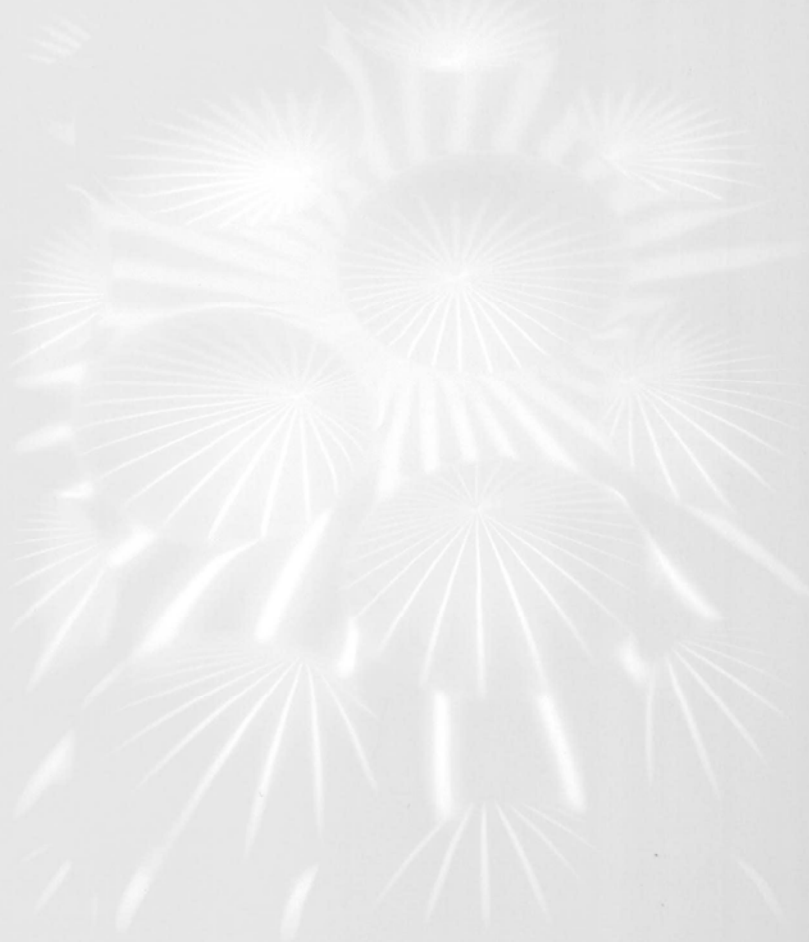


Old Tibetan Documents Online Monograph Series

Vol. II

OLD TIBETAN  
INSCRIPTIONS



Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa  
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

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# OLD TIBETAN INSCRIPTIONS

edited by

Kazushi IWAO

Nathan HILL

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with the collaboration of

Izumi HOSHI

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2009

Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa

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Izumi HOSHI, Yoshiro IMAEDA

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# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	vi
Kazushi IWAO	
Nathan W. HILL	
<b>Plates</b> .....	xi
1. Stele inscriptions : pls. 1, 2	
2. Tablet inscriptions : pls. 3, 4	
3. Rock inscriptions : pls. 5, 6, 7, 8	
4. Bell inscriptions : pls. 9, 10	
5. Wall inscription : pl. 11	
<b>Editorial Policies</b> .....	xvii
- Editing principles	
- Transliteration system	
- <i>Signes critiques</i>	
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	xx
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	xxi
<b>Map</b> .....	xxxiv
<b>List of inscriptions</b> .....	xxxvi
<b>1. Texts of major inscriptions</b> .....	1
1. Stele inscriptions	
2. Tablet inscriptions	
3. Rock inscriptions	
4. Bell inscriptions	
5. Wall inscriptions	
<b>2. Other inscriptions</b> .....	81
1. Stele inscriptions	
2. Rock inscriptions	
3. Others	

## Preface

The Old Tibetan inscriptions are, along with the Old Tibetan manuscripts discovered in Central Asia, among the most important materials for the study of the early Tibet. These inscriptions appear in various media, including stelae, walls, rocks, silver jugs, and clay. Their content varies as much as their material, from an international treaty to a soldier's graffito; this variation consequently reflects many facets of early Tibetan culture.

Despite this potential importance, in traditional Tibetan historiography these inscriptions were rarely recognised as historical materials. Few were the exceptions such as Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698-1755), who left copies of seven Old Tibetan inscriptions, now kept in Sikkim at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gantok. Although a passage of the Sino-Tibetan treaty is referred to in some texts of Tibetan historiography, generally speaking inscriptions became objects of veneration or were simply abandoned rather than being recognized as historical sources.

In the 19th century foreigners began to recognise the significance of these inscriptions. Early reports on inscriptions came mostly from Western Tibet and adjacent areas. The earliest report of any Old Tibetan inscriptions was made by G. Vigne (1801-1863), who found three inscriptions in Baltistan in 1836. After him, H.A. Francke (1870-1930) reported numerous inscriptions and rock bruising in Ladakh at the beginning of the 20th century.

In Central Tibet, the first inscription to be known outside Tibet was the Lhasa treaty inscription, rubbings of which circulated in China probably already in the later part of the 18th century, after the army of the Qing dynasty arrived in Lhasa. But it was only the Chinese side of that bilingual inscription that garnered attention at that time, with study of the Tibetan side beginning only in the 20th century.

As several foreigners succeeded in entering Tibet, many more inscriptions began to be reported. Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984) made several expeditions to Tibet and published in 1950 *The Tombs of the Tibetan Kings*, in which he introduced five inscriptions. H.E. Richardson (1905-2000), who was in Lhasa during 1936-1950 first as representative of the British Government of India and then after 1947 of the independent Government of India, visited several sites and published many inscriptions after his return to the U.K.

The 1980s was an epoch making period for Tibetan epigraphy as four important studies appeared in this period. In 1982 Wang Yao published Old Tibetan inscriptions in his *Tufan jinshilu* 吐蕃金石錄 (*A collection of Inscriptions on Bronzes and Stone Tablets*), which revealed the contemporary condition of the inscriptions after the Cultural Revolution. With this publication, it became known that some bell and stele inscriptions had been lost or broken during the Cultural Revolution. Subsequently, in 1984, Bsod nams skyid published *Bod kyi rdo ring yi ge dang bril bu'i kha byang* (*Texts of pillar and bell inscriptions*), the first Tibetan compilation of Old Tibetan inscriptions. In 1985 H.E. Richardson published *A corpus of early Tibetan inscriptions*, in which his numerous previous studies on inscriptions were definitively compiled and revised. Finally, in 1987, Li Fang Kuei and W. South Coblin published *A Study of the Old Tibetan Inscriptions*. Basing their work primarily on published photographs and rubbings, they gathered all of the available information on the major Old Tibetan inscriptions and published the revised texts, with annotated

translations. With these studies, the texts of the main inscriptions were finally available to scholars for systematic use.

This period of time also saw an increase in the quantity and quality of Tibetan and Chinese scholarship on inscriptions. This is exemplified by the collection *Bod kyi yig rnying zhib 'jug* (*Anthology of the Old Tibetan Studies*) edited by Kha sgang Bra shis Tshering, which includes seventeen Tibetan articles on Old Tibetan inscriptions.

The comprehensiveness achieved by the major studies of the 1980s was necessarily fleeting. New discoveries of significant historical inscriptions were sporadically reported. Among these rediscovered inscriptions, the most impressive are the rock carvings and inscriptions of Ldan ma brag and Brag lha mo introduced by Amy Heller in 1987. The small inscriptions and bruisings mainly found in Western Tibet had never been systematically gathered together, and here too numerous rock inscriptions and reliefs have continued to be newly introduced by Denwood (1980), Takeuchi (forthcoming), Jettmar and Sagaster (1993) and Denwood (2007).

In addition to new inscriptions becoming known, many new and old photographs of the inscriptions have been published in recent years. These are useful not only for checking the text itself but also for investigating the writing style from the standpoint of palaeography. As an example, *Precious Deposit* edited by 'Jam dbyangs and Wang Mingxing, a six volume series of photographs of Tibetan artefacts published in 2000, includes two clear colour photographs of the Rkong po inscription, a photograph of the tablet of Yer pa and a photograph of the rubbings of the inscription of Avalokiteśvara found at Spu sreng.

Newly published older photographs are especially useful in cases where the original artefact has been lost. In this respect special significance is taken by the Tibet Album, an Internet photo album of the old photographs taken by Westerners in Tibet. Many photographs of the Old Tibetan inscriptions previously unpublished are now available on this website (<http://tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk/index.php>).

Thus, now that twenty years have passed since Li and Coblin's publication, many more inscriptions have become available and new images and information regarding previously known inscriptions is also available. It is therefore useful to once again gather together all of the texts and relevant descriptive information in one place.

Soon after the publication of the first volume of the Old Tibetan Documents Online (OTDO) monograph series in 2007, we launched a new project treating Old Tibetan inscriptions. Five editors—Kazushi Iwao, Nathan Hill, Yoshiro Imaeda, Tsuguhito Takeuchi, and Izumi Hoshi—were selected for this new project. After several discussions, we agreed upon three main aims:

1. to accumulate the currently available information on Old Tibetan inscriptions,
2. to choose major inscriptions among them and input the texts of these into an online database, and
3. to publish the result as a printed book.

However, due to the limited time for editing, we decided to restrict the scope of our undertaking to materials incised or bruised in the Old Tibetan palaeographic style. Thus,

## Preface

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with the exception of the inscription in Yulin cave no. 25 we have excluded materials written with pen or brush, such as are found on textiles and wall inscription.<sup>1</sup>

The scope of 'Old Tibetan' is limited to the texts from the early 12th century or earlier, the dating being determined by dates explicitly given in the text, historical figures and events mentioned in text, and the palaeographic form of letters (see also Takeuchi 2004: 34).

The textual data were formatted in the OTDO style, and information on minor inscriptions was collected as far as feasible. These data will be put on the OTDO website, where one can use our 'key word in context' (KWIC) concordance system for searching any syllable or word in the texts as well as in other Old Tibetan manuscript texts. In total we were able to transliterate thirty-four major inscriptions and to collect information for minor inscriptions classified into twenty-nine items. However, as the OTDO is an ongoing Internet project, new information and new inscription shall be added. In this respect, as Y. Imaeda states in Introduction for the OTDO vol.1, the OTDO project is an open forum to which suggestions and contributions are most welcome.

We have to admit that the current condition of the studies on Tibetan inscriptions is not advanced when compared against research areas such as of Greek and Latin epigraphy. Many papers on Tibetan inscriptions give unverifiable readings, without any specification of whether they are eye copies made *in situ*, or based on photographs or rubbings. In those essays which do include photographs they are often not detailed enough, not large enough, or not reproduced carefully enough to be usable. For instance, the Zhol inscription is one of the most important and well-known inscriptions and also is more familiar and accessible than other inscriptions as it is in front of the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Nonetheless, no good image of the entire text has so far been reproduced.

A truly comprehensive documentation of Tibetan epigraphical monuments would include the systematic taking of photographs and squeezes of the entire corpus of extant monuments. Nevertheless, we hope that this volume, which represents the current state of the knowledge of Tibetan inscriptions, will be a valuable contribution for the future of Tibetan epigraphy.

This work would not have been achieved without the help of many people. We appreciate Amy Heller for providing us with much information and allowing us to access many unpublished photographs in her possession. Burkhard Quessel of the British Library kindly showed us the rubbings taken by H.E. Richardson. Brandon Dotson generously gave us permission to publish his photographs of the tablet in Yer pa. Tamara Hill has allowed us to publish two of her photographs. Yoshiharu Takahashi was kind enough to send us many of the photographs he took when he did an investigation of the inscriptions in Tibet. Sam van Schaik of the British Library gave us many valuable comments and advice. We also wish to thank Akihiro Sakajiri, Takatoshi Akagi, Ai Nishida, Meishi Yamamoto and Hitomi Hatate. We hope that those who have helped us will find the fruit of our labours, however imperfect, a fitting testament to our gratitude.

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<sup>1</sup>Wall inscriptions of Western Tibet will be covered by the project 'Inscriptions of Western Tibet' (<http://www.univie.ac.at/Tibetan-inscriptions/>).

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School of Oriental and African Studies  
University of London



# Plates

## 1. Stele inscriptions



Plate 1: The Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription (photo: Tamara Hill).



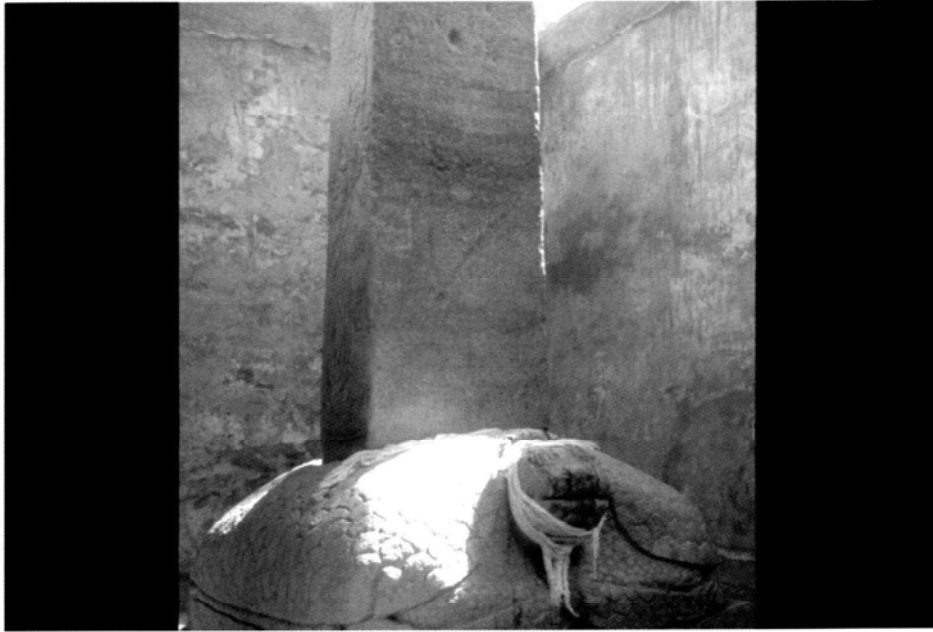


Plate 2: Inscription at the tomb of Khri lde srong brtsan (photo: Tamara Hill).

## 2. Tablet inscriptions

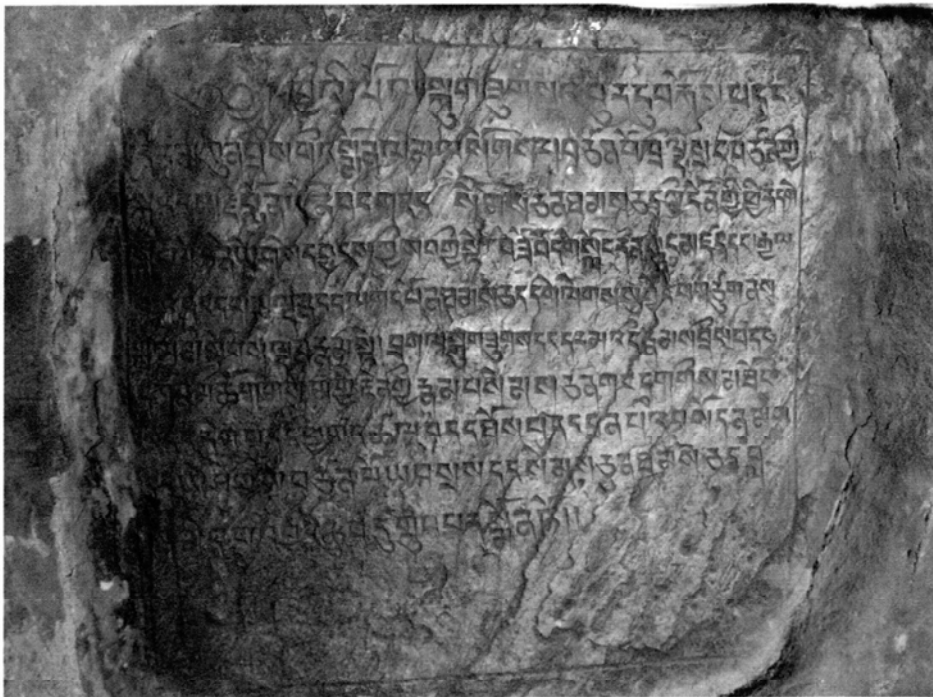


Plate 3: Inscription II at 'Bis khog (photo: Kazushi Iwao).



Plate 4: The Yer pa tablet (photo: Brandon Dotson).

### 3. Rock inscriptions



Plate 5: The first part of the inscription I at 'Bis khog (part. photo: Kazushi Iwao)

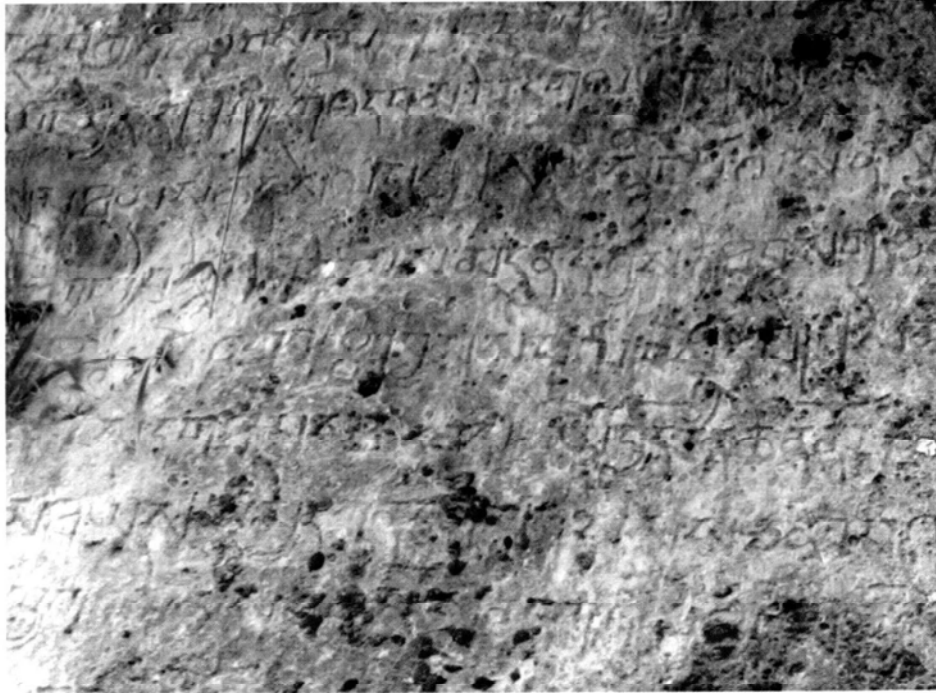


Plate 6: Detail of the inscription I at 'Bis khog (photo: Kazushi Iwao)



Plate 7: The Leb khog inscription (photo: Kazushi Iwao).

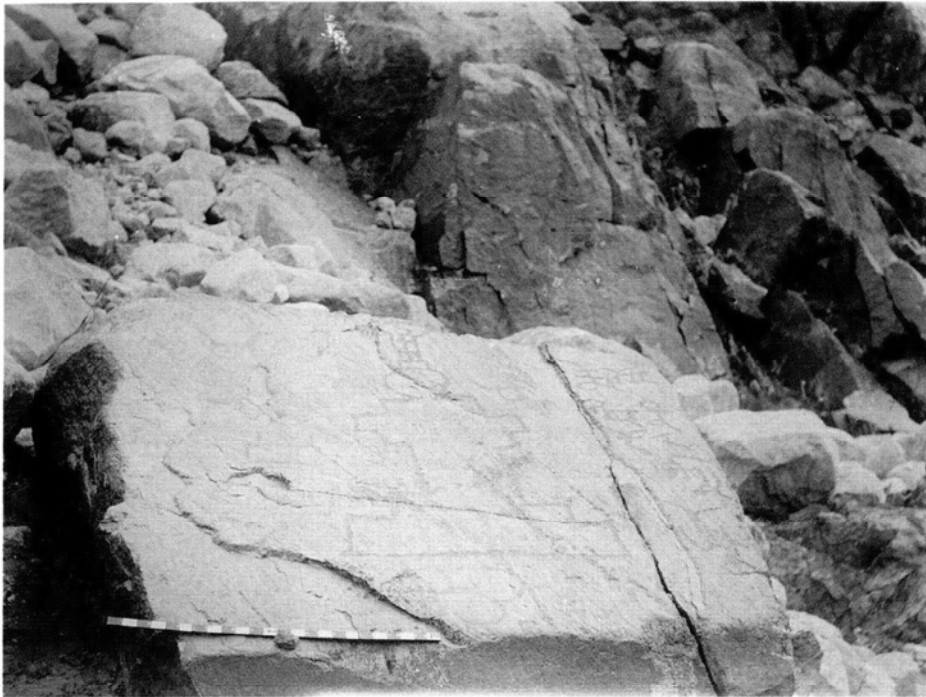


Plate 8: Tibetan inscription at Darkōt pass  
(Photo 392/28(121) ©The British Library Board).

#### 4. Bell inscriptions



Plate 9: The Bell inscription at Bsam yas (photo: Tsuguhito Takeuchi).



Plate 10: Detail of the Bell inscription at Bsam yas (photo: Tsuguhito Takeuchi).

## 5. Wall inscription



Plate 11: The inscription at Endere (after Stein 1907, vol.2, pl.XII).

# Editorial Policies

## Editing principles

In order to retain the peculiarities of the original documents such as archaic spellings, alternation between aspirated and unaspirated consonants, the use of *ya btags*, etc, the text is transliterated as it appears and is edited as lightly as possible with minimal annotations. As a consequence, liaisons like *phyogsu* (for *phyogs su*) and alternation between aspirated and unaspirated consonants are left untouched without emendation.

However, in order to facilitate the reading of the transliterated text, the following measures have been taken by deliberate editorial decision:

1. A syllable is often divided into two parts, the first part being written at the end of a line and the second one at the beginning of the following line. In such cases, the two parts are merged together to reconstitute the original syllable and its line number is that of the line in which the radical letter of the syllable is written. For example, when *sang* is written at the end of line *n*, and the letter *sa* alone at the beginning of the following line (*n+1*), the syllable *sangs* is restituted at line *n*.
2. Very often the last letter of a syllable is written below the preceding letter (for economy of space), like རྩ for རྩ , and བཀྲ for བཀྲ . In such cases, *dang* and *bka'* are restituted without mention of this peculiar paleographical feature.

Full critical editing principles and notes can be found on the website of Old Tibetan Documents Online (OTDO)<sup>2</sup>, where search facilities, such as a KWIC concordance tool, are also available. Furthermore, as updating, revision, and enlargement will continually and regularly be done on the website, readers are advised to refer to it for the latest version.

## Transliteration system

The transliteration system of Tibetan followed in this edition is the one adopted for Old Tibetan Documents Online (OTDO) project. It is based on the Wylie system, but some changes and additions have been made in order to faithfully transliterate certain features in Old Tibetan manuscripts and inscriptions.

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<sup>2</sup><http://otdo.aa.tufs.ac.jp/>



## Consonants

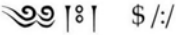
ཀ ka	ཁ kha	ག ga	ང nga
ཅ ca	ཆ cha	ཇ ja	ཉ nya
ཏ ta	ཐ tha	ད da	ན na
པ pa	ཕ pha	བ ba	མ ma
ཚ tsa	ཛ tsha	ཌ dza	ཡ wa
ཞ zha	ཟ za	འ 'a	ལ ya
ར ra	ལ la	ཤ sha	ས sa
ཧ ha	ཨ ḥa		

## Vowels

ཨ ḥa	ཨི i	ཨོ I	ཨུ u	ཨེ e	ཨོ o
ཨི ai	ཨོ au	ཨོ oe			

## Notes

- The letter ཨ is transliterated as ḥa with ḥ as consonantal element.
- The reversed *gi-gu* is transliterated with I (capital letter).  
གི gI    ཉི nI
- When the radical *ya* is prefixed with *ga*, the combination is transliterated as *g.ya*.  
གཡག g.yag (cf. རྒྱག gyag)    གཡུང g.yung (cf. རྒྱུང gyung)
- The *wa-zur* is transliterated with *v*, not with *w*.  
གྲ grva    ཕུ phyva
- When the letter འ is written beneath a consonant, it is considered as *gtags-yig*, not as a long vowel sign.  
ཨྱ ḥ'a (not â)    ཨུྱ h'u (not hû)    ཨོྱ s'o
- When two consonants form a vertical ligature which is not legal in classical Tibetan grammar, the + sign is inserted between them.  
ཨོྱ s+ho (cf. ཨོྱ sho)    ཨྱ z+ha (cf. ཨྱ zha)
- The *anusvāra* is transliterated with M (capital letter).  
ཨོྱྱ ḥ'oM    ཨོྱྱྱ ḥ'oM

- A *tsheg* is, irrespective of its forms, transliterated with a space. Therefore it is not physically represented in the transliteration. Single and double *tsheg* are not differentiated.
- A *shad* is, irrespective of its forms, transliterated with /, repeated the number of times that it is written.
- A sign marking the beginning of a follio, paragaph, etc. is, irrespective of its forms, transliterated with \$.  
 \$ /:
- The vertically placed two dots or circle (double *tsheg*) and four circles between two *shad* are transliterated with /:/ and /::/ respectively.

### *Signes critiques*

- rgya[s]  
Supplements; s is illegible or disappeared, but supplied by the editor.
- rgya[l?]  
Doubtful readings.
- [nus (/dus)]  
Ambiguous readings.
- [\*rgyas]  
Additions; letters omitted in the sources, but added by the editor.
- [---]  
Illegible letters; number unknown.
- nu[-]  
An illegible letter or letters in one syllable.
- {rgyas}  
Interpolations; letters found in the sources, but which are considered to be intrusions.
- Italic letters  
Letters read by the previous study(ies) but not reconfirmed by the editors.
- ###  
Blank spaces original to the inscription.



## Abbreviations

(aaa) : Original English title

(= aaa) : English title provided by editors

*I.Translit.* : Integral transliteration

*I.Trans.* : Integral translation

*P.Translit.* : Partial transliteration

*P.Trans.* : Partial translation

*7th IATS* : Krasser, H., Much, M.T., Steinkellner, E. and Tauscher, H. (eds), *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*, 2 vols., Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Oslo, 1997.

*AOH* : *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*.

*BYZ* : Kha sgang Bkra shis tshe ring (ed.), *Bod kyi yig rnying zhib 'jug / Zangzu wenxian yanjiu* 藏族文獻研究 (*Anthology of the Old Tibetan Studies*), Minzu chubanshe 民族出版社, Beijing, 2003.

*BZ* : *Bod ljong zhib 'jug (Tibetan Studies)*.

*Dulan* : Beijing Daxue Kaogu Wenbo Xueyuan 北京大學考古文博學院 and Qinghaisheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 青海省文物考古研究所 (eds), *Dulan Tufan mu* 都蘭吐蕃墓 (*Tibetan Tombs at Dulan, Qinghai*), Kexue chubanshe 科學出版社, Beijing, 2005.

*IDP* : International Dunhuang Project, <http://idp.bl.uk/>

*INBUDS* : *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 印度学仏教学研究 (*Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*).

*JRAS* : *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

*KB* : *Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig (China Tibetology)*.

*NCG* : *Nihon Chibetto Gakkai Kaihō* 日本西藏学会会報 (*Report of the Japanese Association for Tibetan Studies*).

*TJ* : *The Tibet Journal*.

*WW* : *Wenwu* 文物 (*Cultural Relics*).

*XY* : *Xizang Yanjiu* 西藏研究 (*Tibetan Studies*).

*ZZ* : *Zhongguo Zangxue* 中國藏學 (*China Tibetology*).

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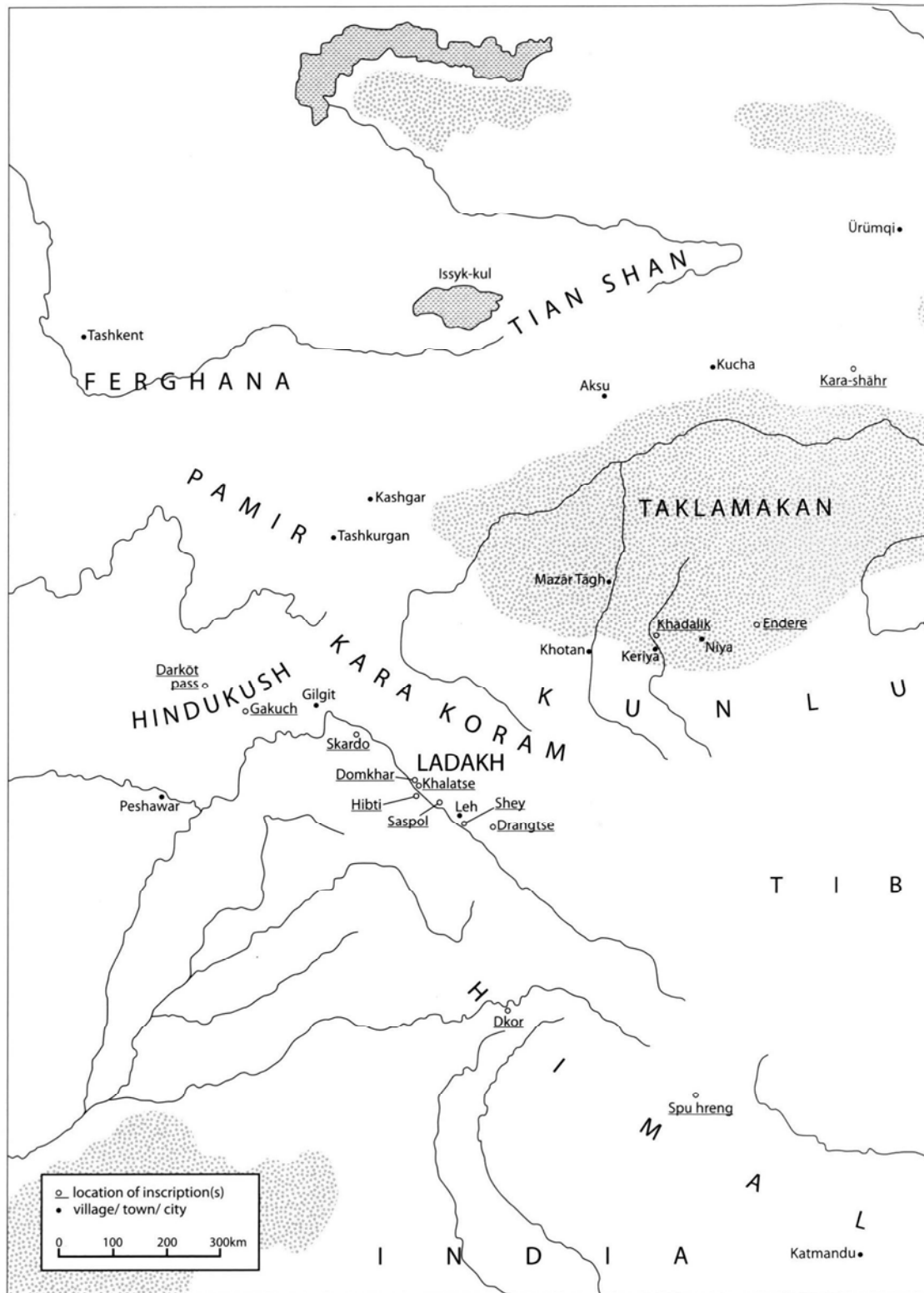
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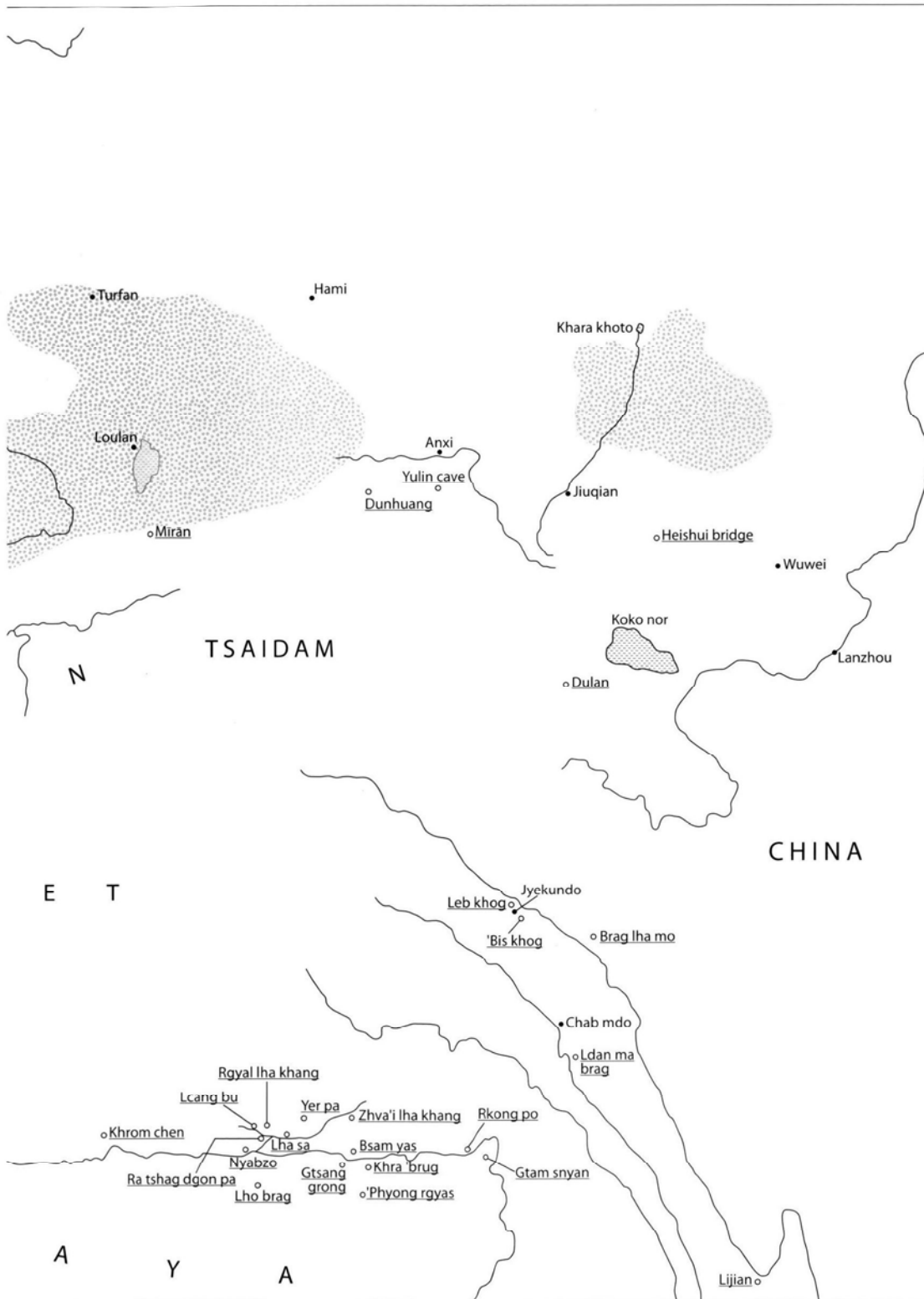
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# List of inscriptions

## 1 Texts of major inscriptions

### 1.1 Stele inscriptions

1.1.1 The Zhol inscription .....	4
1.1.2 Stele found at Lijiang .....	10
1.1.3 The Bsam yas inscription .....	11
1.1.4 Inscription at the 'Phyong rgyas bridge .....	13
1.1.5 The Rkong po Bde mo sa inscription .....	15
1.1.6 West inscription at Zhva'i lha khang .....	17
1.1.7 East inscription at Zhva'i lha khang .....	20
1.1.8 The Skar cung inscription .....	22
1.1.9 Inscription at the tomb of Khri lde srong brtsan .....	25
1.1.10 The Lcang bu inscription .....	29
1.1.11 The Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription of 821-822 .....	32
1.1.12 The Khrom chen inscription .....	43
1.1.13 Inscription of Avalokiteśvara found at Spu hreng .....	48
1.1.14 First stele at Gtsang Grong .....	50
1.1.15 Second stele at Gtsang Grong .....	52

### 1.2 Tablet inscriptions

1.2.1 Fragmented tablet from Yer pa .....	54
1.2.2 Inscription II at 'Bis khog .....	55

### 1.3 Rock inscriptions

1.3.1 Inscription A of Brag lha mo .....	58
1.3.2 Inscription B of Brag lha mo .....	59
1.3.3 First inscription at Ldan ma brag .....	60
1.3.4 Second inscription at Ldan ma brag .....	61
1.3.5 Third inscription at Ldan ma brag .....	63
1.3.6 Fourth inscription at Ldan ma brag .....	64
1.3.7 Inscription at Leb khog .....	65
1.3.8 The Lho brag inscriptions .....	66
1.3.9 Rock inscription near Zhva'i lha khang .....	67

### 1.4 Bell inscriptions

1.4.1 The bell at Bsam yas .....	70
1.4.2 The bell at Khra 'brug .....	71
1.4.3 The bell at Yer pa .....	72

<b>1.5 Wall inscriptions</b>	
1.5.1 Inscriptions in the temple cella of Endere .....	74
1.5.2 Inscriptions on the eastern wall of the Hall of Endere .....	75
1.5.3 The Dunhuang cave no. 365 inscription .....	77
1.5.4 The Dunhuang cave no. 75 inscription .....	78
1.5.5 The Yulin cave no.25 inscription .....	79
<b>2 Other inscriptions</b>	
<b>2.1 Stele inscriptions</b>	
2.1.1 Inscription at Gtam snyan .....	84
2.1.2 Inscription I discovered in a tomb in Dulan 都蘭 .....	84
2.1.3 Inscription II discovered in a tomb in Dulan 都蘭 .....	84
2.1.4 Inscription at Ra tshag dgon pa .....	84
2.1.5 Stele at Rgyal lha khang .....	85
2.1.6 Sino-Tibetan bilingual inscription at the Heishui 黑水 bridge .....	85
2.1.7 Two pillars at Nyabzo .....	86
2.1.8 Inscription at Dkor .....	86
2.1.9 Inscription at Skardo in Baltistan .....	86
<b>2.2 Rock inscriptions</b>	
2.2.1 Inscription I at 'Bis khog .....	88
2.2.2 Five inscriptions at Balu-mkhar .....	88
2.2.3 Inscriptions at Ka ru ko sa .....	88
2.2.4 Inscriptions in Shey .....	89
2.2.5 Inscriptions at Drangtse .....	89
2.2.6 Inscription at Darkōt Pass .....	90
2.2.7 Inscription at Domkhar .....	90
2.2.8 Inscriptions at Gakuch .....	90
2.2.9 Two inscriptions at Hibti .....	91
2.2.10 Three inscriptions at Satpara in Baltistan .....	91
2.2.11 Inscriptions at Khalatse .....	91
2.2.12 Three inscriptions on the bank of the Indus in Khalatse .....	92
2.2.13 Inscriptions at Saspol .....	92
<b>2.3 Others</b>	
2.3.1 Inscription on the image of Maitreya found in Leh .....	96
2.3.2 Inscription on a statue of Avalokiteśvara .....	96
2.3.3 Fragment of a pottery vessel unearthed from Mīrān .....	96
2.3.4 Fragment of a pottery vessel unearthed from Kara-shāhr .....	97
2.3.5 Clay stūpa model from Khādalik .....	97
2.3.6 A silver gilt flat-bottomed cup .....	97
2.3.7 A silver gilt vase .....	98

