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Editorial Office

The Research Center of Foreign Tibetology

Shaanxi Normal University

Xi'an 710062, China

Tel: (86)29-85308860

Email: himalaya11@163.com

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Editors-in-Chief

Wang Qilong, China

Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp, USA

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The First International Symposium on Tibetan and Himalayan Studies

The First International Symposium on Tibetan and Himalayan Studies was held from 25 to 26 November, 2017 in Xi'an, China. It was organized by Foreign Research Center of Foreign Tibetology, Shaanxi Normal University. 65 experts and scholars from China, Russia, the United States, Japan, Mongolia and other countries and regions attended the symposium.

The opening ceremony was chaired by Prof. Wang Qilong, Changjiang scholar of Ministry of Education, dean of School of Foreign Languages, director of Foreign Tibetology Research Center of Shaanxi Normal University. Prof. Dang Huaixing, Vice President of Shaanxi Normal University, Prof. Andre Bazalov, Buddhism and Mongolian Studies Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, and Prof. Shen Weirong, Chinese Department of Tsinghua University, attended the opening ceremony and making brief speeches.



Prof. Dang Huaixing, Vice President of Shaanxi Normal University



Prof. Wang Qilong, Director of Foreign Tibetology Research Center at Shaanxi Normal University



Prof. Shen Weirong, Chinese Department of Tsinghua University



The main Conference Hall of 1st International Symposium on Tibetan and Himalayan Studies

After a brief opening ceremony, the plenary session began with keynote speeches by Prof. Shen Weirong, Prof. An Caidan, Prof. Xion Wenbing and Prof. Andre Bazalov.

There were 9 panel sessions dedicated to various aspects associated with Tibetan and Himalayan studies, including Tibetan history, culture, philology, religion, literature, anthropology, art, populations, historical records and modernity. The next (2nd International Symposium on Tibetan and Himalayan Studies) symposium will be held in October, 2018.

Please visit the website (<http://gwzx.snnu.edu.cn/>) for more information about the Foreign Tibetology Research Center and The Symposium on Tibetan and Himalayan Studies.

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One of the First Samples of Cursive Tibetan in European Collections¹

Alexander Zorin

The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences,
Russia

Abstract: This paper introduces a letter in cursive Tibetan that was obtained by P.S. Pallas, presumably in Buryatia at the beginning of the 1770s. In 1773, he sent it to I. Bacmeister who obviously added it to the collection of Tibetan and Mongolian texts at the Library of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences. It is now preserved at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS (previously called the Asiatic Museum). This early European acquisition of a cursive Tibetan document has a historical value since it belongs to the history of Proto-Tibetology,² although the letter was never published or studied. The full text of the document, its description and translation are provided in this paper. The letter contains a prognosis from one of the Sakya hierarchs on a query of a lay Buddhist concerning his future life and necessary measures to secure longevity and avoid a bad reincarnation.

Key words: P. S. Pallas, Tibetan official letters, cursive writing, Sakya sect

Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811), a great German and Russian scientist and explorer, collected some materials on Buddhist culture of the Buryats and Kalmyks

¹ This paper would not have been written without generous help from several colleagues and friends of mine whose names are mentioned in the respective footnotes. I am especially grateful to Joerg Heimbel for his editing my paper. Any errors that remain are my sole responsibility.

² The term was introduced by H. Walravens; see Walravens 2008, 150.

for the St. Petersburg Imperial Academy of Sciences during his long expedition through remote Russian provinces from 1768 to 1774.³

On July 18, 1773, he wrote a letter to Johannes Bacmeister (1732–1788), a bibliographer at the St. Petersburg Academy Library, including the following passage:

Indessen lege ich eine Probe von einer unter den Mongolen sehr gebräuchlichen Schrift Schar oder Akschur⁴ bey, welche theils tangutisch (wie in dieser Probe selbst), theils auch mongalisch, welches nicht jedermann lesen soll, zu schreiben wird. Mann liest selbige von der linken zur rechten und ich habe in Selenginsk gebeten, die verlangte Übersetzung in der tangutischen Sprache, theils mit der gemeinen Schrift Tangut, theils mit dieser, welche mann die tangutische Courant-schrift nennen könnte, schreiben zu lassen. Ich besitze ein Alphabet und Silbenbüchlein, wo Tangut, Akschur und Mongol untereinander stehen. (Meanwhile, I am enclosing a sample of the Shar or Akshur script wide spread among the Mongols, to be written partly in Tangut (as in this very sample), partly also in Mongolian and not legible for everyone. It is to be read from left to right and I asked in Selenginsk to have the stipulated translation in the Tangut language partly in the ordinary Tangut script, partly in this one that can be called the Tangut cursive script. I own an alphabet and syllabary in which the Tangut, Akshur and Mongolian are given one below the other.)⁵

This letter published by F. Wendland in his biography of P. S. Pallas is now preserved in the Library of Leipzig University.⁶ It must have been left by Bacmeister in Leipzig where he presumably had received it, according to Wendland. What about the sample of cursive writing sent by Pallas? It does not seem plausible

³ On the artefacts brought by Pallas and kept at the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, RAS (Kunstkamera), see Ivanov 2009, 262–268.

⁴ Both terms seem to refer to the Tibetan word *gshar*, the first of them directly, the second being its Mongolian rendering, although it needs to be ascertained. V. L. Uspensky assumes (an e-mail from 2016-08-16) that this reading could be based on the exact transliteration of the Tibetan word with the use of the prefix *g*, i.e. *gshar* (attested in the Kovalevsky dictionary, p. 1453), that would cause the addition of the initial *a*. The change of the root vowel *a* into *u* is possible, too. N. S. Yakhontova (an e-mail from 2016-09-18) supported it with the example of the Mongolian word *agshin*, ‘a moment’, which is clearly originated from Sanskrit *कश्चिन्*. I would like to thank these colleagues as well as A. D. Tsendina for their consultations on the matter.

⁵ I would like to thank H. Walravens for his improving my translation of this German fragment.

⁶ Wendland 1992, 129–130. Wendland explains that the words “die verlangte Übersetzung” (“the stipulated translation”) refer to Bacmeister’s query to obtain translations of a certain sample text into various Asian languages.

that Bacmeister, a responsible fellow of the St. Petersburg Academy Library, could leave it in Leipzig or elsewhere. Apparently, he did not.

In 2015, a manuscript that should be identified as the one mentioned by Pallas in his above-quoted letter to Bacmeister was found by me in the Tibetan collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and it was given an access number Tib.1017.

It is a letter on a single folio of Tibetan paper⁷ folded horizontally ten times and then in half vertically into a narrow slip of paper,⁸ ca 20.5 × ca 3.5 cm, the size of the entire folio being 29.2/29.7 × 40.0/40.5 cm.⁹ The outer side of this narrow slip bears the names of the sender and addressee but, when folded vertically in the opposite way, the slip has the next fold with some unrelated inscriptions as its outer side (for details see below). The main text of the letter is found on the inner side of the folio.

The document is inserted in an envelope made of 18th century Russian paper that has a German inscription with black ink: 23. Tangutische Schrift welche mit dem besonderen Courant Charakter Akschur genannt, geschrieben ist (23. Tangut writing, written in a special cursive style called Akschur). No. 23 refers to the appendix compiled by J. H. Busse to I. Jährig's catalogue of Tibetan and Mongolian texts and Lamaist icons that had been preserved at the St. Petersburg Academy Library by the end of the 1780s. The appendix consists of thirty-six entries, most of the "Tibetan" entries use the word Tübätisch (Tibetan) while Nos. 22–24 pertain to the word Tangutisch (Tangut) that was commonly used by the Europeans up to the end of the 18th century. Without doubt, these entries repeat the original labels given to them by either Bacmeister or the person (or people) who had sent them to St. Petersburg. In the case of No. 23, we find a very close rendering to Pallas's characteristic of the manuscript sent by him to Bacmeister — the words *courant* and *Akschur* are especially meaningful. I suppose we can be sure it is this exactly document that was acquired by the Library from Pallas, in 1773.¹⁰ It was one of the very first Tibetan manuscripts written in a cursive script and obtained by European

⁷ No chemical analysis was made but the texture of paper looks like Tibetan and it must be Tibetan, given the origin of the letter.

⁸ This type of Tibetan texts is "found among Dunhuang manuscripts and constantly used in Tibet" (Helman-Ważny 2014, 61).

⁹ Both the length and the width of the folio differ slightly in size because its edges are not even.

¹⁰ On Busse's appendix and contents of the collection of Tibetan and Mongolian texts gathered at the Library of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences by the end of the 18th century and later passed to the Asiatic Museum (founded 1818), see Walravens and Zorin (forthcoming).

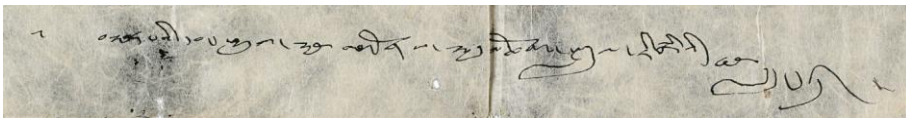
academic institutions. Hence, it has some historical value, even though it was never published or studied. Meanwhile, the text of the manuscript has some significance of its own and deserves an edition and examination.

This is a good sample of an official reply to a query for astrological prognosis and religious advice sent to an important Tibetan lama by a lay person, or, perhaps, on behalf of him. From the letter we learn that the person's name was Tshedrup (Tshe sgrub), aged nineteen, the lama known by the title Sakya Choktrül Rinpoche (Sa skya mchog sprul rin po che), about whom I have failed to find any information. The sender of the letter offered some donations (a silver disc and silk) to the lama and received in return a blessed talisman. Both the query and response are written in a laconic way, following the style of an official document.¹¹ Accordingly, a certain type of cursive script called gshar was used, which is characterized by H. Schneider as “a variant of the Tibetan cursive script resembling the vkhyug yig but using more elaborated characters.”¹²

The text of the document is presented below in the following way: (i.) a brief description for each part, (ii.) a reproduction of the relevant area of the document¹³ supplied with (iii.) a Wylie transliteration,¹⁴ and (iv.) its English translation. The reproductions of the entire inner side and the text area on the outer side are also provided to secure a better understanding of how the document looks like.

The inner side

The main text of the document is found here. It consists of three parts. The first and third parts must have been written by or on behalf of the person who needed the astrological consultation. The second part, placed in between, was written by the scribe at a Sakya monastery.



¹¹ For a study of this style, see Schneider 2002.

¹² *Ibid.*, 417, no. 19. Jamgön Kongtrul treats this term as a general name of Tibetan cursive scripts; see Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Taye 2012, 258 (see also no. 471 on p. 781).

¹³ The photographical reproductions were specially prepared for this edition by my friend M. B. Iokhvin. The text of the original document is rather pale and partly not very well legible.

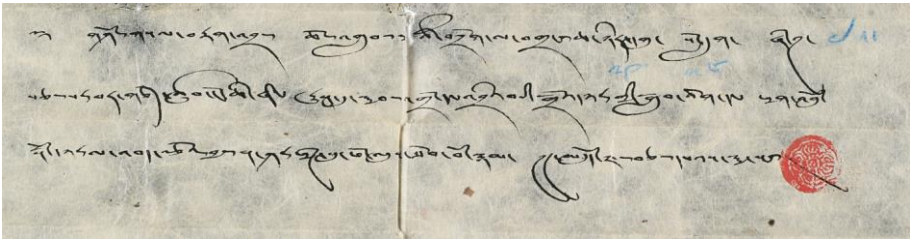
¹⁴ Some difficult points of the handwriting were most kindly clarified for me by Geshe Lharampa Chamba Tonyut, Drepung Gomang Monastery, India. I would like to thank also J. Heimbels and V. L. Uspensky for some important remarks on the text.

1. The name of the addressee: one line (a) written in an area of the folio corresponding to the third fold starting from the top.

a. Z bstan pavi dbang phyug skyabs mgon sa skya mchog sprul rin-o-evi (=rin po chevi)¹⁵ zhabs drung du | |

To the feet of the Lord of the Doctrine, Refuge and Protector, Sakya Choktriül Rinpoche.

2. The response on the query: three lines (b–d), the position of which corresponds to the fourth and fifth folds starting from the top.



b. @| gsham gsal brtag vbras _ chos vgrub kyi tshe bsrog la bgrangs cha nyer dgu [29] _ so drug [36] _ zhe lnga [45]

c. bcas par bar gcod tshub ngo che zhing _ rgyun du skyabs vgro dang vbrel bavi sgrol dkar gyi sgrub chog dang _ phyag vbum

d. rnam dkar la vbad rtson byas na shar phyogs su pho lus thob bam snyam _ sngags mdud-am (= mdud dam) rdzas bcas dpal sa skya nas

The result of the investigation [concerning the questions] listed below. During Chödrupe's¹⁶ life-span serious dangers are [to be expected] at the age of 29, 36 and 45. If [he] continuously makes an effort towards virtuous activities [such as of] the ritual for accomplishing White Tara in combination with [the practice of] going for refuge and [of making] 100.000 prostrations, [I] believe [he] will [, in his next life,] obtain a male body in the Eastern direction.

From Glorious Sakya, with a mantric knot and blessed substances.

The Tibetan numbers for 29, 36 and 45 are written with a blue ink next to the respective Tibetan words.

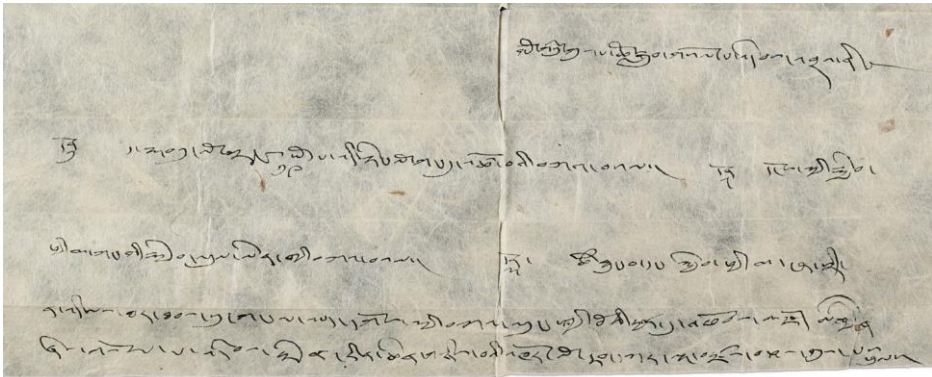
¹⁵ Some bsdu(s) yig found within the manuscript are rendered by me in this way.

¹⁶ The true name of this person was Tshedrup (Tshe sgrub) as will follow from two passages written by either himself or the person who composed the letter for him.

Upon the final shad sign a red seal with a crossed vajra and the respect marker ལྟོ in the center is stamped upside down.¹⁷ It was rotated for reproduction:



3. The query: five lines (e-i), the position of which corresponds to the four lower folds of the folio.



e. sgo gsum gus pa tshe sgrub gsol ba vdebs vbras ni |

f. don 1 _ da skabs-u lo grangs¹⁹ yod pa vdi steng lo gang du vtsho bavi bkav bsal | _ don 2 _ dngos kyi skye ba

g. phyi ma gang gi skye ba lus len gyi bkav bsal | _ don 3 _ tshe thung ba dang skye ba phyi ma ngan srid

h. na vdi las thar thabs su gang la vbad dgos kyi bkav lung spyi bovi rgyan du vphobs¹⁸ mdzod mkhye-en

¹⁷ I have not found such a seal at the web site of the Tibetan Historical Documents (Bonn University) that presents the largest electronic database of Tibetan seals: <http://www.dtab.uni-bonn.de/tibdoc/index1.htm>.

i. zhes gsol pa vdebs rten rin chen gnyis bavi vkhor lo rab dkar lha brdzas bcas gus pas phul |

Here is the request of Tshedrup (Tshe sgrub) devoted in the three gates.

Could you please bestow on [my] bead (1) an answer until what age, in addition to [my] present age of 19 years, [I] will live; (2) an answer of what rebirth [I] will take in my next life; [and] (3) instructions what efforts [I] should undertake in order to try to escape from a short life-span and from a rebirth in a miserable existence. This request is respectfully offered with a silver disc and a pure white silk scarf [as] enclosures.

The outer side

This side contains four inscriptions, only one of them relating directly to the text of the letter. I will start with this inscription and then continue with the others.

1. The names of the addressee and the person whose query is sent to him are written in the area that corresponds with the first fold according to the inner side and the last one according to the outer side. When the document is folded, this area is what can be seen immediately.



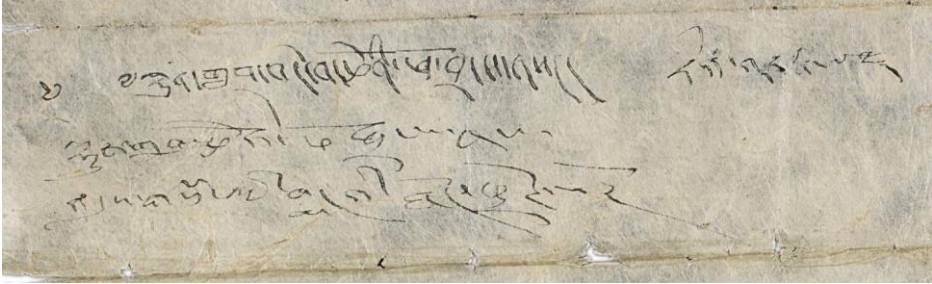
Z bstan pavi dbang phyug sa skya mchog sprul rin po chevi zhabs drung du
 ___ || sgo gsum gus pa tshe sgrub nas phul |

To the feet of Sakya Choktriül Rinpoche, the Lord of the Doctrine, ___ offered from Tshedrup devoted in the three gates.

2. To the right of the previous inscription (see the fig. above), the name Blo bzang is written in the standard dbu can script, the direction of the inscription is different as can be seen from the previous figure. Why this name is written there remains unclear.

3. The following inscription found on the second fold has no clear link with the letter. I am providing but a tentative reading and translation

¹⁸ phebs(?).



- a. @ _ Z lhun grub bde ba chen-ovi [=chen povi] pho brangs nas | __ ???¹⁹
 b. lhun grub chos-or-i [=chos vkhor gyi] pho brangs nas |
 c. vdus gsum gyi bad+mavi thaṃ-d (=thams cad) phyogs so |

From the palace of Lhündrup Dewachenpo...?

From the palace of Lhündrup chökhor...

The place of all lotuses of the three periods.

4. The final inscription is written with blue colour on the same fold as the previous one and seems to be just an exercise in writing.



sa-rgyas (=sangs rgyas) thaṃ-d (=thams cad) vdus pavi sku

The body that unites all the Buddhas.

Conclusions

¹⁹ rig vdzin Z | (?)

The document Tib.1017 preserved at the IOM RAS was obtained by the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences in 1773 from P. S. Pallas, thus being one of the earliest samples of Tibetan cursive writing in European academic institutions.

It was numbered by I. Busse in his appendix to I. Jährig's catalogue of Tibetan and Mongolian materials kept at the Academy Library by the end of the 18th century. This number (23) is found on the envelope where the document is inserted. Afterwards, it was never catalogued or studied up to 2015.

The document is a letter sent by or on behalf of some lay person, Tshedrup, aged nineteen, to one Sakya master, named Sakya Choktrül Rinpoche, for astrological and religious consultation. Some precious offerings sent along with the letter are mentioned.

Thus, this letter has a historical value as both relating to the early stage of development of Tibetan studies in Europe and being an authentic Tibetan document presumably from the early 18th century. The seal with which the lama's reply was stamped may be taken into account by researchers of Tibetan sigillography.

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