lexicography, medicine, house construction, etc., nos. 5051, 5053-5060), and types of sacrifice (nos. 5061-5064).[85] Evidently, *gtsug lag* is not used in the heading of this section in the sense of "monastery." But as the

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82 Stein 2010 [1985], p. 182; Hahn 1995, p. 350.

83 Refer to note 9 above. See, for example, Stein 2010 [1985], p. 186, though he takes *vihāra* to mean not "monastery" but "Brahmanical sciences," which is indeed what the complete phrase *bram ze'i gtsug lag* may mean. Hahn 1995, p. 348, in fact refers to the entry for *gtsug lag khang*; and Bialek, vol. 2, p. 392, also cites the *Mahāvyutpatti* on this, but without further elaboration. Beckwith 2023 assumes that *gtsug lag* means "monastery," but does not mention the *Mahāvyutpatti.*

84 The numbering of the sections is not fixed across the various editions of the *Mahāvyutpatti.* In Ishihama and Fukuda 1989, the sections are not separately numbered. In Foucaux and Julien 1856-1857, the section that concerns us here is no. 216.

85 One curious addition to the list is no. 5052, *shes gsal*, given as equivalent to Skt. *Kaiṭabhaḥ*, the name of a demon. That this is indeed what was intended seems confirmed by Chos kyi grags pa 1957 [1949], p. 887, where we find *shes gsal gdul* defined as *khyab 'jug*, i.e. Viṣṇu, the "vanquisher of Kaiṭabha."

word actually employed here is in fact *vihara*, which may mean "pastime" and so is perhaps not entirely inappropriate, the rubric as a whole can be taken to mean something like "the affairs and activities of Brahmans." Nevertheless, it is not clear that Tibetan Sanskritists, if they may be supposed to have translated the rubrics from Tibetan to Sanskrit, were familiar with this use of *vihara.* It appears more likely that it was just assumed that *vihāra* could stand in for *gtsug lag*, but that it was then carelessly misspelt (as it was, too, in Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's text, given in Appendix III). Be that as it may, *gtsug lag*, as used in the original Tibetan rubric, was clearly intended to mean roughly "sacred lore," or "hallowed traditions," and not "monastery," in which case, *śāstra* or *samaya* might have been better options for the calqued Sanskrit version.

All this hinges on the second issue, namely, the origin of the Sanskrit renderings of the *Mahāvyutpatti*'s section headings. That these are not part of the original text is confirmed in the critical edition of Ishihama and Fukuda (1989), which gives the rubrics only in Tibetan and Mongolian; for the Sanskrit headings are not to be found in any of the canonical editions of the work, nor are they given in the quadrilingual manuscript on which the copy of Foucaux and Julien (1856-1857) was based.[86] Despite this, however, Foucaux did include the Sanskrit rubrics, even if they were not to be found in the main source. For the Russian collections held another manuscript of the *Mahāvyutpatti*, this one in Sanskrit and Tibetan alone, that Foucaux had copied in 1850 and that did include the rubrics in both languages.[87]

The colophon of this version of the text (vol. 2, pp. 298-303) is unfortunately not very informative; it does not permit us to situate the work precisely in time or place, or to identify those responsible for rendering the headings in Sanskrit. The scant information that it does supply, however, strongly suggests that the work was late, perhaps even as late as the eighteenth century. The author of the colophon, who

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[86] This manuscript, which had been collected by Vasily P. Vasilyev (1818-1900) in Beijing in 1853, is the same one reproduced in Lokesh Chandra 1981. It appears that the manuscript may have originated as a bilingual print to which the Chinese and Mongolian were subsequently added by hand. Julien, in his note introducing the copy he prepared with Foucaux, describes the book as a manuscript, but seems to confirm this suggestion in saying, "Si le Thibétain, dont les lettres representaient aussi le Sanscrit, était aussi net qu'un texte imprimé, le chinois et le mongol étaient en grande partie illisibles." The original manuscript, Alexander Zorin kindly informs me, is now held in the collection of the Saint Petersburg State University, shelfmark N 25.147. It was first mentioned briefly by Vasilyev himself in Wassiljew 1855, pp. 382-384.

[87] Foucaux 1850. The original manuscript was reported in Boehtlingk 1845, p. 345, no. 587. It is now held in the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg.

gives his name as Kun dga' rgyal po (p. 301), a person whom I have not been able to identify, states that the work he has completed is a print (*par*, p. 300), though no printed exemplar now seems known. It is possible, of course, that the colophon was prepared for an intended print edition that was never achieved. Prayers are offered for the ruler, titled *mi dbang* and his queen (p. 302), but they are otherwise not named. One might be tempted to think of the Tibetan lord most closely associated with this title, Mi dbang Pho lha nas Bsod nams stobs rgyal (1689-1747), but this is excluded by the reference to the year of composition, a female iron snake year (p. 302), of which the only occurrence during Pho lha nas's life was 1701, when he was just twelve years old. Finally, the work is said to have been concluded at a place called Gnam sde chen, constructed by the "great king" Gu lug han (p. 303). This no doubt refers to Külüg Khan (r. 1308-1311) of the Yuan Dynasty, who appears to have been a devout Buddhist and to have sponsored temple construction in Dadu (later Beijing) and at the summer capital at Shangdu, though Gnam sde chen remains unidentified. What we are left with is the impression that the work was a product of the Qing dynasty, undertaken in or around Beijing. It is clear, at least, that its use of *vihara* for *gtsug lag* cannot be considered reliable, even though it happens to fit the context.

In all events, Foucaux appears to have faithfully copied the rubrics from this bilingual manuscript into the quadrilingual version that he prepared with Julien. Not long afterwards, Minaev used the same bilingual manuscript in the preparation of his own edition of the *Mahāvyutpatti* (1887), reproducing the rubrics as they were found there and apparently without any knowledge of the work of Foucaux. In 1911 this was reissued in the Bibliotheca Buddhica under the editorship of Minorov. The rubric "Brāhmaṇa-vihara-karmāṇi" was given there as "Brāhmaṇa-vihara-karmaḥ (sic)," the error signalled there apparently pertaining to the final case ending and not to the use of *vihara*. Sakaki, for his part, employed all of these versions of the *Mahāvyutpatti*—Foucaux 1850, Foucaux and Julien 1856-1857, and Minaev 1887 and 1911—for the preparation of his own edition,[88] which remained the standard until the appearance of the critical edition of Ishihama and Fukuda in 1989, from which the Sanskrit headings derived from the still-puzzling work of Kun dga' rgyal po were omitted.

[88] Refer to Sakaki 1916-1925, vol. 1, pp. xxii-xxxviii.

Appendix III

Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho on gtsug lag

The brief definition of *gtsug lag* given by Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (or rather his ghost-writer Ldum bu Don grub dbang rgyal) in his celebrated treatise on astrology and divination, the *Baiḍūrya sngon po*, and cited in Das's Dictionary (n. 5 above), is complemented by a longer examination of the term in his extensive compilation of responses to questions concerning that work, the *Baiḍūrya g.ya' sel*, where it is the ninety-first topic discussed. This interesting passage clearly reflects understandings that had grown up over the centuries and that form the background for the definitions given by more recent Tibetan authorities, in particular, their identification of *gtsug lag* above all with scriptures and some other written works. The two editions of the text that I have consulted—Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1971 and 1976—are based on copies of the Lhasa Zhol and Derge Dgon chen editions respectively. In the passage given here, they are substantially identical, save for a single, significant variant.

> go gcig pa gtsug lag ni *skyes rabs* las| lugs dang gtsug lag rigs pas mi 'gal lam nyid nas | zhes pa'i *'grel par dpal chos kyi grags pas mdzad par* gtsug lag ni sangs rgyas kyis gsungs pa'o zhes bshad cing | lo chen bsod nams rgyal mtshan gyis brjod bya don gyi gtsug lag dang rjod byed tshig gi gtsug lag gnyis su bshad pa'i brjod bya don gyi dbang du byas na lhag pa tshul khrims kyi bslab pa gtsug dang shes rab ting 'dzin gyi bslab pa lag tu mdzad pa'i gtsug 'di dge 'dun kyi mtshan dang | rjod byed tshig gi dbang du byas na rgyal ba'i bka' rnams gtsug dang | bstan bcos rnams lag tu grags pa'i bka' bstan bcos kyi glegs bam yang gtsug lag rjes mthun yin pas brjod bya rjod byed kyi gtsug lag bzhugs pa'i nang la gtsug lag khang zhes grags shing | gzhan yang rtsis kyi gtsug lag dang brda sprod kyi gtsug lag sogs du mar grags shing | nag rtsis rang lugs su le'u nyi shu par brjod pa ltar 'jam dpal gyi gtsug nas bton te lha mo rnam rgyal ma'i lag tu bzhag pas gtsug lag tu grags shing | de lta bas na skad dod du'ang gtsug dang lag gi skad dod thob rung | *spyod 'jug* las | gtsug lag khang rnams klog pa dang | | zhes pa'i rgya dper bi ha [1976: ta] ra zhes 'dug pa yang gzhan don mang po 'dus pa'i don sde snod de | *theg pa chen po mdo sde rgyan* las | sde snod dag ni gsum mam gnyis kyang | | bsdus pa'i phyir na rgyu ni dgus 'dod do | | zhes pa'i rgya dper | pi ṭa ka tra yaṃ dwa yambā saṃ ga ha raḥ kā ra ṇai rna ba bi ri ṣṭaṃ | | zhes byung zhing | pi ṭa ka ni gong bu'am bsdus pa ste don mang po brjod byar 'dus pas sde snod do | | yang na pi ṭa zhes pa yul dbus kyi bre bo che'i ming yin pas bre bo che'i nang du bre chung du ma 'dus pa bzhin du brjod bya'i bslab pa'am don mang po 'dus pa'i sde snod dam gtsug lag tu 'dod pas na kho bos bsgrigs

pa'i skad dod rigs su yang gtsug lag la pi ṭa ka rang yod pa shas che bas na tshom pa mi 'tshal lo | (Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1971: vol. 1, 420.2-421.1; 1976: vol. 1, 337.2-338.2)

The ninety-first [question concerns] *gtsug lag*, about which it says in the *Jātaka[mālā]:* "Via the very path that is uncontradicted by custom, *gtsug lag*, or reason …"[89] In the commentary on this composed by Śrī Dharmakīrti,[90] there is this explanation: "*gtsug lag* is what is spoken by the Buddha." And Lo chen Bsod nams rgyal mtshan[91] explains [*gtsug lag* as divided] in two: the *gtsug lag* of meaning, which is what is signified, and the verbal *gtsug lag*, which is the signifying expression. Of these, with respect to the meaning, which is signified, it is the lesson of higher discipline that is the crown (*gtsug*) and the lessons of higher discernment and contemplation that are the hands (*lag*); *gtsug* [*lag*] derived in this way is a name for the *saṃgha.* And, with respect to the verbal, signifying expression, the Victor's pronouncements (*bka'*) are well-known as the crown and the *śāstra*s (*bstan bcos*) as the hands, so that *gtsug lag* accords with the volumes of the canon (*bka' bstan bcos kyi glegs bam*). Therefore, an interior space, where the *gtsug lag* of expression and expressed meaning are kept, is well known as a *gtsug lag khang.*

Moreover, the science (*gtsug lag*) of calculation, the science of grammar, and many others are well known. In the unique traditions of Chinese divination, as is recounted in the twentieth chapter [of the *White Beryl*], what is renowned as *gtsug lag* was projected from Mañjuśrī's crown (*gtsug*) and placed in the hand (*lag*) of goddess Uṣṇīṣavijayā. Hence, it may be a synonym for [the phrase] "crown and hand."

It says in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (10.42): "[May] the *vihāra*s [be well stationed, with abundant] reading and [recitation]!"[92] where the Indian manuscript has *bi ha ra* [or: *bi ta ra*?],[93] though there are many other meanings it embraces, [such as] *sde snod* (Skt. *piṭaka*). As it says in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (11.1): "The *piṭaka*s are three or two in

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89 This passage, where *gtsug lag* translates *ārṣa*, is discussed in Hahn 1995, p. 350. There is also a second occurrence of *gtsug lag* in the Tibetan *Jātakamālā*, ch. 14: *gtsug lag khyad par can*, in Sanskrit: *śāstrātiśayaṃ*, the excellence of the *śāstra*s.

90 This figure is probably not to be identified with the famous seventh-century philosopher of the same name. I believe that he is the Dharmakīrti of Suvarṇadvīpa, i.e. Bla ma gser gling pa, who was one of the major teachers of Atiśa. Although the *Jātakamālā* had been first translated during the imperial period, its great popularity in Tibet stemmed from its promotion amongst Atiśa's Bka' gdams pa successors.

91 This figure appears in various lineage lists as a disciple of 'Gos lo Gzhon nu dpal (1392-1481) and Paṇ chen Byams gling pa (1401-1475), and as a teacher of the Zhwa dmar hierarch Spyan snga Chos kyi grags pa (1453-1524), but I have not succeeded in identifying the precise source to which the Sde srid refers here.

92 *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 10.42ab: *pāṭhasvādhyāyakalilā vihārāḥ santu susthitāḥ.*

93 The Sde srid's reference to *sde snod* here suggests that he misread *vihāra* in the Sanskrit manuscript available to him as *bi ta ra*, not *bi ha ra*, and that he assimilated this to *piṭaka.* I have no better explanation for his odd treatment of the text here.

> brief, and held [to be three] for nine reasons."[94] In the Sanskrit manuscript this is: *pi ṭa ka tra yaṃ dwa yam bā saṃ ga ha raḥ kā ra ṇai rna ba bi ri ṣṭaṃ.*
>
> *Piṭaka* has many meanings [such as] a heap or what is gathered together; to condense its significance, it is *sde snod.* Otherwise, because *piṭaka* is the name for the large gallon of Madhyadeśa, just as the large gallon contains many small pints, the *piṭaka*, or *gtsug lag*, is held to comprise many expressed teachings, or meanings. Therefore, in the class of terms that I have compiled, because *gtsug lag* mostly has *piṭaka* [as its meaning], there should be no doubt.

Appendix IV

On the "Original Gtsug lag"

One of the more puzzling expressions encountered in the course of this research was *gtsug lag dang po*, the "first, or original *gtsug lag*," given in the sixteenth-century *Mngon brjod mkhas pa'i rna rgyan* as meaning *'khor ba*, i.e. *saṃsāra*,[95] and included, on the basis of this source, in Das's Dictionary. The only reference to this in contemporary Tibetology, so far as I know, is in Macdonald 1971, where Das's mention of this definition is qualified as "very interesting," for, she says, "the wheel of *saṃsāra* [is] the Law that the order of the Buddhist world obeys."[96]

The "original *gtsug lag*" is not at all known from Old Tibetan sources, so far as I have been able to establish, and has therefore been omitted from discussion in the main body of this article. Indeed, the only instances of use that I have so far found are quite late, from the writings of the noted Sa skya pa scholar Zhu chen Tshul khrims rin chen (1697-1774), an author who was no doubt familiar with the *Mngon brjod mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*. He does not, however, employ the term to mean *'khor ba.* In his work, it refers rather to *bzo rig*, Skt. *śilpavidyā*, the branch of learning concerning the plastic arts, architecture, and productive techniques.[97] This suggests that the phrase, in the sense of

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[94] *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* 11.1ab: *piṭakatrayaṃ dvayaṃ vā saṃgrahataḥ kāraṇair navabhir iṣṭam.* The Sde srid's transliteration of the Sanskrit is recognizable despite several errors.

[95] Ngag dbang 'jigs grags, 1581, fol. 68a4. The dates of the author, a well-known prince and poet, are established by Per Sørensen, to whom I am grateful for this information, as 1532/42-1597.

[96] Macdonald 1971, p. 353.

[97] Tshul khrims rin chen 2005, vol. 6, plate 340.4: *gtsug lag dang po'i rig pa'i gzhung … snang brnyan sprul pa'i sman mkhyen mkhas pa dag;* vol. 10, plate 562.4-6: *rig pa'i gtsug lag 'dzin pa'i rigs las lha bzo mkhas pa la … gtsug lag dang po'i lugs bzang snang ba yis ‖ ngo mtshar gzugs brgya'i ltad mo ci yang ngom.*

saṃsāra, may have emerged as a theoretical invention of the literature on synonymics rather than as a term in actual literary use. That the arts would be designated as the first among learned traditions seems warranted by the notion that *all* techniques and sciences are encompassed by the practices forming body, speech and mind.[98] By analogy, we might think of the world as a whole as the primal artifice, born of the original art, which may account for the reasoning behind the definition of the phrase as *'khor ba*, but here I am merely speculating. Sanskritists may recall the opening words of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam,* his most famous play: *yā sṛṣṭiḥ sraṣṭur ādyā*, "that which was the first creation of the Creator," but the commentators take this as alluding to the primal waters. And I do not believe that the play was in any case well known among Tibetan scholars, even those who were passionate students of Indian poetic traditions, as was Ngag dbang 'jigs grags, a great admirer of Kālīdāsa. His outstanding contribution to Tibetan *kāvya*, the *Rig 'dzin pho nya*, was, after all, modelled on the latter's *Meghadūta.*

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[98] As Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 98, tells us, "the arts gather within them the other three [branches of learning, viz., medicine, grammar, and logic]."

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