

TIBETAN *MDO**

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*myi la la myi dgos pa'i/yan lag la ni zhib ching dgos pa'i mdo la ni
rtsing ba yang yod do//* "There are also some people being minutely
concerned with unnecessary details while dealing roughly with
essential points."

Phu bos nu bor btams shing bstan pa'i mdo
(Edition of Chab spel [1997, p. 32])

This paper addresses the problems surrounding *mdo*, a Tibetan word occurring in varied contexts (religion, jurisprudence, geography, medicine etc.); and several difficult Tibetan passages are also discussed.

Key words: Tibetan orthography, toponym, medicine, India, China.

Tibetan *mdo* refers, in the first place, to the meeting point (*thug / 'phrad mtshams*) of two roads (*lam mdo, srang mdo* 'junction'), two rivers (*chu mdo* 'confluence'), two valleys (*lung mdo* 'mouth of the valley'), and two channels / furrows (*dka' mdo, rka mdo*). The meeting place of three roads etc. is *sum mdo* (*sum / gsum* 'three') and that of a crossroads is [*lam*] *bzhi mdo* (*bzhi* 'four'). Hence '*dus mdo* 'the gathering point', *gyes mdo* 'the parting point', '*gag mdo* 'the strategic locale', *mdo 'gag* 'the juncture, the crucial point', *spyi mdo* 'general summary', *mdo don* 'gist' (also *rdo don* where *rdo* being a variant of *mdo* has nothing to do with *rdo* 'stone'), *mdor bstan* 'concisely shown', *mdo tsam* 'just briefly', *mdor bsdus na* 'in summary'. In pathology, we have *tsha grang gal mdo*, the crucial point of the transition of body temperature. In religion, we have *mdo* 'scripture' for Sanskrit *sūtra*, the Buddha's teachings that were gathered into compilation (*mdo dril ba*) forming the essential precepts that every Buddhist should follow.

In the process of reading Tibetan texts, one may find that there are other words which seem to be phonetically and semantically related to *mdo* and the problem is made complicated by Tibetan orthography which may not reflect the actual pronun-

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ciation of *every* Tibetan word at the time when the words were first written down in the forms we see today¹. In addition, it may not be easy to grasp its meaning when it occurs in contexts with which we are not completely familiar. I shall present just a few cases in this paper.

mdo, zla, do

In the *dbu can* version of U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal's (1230–1309) biography edited by Rta mgrin tshe dbang and published in Tibet, one finds this sentence:

zla ba thams cad hal cing <zhing> dad par gyur skad/
(Bsod nams 'od zer 1997, p. 198)

It is said that all *zla ba* panted and were inspired by faith.

Zla ba means 'the moon, month, soma, semen' which does not fit in this context. The same sentence reads somewhat differently in the *dbu med* version reproduced and published in Sikkim:

mdo bo pa thams cad ha las shing dad par gyur skad/
(Bsod nams 'od zer 1976, p. 140)

It is said that all *mdo bo pa* were amazed and inspired by faith.

There are at least two possible ways to read this:

- (1) *Mdo bo pa* may refer either in general to those dwelling in the lower valley (*mdo, mda*) or in particular to the members of *Mdo bo che ba*, a branch of the *Bka' brgyud pa* school (Smith 1970, p. 7). The variance of spelling, probably indicative of dialectal difference, is also found in the compound *zla 'gril* (compare also *zla* in *zla 'dres* 'to mix') and *mdo 'dril* 'gather together'.
- (2) *Zla ba* should probably be understood as *zla bo* 'companion, associate'. Zhang (1993, p. 2908) has *sa yi zla ba* 'the helpmate (助伴) of earth' as a kenning for gold. Likewise, it is probable that *mdo bo pa* is a variant of *do pa / do po* 'assistant, attendant'. To be sure, *zla* and *do* are synonymous. Consider '*gran do* = '*gran zla* 'rival, match', *do med* = *zla med* 'peerless, without a counterpart' and the binom *do zla* 'match, pair'. Therefore *zla ba thams cad* means 'the whole entourage'. As for *mdo bo pa*, the repetition of possessive suffix is not unusual. Dngul chu Dharmabhadra (1772–1851) writes with reference to

¹ There are variants of spelling, either retrieved from ancient manuscripts or coexisting in current usage, which may be traced to different historical periods or different geographical localities. There must also be cases where only later forms are extant. For instance, 'lynx' is spelled *dbyi* and *gyi*, supposed that *gyi* is a later development and is the only form known to us. Now, any study involving this word based on the assumption that *gyi* reflects the phonetic reality of the word when it was first recorded is destined to be flawed. A comprehensive dictionary of Tibetan variants of spelling based on extant sources such as Dunhuang documents, *gter ma* texts etc., is still a desideratum in Tibetan and Sino-Tibetan studies.

mda' pa 'dwellers of the lower valley' (to be distinguished from *mda' pa* 'archer'): *mda' pa zhes pa'i pa yig de dang por bdag sgra yin pa bden yang slar ming gi cha shas su gyur nas bdag sgra bskyar du sbyor dgos pa du ma mthong phu pa ba/ mda' pa ba/ chang ma pa/ thang ma ba/ zhes pa lta bu'o//* "Although it is true that the syllable *pa* of *mda' pa* is in the first place a possessive suffix, when it had further become part of the substantive, the need of affixing to it a possessive suffix as a repetition is seen in many instances such as *phu pa ba, mda' pa ba, chang ma pa, thang ma ba*" (1979, p. 473).

The *mda'* in *ra mda'* 'assistant' also has nothing to do with *mda'* 'arrow' but is related to *zla* in *zla rogs / grogs* 'companion, assistant', *bza' zla* (compare *za grogs*) 'spouse', *spun / tshang / tshad zla* 'brothers', *dpa' zla* 'an aide, lieutenant', *ming zla* '(in grammar) an auxiliary', *rtsed zla* 'a playmate' etc.² It is certain that *mda'* and *zla* were used interchangeably only after *zla* had assumed the same pronunciation as *mda'* [*da*]. The frequency with which Tibetan scribes and writers use homophones interchangeably represents a major obstacle to effective reading, especially for inexperienced students. This is reminiscent of the phenomenon which is very common in Classical Chinese known as *tongjia* 'borrowing of interchangeable characters (i.e., those with similar or close pronunciations)', the critical awareness of which reached its maturity only in the 17th–18th centuries when first-rate Chinese scholars turned their major attention from historiography to paleography and phonology³. Much work has still to be done especially in the domain of the Tibetan language before comparative studies of both can yield reliable results.

Besides *zla*, there is *do* meaning 'two, pair' (*dor* 'in a pair') as opposite to *gang* 'one'. Hence *bar [ma] do* 'intermediate existence (Skr. *antarabhāva*) between the two [states of death and rebirth]' (*skye 'chi bar do*). It is neither related to Pers. دو *du*, *do* 'two', nor, as suggested in Simon (1984, p. 133), to Skr. *dva*, Lat. *duo* and Ch. *dui*.

One may view *do gal* 'importance, crucial point' as but a variant of *gal mdo*. As for *chad mdo* 'a covenant [between two parties, or that brings two parties

² *ra mda'* = *ra grogs* is given already in Csoma de Kőrös (1834, p. 230). Рерих (1987, p. 10) gives 'помощь, содействие / help, assistance; помощник, подручный / helper, assistant; друг / friend'. The Qing official title 土司安撫使 (Manchu. *aiman-i toktobure bilure hafan*) was rendered by Tib. *jags byed rams* (read: *ram*, cf. *rogs ram* 'assist') *zla* 'a deputy assisting [the local chieftain in] the preservation of peace', see the second *juan* (no pagination) of Fu Heng et al. I do not know of any earlier occurrence of *ram zla* that predates *ra mda'*. In the translation of the *Vinayavibhaṅga* by the 8th-century Tibetan translator Cog ro Klu'i rgyal mtshan, we find the five hundred fishermen dragged out to sea by a giant fish (Tib. *chu srin*, Ch. *mojie* < Skr. *makara*) shouting *ra mda' zlog shig* (Peking Kanjur, 'Dul ba, Vol. Che, f. 146r, line 5; cf. *ra mda' ba bzlog pa* in line 6) which is given in Yijing's 義淨 (634–713) Chinese translation as 共我相濟 'Be with us [to / and] help / save one another!' – see 根本說一切有部毘奈耶 (*Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*), *Taishō* No. 1442, p. 669a. The function of *zlog* 'revert, counter' in this context is to make the preceding verb reciprocal (< Skr. *prati-*), hence *ra mda' zlog* = 'Help one another!'.

³ As for Tibetan scholarship in linguistics in the 18th–19th centuries, see van der Kuijp (1986, pp. 31–32, 48–49).

together?]', one should recall the Tibetan judicial term *mdo lon*⁴ in the fourth principle of Srong btsan sgam po's legal codes (*khriims yig*):

kha drag zhan gnyis rtsod na bden rdzun brtags pa'i mthar kha drag pa ma skyengs shing zhan pa yi mi 'chad par gcod pa mdo lon zhu chad kyi khriims yig (Dpa' bo 1986, p. 193).

If the lofty and the inferior dispute, to resolve it by not mortifying the lofty and not dejecting the inferior after examining what is right and wrong [is] the rule of judging a lawsuit (*zhu chad*) [by] *mdo lon*.

One may read *mdo lon* as 'to suffice (*lon pa*) two (*do*⁵, or the very two parties involved, *do bdag gnyis phyogs*)' or 'to attain / reach (*lon pa*) the meeting point

⁴ Cf. Mkhas pa Lde'u (1987, p. 270): *mdo lon zhu bcad kyi khriims dang bzhi*. This expression must not be confused with *mdo long* which occurs in the narrative of Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje's (1284–1339) transmigratory experience in his biography *bar do ma*:

[... ...] *cung zhig brgyal/ dran pa mdo long mdo long byung ba na nag la mun pa lci zhing 'thib pa khams 'tshub pa/* (Dpa' bo 1986, p. 923).

I tentatively read *mdo long* as 'du long which is synonymous with *zing long* 'commotion' or *zing long long* 'bustling, in a flurry' (see Zhang 1993, p. 2459). Cf. Btsan lha (1997, p. 993): *slong slong po* 'hurried, flustered'; Zhang (1993, p. 2817): *long long* 'swirling upheaval, seething, gust'. Compare also *thugs blong blong* 'perplexed, ruffled, discomposed' as in, e.g., Mgon po skyabs (1983, p. 41) where we read of the young Buddhist monk (who was to become the founder of the Ming Dynasty some sixteen years later) in his vacillation before deciding to join the mass uprising against the Mongol regime: [... ...] *ji ltar bya sogs kyi dogs pas thugs blong blong por gyur [... ...]*. A tentative translation for Karma pa: "[... ...] he fell unconscious for a little while. When his memory became perturbed (*smṛti-vibhrama?*), the darkness thickened, enshrouded [everywhere] and overwhelmed his body." The history by Tshal pa Si tu (1981, p. 95) reads *dran pa mdo long tsam byung / sku khams 'tshub cing 'o brgyal ba* which is rendered in Chen-Zhou (1988, p. 84) by 'after he has recovered consciousness (醒後) (!), he felt his body particularly wearied'.

⁵ The meaning of *do* is somewhat elusive in *do dgong* 'this evening', *do nub* 'tonight', *do zhag* 'recently' etc. Though it might appear that *do* in *do dgong* was 'di 'this' being assimilated by the subsequent vowel, such a principle of 'vowel harmony' cannot account for *do cig* 'the current year' which already occurs in the Dunhuang Sino-Tibetan lexicon studied by Lajos Ligeti (1968, p. 287). The meaning 'this' for *do* given by Jäschke and Das should not delude us. Consider *de ring* (lit. 'that period') and *de dgong* (lit. 'that evening') which have also come to mean 'today' and 'this evening' respectively and no lexicographer should thereby interpret *de* as meaning both 'that' and 'this'. Hahn (1994, p. 42) lists three demonstrative pronouns – *de* 'jener', *do* 'dieser', 'di 'dieser' – and states that "von ihnen wird *do* kaum verwendet". The compilers of the Tibetan–Tibetan–Chinese dictionary (= Zhang) were cautious in that the meaning 'this' is not included under the entry *do*. Judging from *do dgong* = *da dgong* 'this evening', *da* 'at present, right now' (also *da lta* 'at present'), *do shi* 'almost dead, dying', *do gsod* 'just about to kill' etc., *do* may well be understood as 'just, right, immediate'. It may not be amiss here to compare its semantic field to that of an unrelated Chinese word, namely, *dang* 當 'match, on a par with; right, proper, fit; should; right at the moment when...'. E.g., *bandang* 伴當 'retinue, companion' which was used to be translated as Mo. *nökör* in the *Secret History of the Mongols*: 薛兀迭列徹不速那可兒兀該 (*següder-ēce busu nökör ügei*), 除影兒外無伴當 'having no partner aside from [one's own] shadow', Eldengtei-Oyun Dalai (1980, pp. 88–89, 936); *zhèngdàng* 正當 'right, proper', *zhèngdāng* 正當 'just about..., *aller bien à...*; at an opportune moment'. In Buddhist Chinese, there is *danglai* 當來 '[that which] should come, the future'. More familiar words are *dangtian* 當天 'that very day, the same day', *dangye* 當夜 'right that very night', *dangxia* 當下 'hic et nunc', *dangshi* 當世 and *dangdai* 當代 'contemporary, nowadays'. Also *dangri* 當日 'that very day'

(*mdo*)’ (to reach a compromise). It is no less probable that *lon* functions like *slon* ‘mend’ or ‘blend, unite’ as in *zla bor slon pa* ‘to coalesce’ (cf. Zhang 1993, p. 2998). The reading remains doubtful.

mdo in the medical context

The following passage appears in the section dealing with the treatment of epistaxis (*sna khrag gcod pa’i thabs*) in Zur mkhar Mnyam nyid rdo rje’s (1439–1475) *Grangs med gsung ngag dum bu khrigs su bkod pa*:

[... ...] yang na ltag khung dang ro stod du chu grang phyar/
yang na dpral mdo la dbyug btsos <bcos> sam me btsa’ byas na chad
do/ (1977, 2: A, p. 34)

[... ...] or, [when] cold water was sprayed on the nuchal concavity (*ltag khung*)⁶ and the chest; or alternatively, when the treatment by [patting with a] stick or cauterization on the forehead’s *mdo* was done, [the bleeding] was stopped.

and *dangnian* 當年 ‘the current year’, both in the course of time have come to mean ‘in the past’. (A similar semantic shift can be observed, e.g., in Malay *sediakala* ‘previously, olden times’, *sedia* ‘to be ready, to make ready or prepared’ < Skr. *sadyaskāla* ‘the same day’, *sadyas* ‘the same day, just’.) For easy reference, a passage illustrating how *do nub* and *de ring* function is cited here: *tsandra go mi ’phags pa spyan ras gzigs kyi lha khang zhig na bzhugs kyin yod de/ zla grags kyi de ring rtsod pa mang po bkod pa’i lan/ do nub ’phags pa spyan ras gzigs la zhus te nang par lan btap pa na/ zla grags kyi lan gdab par mi nus so//* (Tāranātha 1976, p. 505) “While residing in a temple of Āryāvalokiteśvara, Candragomin asked Āryāvalokiteśvara at night (*do nub* ‘right at the same night’) for responses to the many arguments formulated by Candrakīrti during the day (*de ring* ‘that day, the same day’) and, when he answered back in the [following] morning (*nang par*), Candrakīrti was unable to riposte.” Berthold Laufer has Tangut *to*, *do* ‘true’ on his list of “words not traceable to allied languages” published in his pioneering study of Tangut in 1916 (1987, p. 703). It seems that these Tangut words, 𑖑𑖔 ‘genuine’, 𑖑𑖕 ‘right, upright’ (cf. Li Fanwen 1997, p. 930), together with Burmese *taw* ‘upright; proper, fit; meet; opportunely; just about’ (cf. Bernot 1981, p. 145, Judson 1953, pp. 499–500), are related to Tib. *do*.

⁶ *khung* ‘hole, hollow’, cf. *mchan khung* ‘armpit’. To mention in passing, *mchan* is a meaningful word which also indicates ‘intimate relationship’ as in *mchan gyi mchis brang* ‘beloved wife’, *mchan gyi bu phrug* ‘beloved child’ (Zhang 1993, p. 845) and for which, compare Manchu *oho siraha ahūn deo* ‘brothers of different fathers but of the same mother’ (Hu 1994, p. 598; lit. ‘armpit-related brothers’) and Ch. *zhouye* 肘腋 ‘those closest to oneself’ (lit. ‘elbow and armpit’). There are basically two *mchan bu* (*bu* ‘son’): *mchan bu*₁ ‘close associate or disciple’ and *mchan bu*₂ ‘glosses’. For the latter, cf. Ch. *zizhu* 子注 ‘sonly annotations’ which are notes inserted in a basic text. For the Buddhist origin of *zizhu* (ca. late 3rd–early 4th centuries), see Chen Yinke (Y. K. Tschen 1933 and 1939). However, the *mchan* in *mchan bu*₂ and *mchan ’grel* might very well be a loan word from Ch. *jian* 箋 (< [ts’ien]) ‘annotations, exegeses, scholia, memo’ simply taking the orthographic form of *mchan*. Note that *jian* is a variant of *qian* 籤 ‘a slip of paper containing notes pasted on a page or inserted in a book; memorandum; endorsement’ and so is *qian* 籤 (< [ts’iam]). The Mongolian equivalent for *ltag khung* is *sili-yin qongqurqai* (see Lessing 1995, pp. 707, 963).

This *mdo* refers to synapses and the junctures of a vessel (*rtsa mdo*)⁷. It is already found in the Tibetan medical classic *Rgyud bzhi*⁸ and in this connexion we quote the following from the commentary by Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705):

rkan gyi dkyil na dbang po bzhi 'dom ba'i rtsa sum mdo ris yod de/ yan lag brgyad par/ lce mig sna dang rna ba yi/[] bu ga bzhi ni 'dus pa dag/[] rkan <rkan> dang sgo ru kha bzhi ste// bu ga'i nang ni de rnams kyi/[] gnad ni sum mdo ris zhes bya// zhes gsungs pa dang/ de ltar nang rtsa dpyang thag bcu gsum/ phyi rtsa drug/ so rtsa ldad byed gnyis/ 'dom rtsa sum mdo ris gcig ste nyi shu rtsa gnyis po chu rtsa'i gnad du bstan no/ (1973, f. 155).

There is the confluence of the three meeting vessels of the four sense faculties in the centre of the palate, as said in the *Eight Branches*: “What combines the four cavities of the tongue, eyes, nose and ears is the quadrangle (*kha bzhi*) [shared] among the palate and the aperture; their crucial point (*gnad*, Skr. *marma* ‘vital spot’) within the cavities is called *sum mdo ris*,” and, as such, the suspending threads [linked to] the internal vessels being thirteen [in number], the external vessels being six [in number], the dental vessels of mastication being two [in number], the *mdo ris* of the three meeting vessels being one [in number], [totally] twenty-two, are shown at the crucial point of nerves (*chu rtsa*).

The *Eight Branches* refers to Vāgbhaṭa’s (Pha khol) *Aṣṭāṅga-hṛdaya-saṃhita* (*Yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po bsdu pa*). The verses cited were translated from the fourth section of the second chapter *Sārīrasthāna* (*lus kyi gnas*). The Sanskrit original for Tibetan *sum mdo ris* is *ṣṛṅgāṭaka* (Murthy 1991, p. 427, Hilgenberg–Kirfel

⁷ Tib. *mdo* as a medical term is equivalent to *xuedao* 穴道 (acupoint) in Chinese therapy. In Chinese medical philosophy the human body (microcosm) is likened to the universe (macrocosm). That is why most, if not all, of the names of acupoints can be traced to their astro-geographical origin. It must not be forgotten that *dao* is a geographical term. When a river flows into a larger one, the river is said to “take the right course” or to be “rightly conducted (道, 導) [by King Yu 禹, the hero in the Chinese legend of flood]” and the meeting place of both rivers is named *dao*, somewhat like *mdo* in Tibetan place-names such as Chab mdo, Mdo chu, A mdo, Dar rtse mdo etc. This is found in the *Dili zhi* (*Treatise on Geography*) in Ban Gu’s *Han History* (1st century B.C.), e.g., 夷水東至夷道入江 “The Yishui (or Yi River. The original meaning of Ch. *shui* is ‘water’, like its Tibetan equivalent *chu* ‘water, river’) flows eastward, reaches Yidao where it enters the Yangzi River” (1962, p. 1566). Chinese historians and archaeologists have long been aware of the fact that the toponyms that carry the word *dao* as found in Ban Gu’s treatise are traces of non-Chinese nomadic groups (Tibetans? Indo-Europeans?) in Shenxi and Gansu, e.g. Yidao 夷道, Qiangdao 羌道, Didao 狄道 etc. (see, for example, Xu 1933, p. 211). It is puzzling that Ch. *dao* was used in a much similar way like that of Tib. *mdo* mostly, if not exclusively, in “barbarian” toponyms. To my knowledge, no satisfactory etymology has been given of *dao* which is better known in European languages in the form of *tao* and has been fashionably, if not misleadingly, drawn parallel to Greek *logos*. This has to be treated on a separate occasion.

⁸ G-yu thog (1993, p. 411): *rkan gyi dkyil na 'dom rtsa sum mdo ris// nyi shu rtsa gnyis chu rtsa'i gnad du bstan//*

1941, p. 192). The locus of this particular *sum mdo ris* is well indicated in the 17th-century Tibetan medical paintings reproduced in Парфионович, “книга II, лист 14” (1994, p.129), where *rkan gyi dbus gsum mdo* is rendered by слияние трех сосудов неба and in “книга III, лист 38” (p. 269) where *rkan gyi dbus na gsum mdo ris* is given as [точка] трех ветвей сосуда «рамлуг» [? – my question mark] середины нёба. These are given respectively in the English version edited by Anthony Aris as ‘confluence of the three channels of the palate (*rkan gyi dbus gsum ’dus*)’ (1992, p. 199) – in which *’dus* (instead of *mdo*) must be an oversight – and ‘pattern of the [bloodletting locus of] confluence of three [vessels] at the mid-palate (*rkan gyi dbus na gsum mdo ris*)’ (p. 247). In Li Yongnian (1983, p. 308), *sum mdo ris* is rendered by *sanjiaowen* 三交紋 ‘pattern of the intersection of three [vessels]’. The new Russian translation also has «рисунок тройного слияния» (Дашиев 2001, p. 410). *Ris* has been understood as ‘pattern’. It should be noted that G-yu thog gsar ma Yon tan mgon po’s (12th-century) treatise has *’dom rtsa sum do <mdo> rigs* (1967, p. 277) while Padma dkar po’s (1525–1592) commentary has *gsum mdo ris* (1973, p. 354) as well as *sum mdo rigs* (p. 356). It therefore seems that among the several meanings of *ris*, the one of ‘class’ (e.g. *lha ris* ‘royal family’, *mtho ris* ‘high class [of birth]’) should be taken to match that of *rigs* ‘class, kind’. This may imply that there are other *mdo*-s apart from that at the mid-palate⁹, such as the one on the forehead, and they form a class of *mdo*-s. This, however, is not the case. We must bear in mind that although Tibetans had adopted a phonetic script modelled on the Indian writing system, Tibetan spelling had become deceptive in the course of oral and textual transmission. *Ris* and *rigs* have both come to be pronounced like *ri* ‘mountain’, i.e., all with a final stop. *Ri* in *ri mo* ‘drawing, pattern’ and *ri mo ba* ‘artist’ does not mean ‘mountain’ but rather should be taken as *ris* ‘pattern, figure’ as in *g-yung drung ris bris pa* ‘drawing the figure of a *svastika*’. Consider also *zla ba’i ra ri = zla ris* ‘the moon’s black spot’. Even if we are able to prove that the *rigs* in *sum mdo rigs* is not the result of textual corruption and that Padma dkar po did himself spell *rigs*, we still cannot rule out the possibility that by writing *rigs* he actually meant *ris* or *ri*. In fact *sum mdo ris* is nothing more than a calque on Skr. *ṣṛṅgāṭaka* ‘a place where four roads meet’, ‘a collection or mountain of three peaks’ (Wilson 1832, p. 856)¹⁰ – in which *ris* (= *ri*) serves to reflect the Skr. *ṣṛṅga* ‘peak’ (*ri rtse*).

⁹ Cf. Karma Si tu dbon (1997, p. 109): *gong du bshad pa’i gsang bzhi dang// ltag khung skra mtshams gyen tshon gang// bdud kyi mun khung zhes bya ste// nang na dbang po kun ’dus rtsa// sum mdo ris te btsod mdud ’dra// spra ba bdun gyis bsdam par bya//*

¹⁰ The second meaning is cited in Böhtlingk–Roth (1875, p. 290) which also gives ‘Dreieck’ and ‘Kreuzweg’ (cf. also Monier-Williams 1899, p. 1087). The Mongolian version of *Rgyud bzhi* is not available to me. However, from the manuscript of a Tibeto-Mongolian medical lexicon conveniently reproduced in Sárközi (1984, p. 262), we find that *gsum mdo ris* – the letter *sa* is added beneath *ri* in the manuscript – had been rendered by Мо. *γurban ebedčün-ü ayuljar* where *γurban* means ‘three’ and *ayuljar* ‘confluence, juncture, crossroads’. It is curious to find *ebedčün-ü ayuljar* instead of *tamir-un ayuljar* (*ebedčün* ‘disease’; *tamir* ‘blood vessel’). The translator seems to have been puzzled by *ris* and read it as *rims* ‘plague’; *rims nad* = Skr. *jvara* ‘fever’ is found at the beginning of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* where the Buddha is praised as one thoroughly cleansed of febrile disease (*rims nad legs par byang ba*) (Hattori 1968, pp. 23, 176, 238). I failed to locate in Бадмаева a reference to the anatomical term in question.

Is this then a “misspelling” on the part of later scribes or of the great translator (*lo chen*) Rin chen bzang po (958–1055) who translated Vāgbhaṭa into Tibetan? It should be noted that *mdo ris* is found in a Dunhuang manuscript on hippiatry, namely, *Pelliot Tibétain 1064* which had been studied by Anne-Marie Blondeau:

*rta rngo byung ba'i sman dphyad la thog ma rngo ga las 'byung
ba dang/ ma byung ba'i mtshams su/ lcags bsregs pas mched du mi
gnang bar/ mdo ris tshabs tsam du/ bskor la/*

Moyens de soigner la gale apparue sur un cheval. D'abord, on cautérise avec un instrument en fer, à la limite où la gale est apparue et où elle n'est pas encore apparue, et pour empêcher qu'elle ne se propage, on entoure cette région sur une surface d'environ un empan (?). (1972, pp. 240–241)

In connexion with the difficult *mdo ris*, Blondeau suggested, with a question mark, the reading of ‘a span’ (which should be *mtho re*). The correct reading, in all likelihood, is *mdo ris*¹¹. As the Dunhuang cave-depository was sealed around the mid-11th century, we may deduce that this spelling was current by Rin chen bzang po's time¹².

¹¹ I am thankful to the anonymous referee of *AOH* for drawing my attention to the fact that *mdo ris* also occurs in *Pelliot Tibétain 1297* published and translated under the title ‘A contract for the sale of a horse’ in Takeuchi (1995, pp. 155–158): *dge slong cang bon car gvis rta gcīg mjal te// spu rtags dang mdo [ri]s la// pho gva skya la mdo ris shing lo dang phyo mkhar mchīs pa gcīg [...]* *rta 'dī dbyar s[p]u khruste mdo ris lhag chad cig mchīs na' dpang rgya phral la brje bar bgyis//* ‘[T]he priest Cang bon-car bought a horse; as for its hair features and patterns (*mdo-ris*), it is a male [horse] with white nose (*gva*), its [body fur being] gray with patterns of the shapes of a leaf and *phyo-mkhar*; [... ...] if in summer time the hair [of] this horse having fallen and either a surplus or a shortage of its *mdo-ris* appears, the contract should immediately be replaced.’ Takeuchi adds: “I infer that *mdo-ris* may be either ‘pattern or shape of hair colour’ or ‘shape or bend of muscles’. Also, *mdo* may be considered as a variant spelling of ‘*do-ba* ‘excellent breed of horses’ or ‘horse’.” Chen and Wang (1983, p. 97), in an earlier edition of this document, furnishes a note for *mdo ris*, namely, *rta mdo ba'i spu ris* (pattern of hair – in respect to, understandably, the colour – of a horse). I read *spu rtags* as *spu* ‘hair’ and *rtags* ‘sex, genital sign’ (e.g., *mo rtags* ‘female, female genitals’) whereas *mdo ris* as the *ris* ‘family, species’ of *mdo* ‘horse’, see also note 13 below. In terms of *spu*, it is of *gva skya* ‘pale-grey forehead’ (*gva* ‘bovine or horses with white forehead’, see Zhang 1993, p. 379); in terms of *rtags*, it is *pho* ‘male’; in terms of *mdo ris* ‘species of the horse’, it is *shing lo dang phyo mkhar* (presumably the name of such a species). Also, *lhag chad* probably means ‘deficiency’ rather than ‘a surplus or a shortage’. Compare *skyid sdug* (lit. ‘happiness and misery’) which often means either ‘well-being’ or ‘ill-being’ exclusively. That is to say, it is probably not a copulative compound but is similar to the so-called *pianyi* 偏義 (‘semantically one-sided’) compounds in [Old, Middle, Modern] Chinese which consist of a pair of antonyms. It follows that *mdo ris lhag chad cig mchīs na'* may be read ‘should there be any deficiency [inherent in] the species’. My reading is admittedly tentative.

¹² The final stop of *ri* seems to be the remnant of a final -g, cf. *riga* ‘mountain’ in Zangskar dialect (Riaboff 1996, p. 26). The spelling *ris* was probably typical of the orthographic convention followed by Rin chen bzang po who came from the royal house of Mnga' ris gu ge. The only spelling variant of Mnga' ris known to me is Mnga' rigs (Anonymous 1987, p. 46) and both can mean ‘the class [of people] being ruled, subjects’ (cf. ‘*bangs rigs*) or ‘territory, assigned domain’ (cf. *dbang ris, sa ris / rigs*). There is good reason, however, to consider a possible link be-

The treatment of Tib. *mdo* in this paper is by no means exhaustive. Also, *mdo ba* / 'do ba 'steed, courier, messenger'¹³ found in Dunhuang manuscripts must be distinguished from the *mdo* discussed earlier. It is hoped that the facts presented in this paper, however trifling they might appear, can be of some use for future research.

tween the toponym and the mountain cult in the very region that is surrounded by the Himalaya and Kunlun mountains.

¹³ See Blondeau (1972, pp. 157, 297) and Btsan lha (1997, p. 360). Zhang (1993, p. 1413) has 'do ta 'messenger' which seems to be a variant of *mdo* / 'do rta. According to the 18th-century writer 'Jig med rig pa'i rdo rje, the Mongol prince Göden sent a *do rta zhes pa'i rkang mgyogs* ("einen Schnellfüssigen namens Dorta" – Huth 1892, p. 131) to 'invite' Sa skya paṇḍita for a meeting. The 15th-century writer Dpal 'byor bzang po (1985, p. 357) has *rdo tha* (cf. *tha* 'horse' in *tha skar* 'the star presided over by the Aśvins') *shri* (Ch. *shi* 'messenger'?) instead of *do rta*. Could it be the title by which Tibetans called the messengers of the Mongol relay system? It may be of interest that there was a courier system known as *mingtuo* in Tang China. The Song-dynasty writer Yue Shi recorded that Emperor Xuanzong's amour, Lady Yang, once dispatched secretly the *mingtuo* courier 私發明駝使 to send three Malay camphors (*dryobalanops aromatica*) – out of the ten which the emperor had bestowed on her – to An Lushan, the Turko-Sogdian general and excellent performer of the "Iranian whirling dance" (*Huxuanwu*), with whom she had a liaison. An interlinear note in Yue's record reads: 明駝使, 腹下有毛, 夜能明, 日行五百里. 'The *mingtuo* (lit. 'camel of light') courier, on the belly [of the camel he rode on] there is hair that could glow at night, travels five hundred miles per day' (1927, p. 11b). (This note is so poorly phrased that it sounds as though the glowing hair belonged to the messenger rather than to the camel!) The Qing poet Zha Shenxing 查慎行 (1651–1728) must have felt troubled by this fanciful account – indicative of the fact that the name *mingtuo* was foreign to the Song writer – when he offered a "less imaginative" but no less unpersuasive explanation in his miscellany *On Retreat amid the Multitude* 人海記 (1989, p. 114): 臥而齧草, 腹不貼地, 故曰明駝 'Lying down, it chews grasses [and] its belly never touches the ground. So it is called *mingtuo* ('camel of daylight', implying its being sleepless?).' In the poem *Mulan shi*, the heroine Mulan petitioned the *Qayan* to furnish her with a *mingtuo* which could travel as far as a thousand miles so as to send her home very soon (see Lu 1983, p. 2161). As is well known, this famous folk song from *circa* the 6th century A.D. might have undergone textual modification during the Tang period in view of a few traces of probable embellishment by Tang writers. The "History of Tibet" in the *New Tang History* states that the dromedary in Tibet traveled a thousand miles per day (see Ouyang 1975). According to Zheng Chuhui's *Miscellaneous Records on the Reign of Emperor Minghuang*, when the Turkic general Geshu Han was in charge of defending Qinghai from the Tibetan military threat, he had messengers travel five hundred miles a day on white camels to send reports to the Chinese emperor (乘白駝以奏事, 日馳五百里). Is there any connexion between the couriers of the two states (Tang and Tufan) known contemporaneously as *mingtuo* in Chinese and *mdo* in Tibetan? Such an inquiry is significant inasmuch as we know so little about the system of communications that enabled the Tibetan *btsan po* to rule his empire and to wage victorious wars against Tibet's neighbouring states. The term *mingtuo* had been translated into Manchu *serkingge temen*, Tibetan *rnga mgyogs*, Mongolian *sedgül temege* and Uigur *atan tügä* as can be found under the rubric *morin ulha-i hacin* in the Qing pentaglot dictionary (Tamura–Imanishi–Satō 1966, p. 926) and which seems to be the source for Захаров (1875, p. 590): почтовый дюжий верблюдъ, который пробѣжавъ 1.000 ли въ день при спаньѣ не садится брюхомъ и ногами на землю. Hauer (1955, p. 785) and Norman (1978, p. 239) merely give 'schnellgehendes Kamel' and 'a fast camel' respectively for *serkingge temen*. These are all very late translations which shed no light on the obscure Chinese name documented about a thousand years earlier.

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