

## The Princess and the Yak: The Hunt as Narrative Trope and Historical Reality in Early Tibet

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In a famous passage from the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, Tibet's earliest extant narrative of its imperial period (c.600–850), Princess Sad mar kar sings of a yak killed in the course of the hunt.<sup>1</sup> Symbolizing the kingdom of Zhang zhung, to whose king Sad mar kar is unhappily wed, the slain yak is butchered and divided among the hunters, who themselves represent constituent parts of Tibetan imperial society.

Oh! In the northern pastures, up a,bove,  
The bull, the lone wild yak;  
[In] the northern pastures, if you shall slay the wild yak:  
From the upper part of the valley, those who make shouts,  
The Ldong [and] Thong—the bounty of 'Phan [yul]!  
From the lower part of the valley, those who flap the streamers,  
The Sha and Spug of Skyi!  
From the middle, those who shoot at the belly,  
The Lho and Rngegs of Yar!

From the upper part of the valley, the shouts having been made,  
From the lower part of the valley, the streamers having been flapped,  
In the middle, the middle of that  
The bull [yak] is killed.

The horn is Phying ba's nectar,  
The bones and the sinews were granted to the Ldong Tong,  
The flesh and the hide were granted to the Lhe Rngegs,  
The long hair of the belly was granted to the Sha Spug.<sup>2</sup>

1 I undertook this research as a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Oxford, where my research project, a translation and study of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, was titled “Narrative, Orality and Sacred Kingship in Tibet’s First Epic History,” and I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the British Academy for supporting my research. I also gratefully acknowledge the support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, who support my current research project, “Kingship and Religion in Tibet.” I shall discuss issues of genre and history at length in my forthcoming translation and study of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. For discussions of matters relating to hunting, epigraphy, and related matters, I am grateful to John Vincent Bellezza, Dorje Thondup, Harald Hauptmann, Amy Heller, Toni Huber, Jason Neelis, and Gergely Orosz. Needless to say, any mistakes or misunderstandings are entirely my own.

2 *kye byang 'brog ni ya bI na / / pho ma 'i nI 'brong gchig pa / / byang 'brog ni 'brong dgum na / / pu nas nI khus 'debs pa' / / ldong thong nI 'pan gyis thob / / mda' nas nI g.yab 'dor ba skyi 'I nI sha dang spug / / dbus nas ni dpor 'phen ba / / yar kyI ni lho dang rngegs / / pu nas nI khus btab ching / / mda' nas nI g.yab bor nas / / de 'i ni bar bar du / pho ma 'I ni bkuM zhing / / thur thur nI pying ba 'I bcud / / ru rgyus nI ldong tong stsald / sha lko ni lbe rngegs stsald / / lbo shog nI sha spug stsald / /*; P. tib. 1287,

As has been remarked from as early as Bacot and Toussaint's footnote to their translation of this passage, the songs of Sad mar kar, relayed by messenger to her brother the Tibetan emperor Srong brtsan sgam po (c.605–649), are a thinly veiled exhortation to war (*DTH*: 158, n. 5).

The tale of Sad mar kar has captured the attention of generations of scholars – both of the philological and the anthropological bent – among them Gendun Chömpel, Géza Uray, Ariane Macdonald, Don grub rgyal, Siegbert Hummel, Nick Allen, and Mark Oppitz. In particular, Ariane Macdonald treated the Sad mar kar episode in detail in her magisterial study of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and related works, and Géza Uray dedicated a brilliant article to the songs of Sad mar kar and their place in what he referred to as the “song cycle” of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. In addition to their numerous contributions to the meanings of individual terms or stanzas, both Macdonald (1971: 263–65) and Uray (1972: 35–36) underlined the debt that the songs of Sad mar kar – and the Sad mar kar episode as a whole – owe to ritual literature, and pointed to the existence of similar hunting images in ritual and divination texts. From their works, and their noting of close parallels between the marriage of Sad mar kar to the king of Zhang zhung in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and that of Lady Lho rgyal Byang mo tsun to the lord of Zhang zhung in a funerary narrative in P. tib. 1136, it is clear that just as Sad mar kar's image of the hunt draws on a pool of tradition that also informs Tibetan ritual narratives and divination prognoses, she herself is implicated as a character who has emerged from this same pool of tradition.<sup>3</sup> The episode of the unhappy marriage of Princess Sad mar kar, like the tale of the unhappy marriage of Lady Lho rgyal byang mo tsun, is an expression of the “matrimonial narrative trope,” a common type of ritual narrative that presages and precedes the illness or death of one of the protagonists, and then moves on to the healing or funeral rites performed for them.<sup>4</sup> The creative and dramatic emplotment of the Sad mar kar episode within such a trope pertains both to the genre of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and to its value as a historical source – a topic that I shall address elsewhere.

Rather than focusing here on how Sad mar kar's status as a character in a matrimonial narrative trope might affect how we view her historicity, or how we might approach the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* as a historical source, I will instead devote my attention to her image of the hunt. After demonstrating its kinship with similar images in ritual and divination texts, I will turn to other Old Tibetan narrative descriptions of hunting, mostly from ritual texts. I will consider these literary images alongside other figural representations of hunting from rock art and from coffin panels found in different areas of the Tibetan plateau. In examining the cultural and historical background of such images, I

ll. 412–16; *DTH*: 156–57; Uray 1972: 25; Don grub rgyal 1997 (1984): 392–93; Hummel 2000 (1994): 113–14.

3 In the context of oral tradition, Lauri Honko (2000: 18) describes a “pool of tradition” as follows: “we cannot postulate a well-arranged library of earlier performed oral texts in the mind of the individual but rather a ‘pool’ of generic rules, storylines, mental images of epic events, linguistically preprocessed descriptions of repeatable scenes, sets of established terms and attributes, phrases and formulas, which every performer may utilize in an imaginative way, vary and reorganize according to the needs and potentials present at a new performance.” The utility of this concept extends beyond an oral performative context.

4 For further details on the “matrimonial narrative” in Old Tibetan ritual literature, see Dotson 2008: 45–47 and Dotson forthcoming.

will also turn to a different class of sources in order to briefly examine the *lings* hunt, which, in Tibetan imperial times, was a large group hunt. In the course of investigating our manuscript and epigraphic sources for the *lings* hunt, I will examine briefly its possible links to the widespread tradition of the Eurasian royal hunt, and consider how the existence of the Tibetan *lings* hunt might relate to Sad mar kar's image of the hunt.

### The Hunt in Narrative Context

Sad mar kar's depiction of the three groups of Tibetan hunters deploys a stereotyped image of the hunt found in ritual literature. It places hunters in the upper and lower parts of a valley, frightening animals into the middle with shouts and streamers. It is a highly flexible image, and Sad mar kar's use of it is more elaborated than what we generally find in ritual literature. In the funerary text P. tib. 1136, for example, when the father and brother of Lady Lho rgyal Byang mo tsun go about catching two wondrous horses, we read: "when they made shouts from the upper part of the valley and flapped streamers in the lower part of the valley, the horses ran, the steeds ran" (*pu nas khus btab mda' nas g.yab bor na / rta dkyus ste mchis rmang dkyuste mchis nas*; ll. 40–41; Macdonald 1971: 265–66). Similar language is also found in the dice divination text IOL Tib J 739:

Oh! From the upper part of the valley, they made shouts,  
The echo resounding – *ti ri ri*!<sup>5</sup>  
From the lower part of the valley, they flapped the streamers,  
Billowing, *chab ma chib*!  
(*kye phu nas nis khyas<sup>6</sup> btab pas / brag cha ni ti ri ri / mda' nas ni yab bor bas / lhog lhog ni ljab ma ljib*; IOL Tib J 739, 2v6–7; Uray 1972: 14).

At its most stripped down, there may be only one group, as in Dmu rje rgya bdun's capture of Mgon tshun pyva's two errant horses in P. tib. 1134, when he single-handedly traps them on a hillside by means of shouts and a lasso. (*dmu rje rgya' / bdun gyis / ri kha' / khus / btabste dmu dbye che la / bkug dmu zhags / gsang gis / bzungste*; ll. 111–12; Stein 1971: 495). We also find an interesting variation of the image in the dice divination text IOL Tib J 739: while seven hunters use shouts to harry a single deer in the upper part of the valley, the lower part of the valley is not manned by their accomplices, but home to three wary otters. The hunters, busy in the upper valley, personify danger that is far away, and the prognosis is a good one, indicating that there is nothing to worry about:

"1 – 2 – 3 [from a roll of three four-sided dice]  
Oh! In the three upper valleys, up above,  
The pale grassland, on the golden ridge,<sup>7</sup>

5 The syllables *ti ri ri* describe the resounding of drums in a formula found repeatedly in the *Tale of the Cycle of Birth and Death*; see Imaeda 2007: 121, 137.

6 I read *khyas* as an error for *khus*.

7 *spang snar ni gser sdongs la*. In the past, the *dbu med sp* in *spang* has been incorrectly transliterated with *yang* (Imaeda, *et al.* 2007: 333). This has been corrected on the OTDO website; <http://otdo.aa.tufs.ac.jp>. The phrases *spang snar* and *spang snar po* are found in numerous Old Tibetan ritual and divination texts, where it appears to indicate a hallowed ground sometimes used for hunting. The term *gser sdongs* is more opaque, and I have treated it as if it read *gser sdings*. This is partly motivated by the fact that the top of the page is damaged such that the vowel is not clear.

Seven men, hunting deer;  
At one deer, they make a shout.

In the three lower valleys, down below,  
Three otters, they are weary.  
Exhausted, and oppressed by hunger,  
They fear an enemy;  
But there is no danger – an excellent prognosis.”

@ / @@ / @@@ / *kye phu sum ni ya byi la / spang snar / ni gser sdongs la / sha shor ni my[i] bdun kyis / sha gcig ni khus btab pa' / mda' gsum ni ma byi na / gyur gsum ni thugs snyung ba' / 'o brgyal ni 'gres kyi non / dgra zbig la dogs pa las nyen myed de bzang rab bo*; IOL Tib J 739, 17r10–17v6

Sad mar kar's image obviously draws on and references this type of traditional depiction of the hunt. In the three groups that she deploys – the Ldong Tong in the upper part of the valley, the Sha Spug in the lower part, and the Lho Rngegs in the middle – we also see an idealized representation of Tibetan society. The Ldong [s]Tong, the Lho Rngegs, and the Sha Spug are ostensibly three groups each made up of two clan names, but each compound ethnonym may in fact constitute more than the sum of its parts.<sup>8</sup> It is reminiscent of the schematic representation of three pairs of clans that we find in one of the Old Tibetan myths of the first king's descent, where the first king, here KhrI bar la bdun tshlg, descends from heaven with his ministers (*blon po*) Lho and Ngegs, his priests (*bon po*) Mtshe and Gco, and his “cooks” (*phyag tshang*) Sha and Spug (P. tib. 1038, ll. 12–17). Both are instances of a group of three, and the group of three in the myth of the king's descent might even call to mind Georges Dumézil's theory of an Indo-European tripartite division of society into warriors, priests, and producers. Nick Allen (1978), for his part, read Sad mar kar's image in the context of influential theories concerning the four-fold division of society, which he argues is a fundamental structure in the Himalayas and further afield. Such a division into four, as opposed to three, is relevant when a fourth group – the Tibetan king, referred to metonymically by the name of the royal homeland of Phying ba – is added to the group of three hunters for the division of fallen yak.<sup>9</sup>

8 In the songs exchanged between Khyung po Spung sad Zu tse and Myang Zhang snang at Chr. iv.d, for example (I use here the chapter divisions given in Uray 1992), Zhang snang rebuts Zu tse by altering the words of Zu tse's song. Here Zu tse complains that the spoils of his conquests are repeatedly given to the Lho Rngegs, a group that includes the ministerial aristocracy from the king's traditional power base in Yar lung: *lho rngegs nI 'phan gyi snon / se khyung nI 'phan gyis btab / / snga na nI 'phan ba la / da tsam nI spyang yang yas*. In his reply Myang repeats verbatim the above lines of Zu tse's song, except that he replaces Se Khyung, the ethnonym to which Zu tse's Khyung po clan belongs, with a separate compound ethnonym, Ldong Tong. In parallel with Zu tse's Khyung po clan belonging to the Se Khyung group, the Ldong Tong / Ldong Stong is probably the larger group to which Zhang snang's Myang clan belongs (Beckwith 1977: 251, n. 56). This may also include the Dbas, Mnons, and Tshes pong – those clans to the north of the Gtsang po that joined the empire by overthrowing their own ruler, Zing po rje Khri pang sum of Ngas po. This contention finds some support in a later schema of Tibetan descent from the protoclan: in one popular fifteenth-century list in the *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu* showing the descent of clans from four original protoclanes, the Myang and Tshes pong are from the Ldong, while the Dbas are from the Stong (Smith 2001: 218–19).

9 The anatomical terms in the four shares of the yak make for interesting comparison with the prescribed butchering of the yak into six shares in the hunting laws in P. tib. 1071 and P. tib. 1072. These are more comprehensive, listing hindlegs (*rkang sla*), forelegs (*lag sla*), internal organs and so forth, while Sad

The language of the hunting image also tells us something about the form of hunting that it describes. The terminology for shouting (*khus btab*) is clear, but the phrase *g.yab 'dor* / *g.yab bor* / *yab bor* is less so. In his discussion of the phrase, “Oh! From the upper part of the valley, they made shouts, The echo – *ti ri ri*! From the lower part of the valley, they flapped the streamers, Billowing, *chab ma chib!*” (*kye phu nas nis khyas btab pas / brag cha ni ti ri ri / mda' nas ni yab bor bas / lhog lhog ni ljab ma ljib*; IOL Tib J 739, 2v7), Uray (1972: 14) writes that *g.yab* is “the primary, unsuffixed form of the noun *yab-mo* / *g.yab-mo* ‘the act of fanning, waving; fan, yak-tail fan, kettle drum stick.’” Discussing the onomatopoeia here, where *ljab ma ljib* describes the sound of *yab bor* in the same way that *ti ri ri* – likely the same as *ldi ri ri*, the sound of thunder – describes the echo of the hunters’ shouts, Uray also points out a passage in IOL Tib J 734.5r, l. 210 where a similar gemination describes the sound of skinning an animal: *pags bshu nI lji be ljiIng*. Working from microfilm, Uray misread this as *lji be lji[b]* and translated it with “cracking.”<sup>10</sup> On this basis he concludes that *g.yab bor* indicates that the animal is driven back with flails, and translates it with “shook the flails.” This may be correct, but it is somewhat free, and is not the only possible interpretation. Macdonald (1971: 266), for example, translates *g.yab bor* with “leur bloque le chemin et les repousse.” “Repousse” bears some relation to *bor*, which can mean “to cast away,” “to fling,” and “to spread out.” The verb *'dor* has a nearly identical meaning. Macdonald’s translation of *g.yab*, however, is more contextual. The same appears to be true of Don grub rgyal’s translation of *g.yab 'bor* with “shouted in response” (*^a lan ster ba / ^a lan sbyin*) (Don grub rgyal 1997 [1984]: 393 and 593, n. 122), and Bacot and Toussaint’s “faisant un signal” (*DTH*: 156), followed also by Hummel’s “give signals” (Hummel 2000 [1994]: 113). One could perhaps more plausibly point to the word *yab pa* / *g.yab pa* as “covered place, covert shelter” (Jäschke

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mar kar’s song omits many important parts of the animal. These circumstances are not at all surprising considering the formal constraints of the song: Sad mar kar’s yak must be divided among four groups, and this must be accomplished in four lines, each of six syllables. For a recent discussion of some of the relevant anatomical terms, see Zeisler 2011: 120–21.

The dismemberment of the animal and its distribution is of course a favorite topic for anthropologists, and in addition to Allen, Alexander Macdonald related Sad mar kar’s fallen yak to what he terms “creative dismemberment” in the Himalayas, by which he means a constellation of origin myths, rituals, and sacrifices going from the Vedic myth of the “first man” Mahāpuruṣa to the sharing of meat during contemporary festivals among Tibeto-Burman groups in the Himalayas (Macdonald 1980). Michael Oppitz revisited Sad mar kar’s image of the fallen yak again in his critique and expansion of Macdonald’s concept, offered in a felicitation volume to Macdonald. In particular, Oppitz (1997: 537) argued that meat division can be further specified through the application of a number of categories, eg., mythical v. ritual; primeval v. contemporary; sacrificial vs. non-sacrificial; wild v. domesticated; and creative v. re-creative. If we follow Oppitz’s lead, we observe that the killing and distribution of Sad mar kar’s yak is a non-sacrificial distribution of a wild animal. Furthermore, it is “creative” in the sense that in addition to overlapping with the sort of “recreative” mythical tellings among the Tamang that recall a primordial distribution of meat from whence the Tamang clans received their names (a ritual remembering of Tamang society), Sad mar kar’s song also “re-members forward” within the *Chronicle*’s narrative, envisioning a distribution that has yet to occur. For summaries of two Tamang myths involving “creative dismemberment,” see Macdonald 1980: 201–02; for reflections on the use of this term, and its applicability to the song of Sad mar kar, which Oppitz sees as a “special case,” see Oppitz 1997: 535–38. See also Hazod 2000: 219–21.

10 Against this reading one can point out that skinning is more likely to make a sucking sound, which might suggest that the gemination comes from *'jib pa* “to suck.” The gemination may also describe flapping, in that one pulls at a large flap of skin to separate it from the body of the animal.

1998 [1881]: 507), and assume that the hunters come out from their hides or cast these aside. Another way that one might approach *g.yab* / *yab* in this phrase is as a noun derived from the past stem of the verb *g.yob*, meaning “to swing, to flutter” and “to wave” (Hill 2010: 272). As a further clue, we find the following passage in the dice divination text IOL Tib J 739: “The shouting – in one’s ears; waving the streamers – dust [in] one’s eyes,” (*khüs btab ni snyan ma su* / *g.yab bor ni spyen ma rdul*; 3r7–8). From this it is clear that while shouting is an aural technique, *g.yab bor* is mostly visual, and that it is an action that is liable to get dust in one’s eyes. The same text (at 2r9) makes explicit that it concerns a textile: “They flapped the white silk streamers, They cut the brocade designs” (*dar kar ni g.yab ’bor zhing* / *za ’og ni mtshon dras la* /). This latter passage comes in the context of the preamble to the divination prognoses, and the preamble includes offerings to the *mo bdag* and invocations to several deities. The phrase suggests the flapping or waving of fabric, banners, pennants, or streamers. It also agrees well with the phrase, “From the lower part of the valley, flapping the streamers, Billowing, *chab ma chib!* (*mda’ nas ni yab bor bas* / *lhog lhog ni ljab ma ljib*; IOL Tib J 739, 2v7).

Sad mar kar’s image of three groups of hunters using the topography to their advantage and performing stereotyped roles is not the only sort of hunting image found in a narrative context in Old Tibetan writing. We find in Old Tibetan manuscripts several references to hunting, and these occur most commonly in ritual literature, where hunting trips, like horse-racing and marriage, presage the death of one of the protagonists and lead inevitably to his or her funeral rites being performed by a ritual specialist. As the hunt is only incidental to the main ritual action, it is described matter-of-factly and without detail, so we must content ourselves with a small group of stereotyped phrases. In the funerary text P. tib. 1040, for example, Gseng lde ri tells his wife that he is going hunting on the northern plateau Byang ’brog brgyad gong: “I will go to chase deer and hunt gazelle” (*sha shor dgo ’drim du gshegs*; ll. 40–41). We find the same expression in the ritual text P. tib. 1289: “the lord Dang dang dangs kyi rje went to Byang ka snam brgyad to chase deer, went to hunt gazelle” (*rje dang dang dangs gyI rje gyang ka snam brgyad du* / *sha shor du gshegs* / *dgo ’drim du gshegs*; P. tib. 1289v, ll. 2–3; Stein 1971: 519); and also at IOL Tib J 739, 16r, l. 7. Also in the dice divination text IOL Tib J 739, 12v, l. 7 we find someone unsuccessfully using a lasso (*zhabs*) to hunt a vulture (*rgod ’drim*). We find the verb *shor* – and the forms *bshor* and *’chor* – applied to “wild animals” (*ri dags*) in P. tib. 1047, l. 201; P. tib. 1043, ll. 28, 96, 98; P. tib. 1051, l. 9; and P. tib. 1283, l. 607.<sup>11</sup> The same verb is applied to hunting a yak in P. tib. 1136, l. 11; to birds (*bya’u* / *bye’u*) in IOL Tib J 732, ll. 18–19;<sup>12</sup> and to fish (*nya*) in P. tib. 1285r, l. 4. Most often, however, it is used alliteratively for deer hunting (*sha shor*). In IOL Tib J 734, 5r, l. 200 we find *sha ’chor* paired with an interesting term for hunting yak: “he went to ’Brog dbye ldang sum to chase deer, he went to hunt (‘encircle’) yak” (*gyul ’brog dbye ldang sum du sha ’chor du gshegs g.yag ’gor du gshegs*). We also find the verb *’gor* in the

11 This latter refers to a Turkic-speaking group that hunts with dogs.

12 This also seems to involve the use of traps (*snyi*). Traps (*snyi*) are also mentioned in a divination prognosis in P. tib. 1047: “prognosis for a blue sheep escaping from a trap” (*sna ba snyi las shord pha’i ngo*; l. 346). Both traps and snares (*kog tse* / *kog tshe*) are used, unsuccessfully, to try to catch horses in the ritual text P. tib. 1136, l. 40: *rta’i kog tse rmang ’gi kog tshe ra snyi thing ka lag bzhi zhig bgyis ste* / *rta gling khyad khyud ljod du btsugste* /. On the use of traps in contemporary antelope hunting in Sger rtse County, see Huber 2005.





Figure 1: Petroglyph from Ri rgyal in Sger rtse county, photo by Toni Huber (used by permission).

phrase *g.yag shor 'brong 'gor* in P. tib. 1136, l. 11, and the similar *sha shord 'brong gor* in P. tib. 1134, l. 26 and P. tib. 1285r, l. 31.

What, if anything, can we conclude from such expressions? We have observed their poetics in the alliterative use of the common phrase *sha shor*. The same is true of *g.yag 'gor*.<sup>13</sup> One possible conclusion is that these are poetic expressions more than they are descriptions of any particular form of hunting. On the other hand, these are not literary creations that are utterly divorced from a social context in which hunting occurred. Were one to insist that these phrases must describe actual hunting traditions, then at least one phrase, *g.yag 'gor*, is of particular interest. The use of the term *'gor* for hunting yak is important, since it means “to encircle,” and Beckwith argues that *'gor* is a Tibetan word for which he can identify a proto-Indo-European root, namely *\*ker* (Walter and Beckwith 1997: 1047). Prehistoric rock art depicts scenes that are suggestive of such a technique, where several mounted hunters with bow and arrow hunt a wild yak.

13 Hill (2012: 396) demonstrates that the “Old Tibetan orthographic distinction of <gy> and <g.y> represents the phonetic distinction of [gʲ] and [gɨ].”

In his discussion of such scenes, John Vincent Bellezza (2002: 133) suggests that they constitute evidence that Tibetans hunted wild yak on horseback with bow and arrow.<sup>14</sup> Other pieces of evidence also argue in favor of reading *g.yag 'gor* as more than a literary convention. If we allow that this verb for the hunt, “to encircle,” is a loan word from an Indo-European language, one might assume that the tradition of group hunt where the animals are encircled may therefore have come from an early migration of people from Eurasia. The Tibetan use of the verb “to encircle” for hunting yak finds parallels in several other Eurasian cultures’ terms for the ring hunt, many of which underline the close relationship between warfare and the royal hunt. In Arabic, for example, *al ḥalqa* is a ring hunt, and *ḥalqah*, meaning “ring,” is “both the term for a battue formed by thousands of troops and the name of a military unit” (Allsen 2006: 26, 217). In the thirteenth century, Mongols used the Chinese term *dawei* “beat and surround” for the ring hunt, and also the term *nerge*, a loan from the Persian *nirkah* (“hunting ring”), along with *jerge*, meaning “rank, row, column,” but also “hunting circle” and “encircling movement” (Allsen 2006: 26–27).

Painted hunting scenes on coffin panels found in tombs in Delingha and elsewhere near Dulan in Qinghai County display several archers, mounted and on foot, hunting a quarry of deer and yak. Generally dated to approximately the mid-eighth century, the coffin panels have been studied by, among others, Amy Heller (in this volume). The hunting scenes, like many other scenes in these coffin panels, display an amalgamation of cultural and artistic influences (e.g., Tibetan, Sogdian, and 'a zha / Xianbei), and are a testament to the vivacity of cultural exchanges during this era.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to such scenes, we also have on the same tomb panel a scene of men hunting yak on horseback (Fig. 2). Like hunting scenes in rock art and like Sad mar kar's image, these are stylized representations, and the hunting scenes appear to be a standard feature of similar, earlier Xianbei coffin panels.<sup>16</sup> As such, our Tibetan and 'a zha mounted hunters are part of an artistic convention for depicting certain stylized and formulaic scenes of human life, and they are not necessarily specific to the hunting experiences of the coffin's occupant.<sup>17</sup> Equally, however, one might read the transmission and reception of this motif as evidence for a hunting tradition shared by Xianbei, 'a zha, and Tibetans.

While it would be wrong to rule out completely that such a form of hunting did exist, the evidence for “encircling yaks” is thin. A diffusionary argument for a Tibetan ring hunt rests partly on the strength of Beckwith's assertion that *'gor* is a loan word deriving ultimately from a reconstructed proto-Indo-European root. This is an asser-

14 Bellezza (2002: 133) also, it should be noted, places this in the context of the drive hunt, rather than the ring hunt.

15 The scenes on these panels appear to depict both 'a zha and Tibetans, but their ethnicity is in some ways a moot point: Heller (2006: 75) has demonstrated that after their annexation, the 'a zha were highly assimilated to the Tibetans, at least in the realm of burial and ritual culture; cf. Tong 2008: 165–80.

16 For discussions of Xianbei precursors to these coffin panels, which also include hunting scenes, see Tong 2008: 175–80, 183–84. See especially the artist's rendition of Xianbei coffin panels from a Xianbei tomb excavated in Datong in Shanxi: fig. 6.5.2-16 on page 437, reproduced after Liu and Gao 2004. The general use of hunting scenes in a funerary context is of course widespread, and extends far beyond the China and Central Eurasia.

17 Similarly, Amy Heller (in this volume) suggests that the scenes on the coffin panels depict a “generic narrative” rather than documenting scenes from the deceased's lifetime.





Figure 2: Artist's rendition of left tomb panel from Delingha (detail from left half).  
(After Luo Shiping 2006: 69).

tion that I am ill equipped to judge. One can say, however, that its alliterative use in the phrase *g.yag 'gor* militates somewhat against this. More fundamentally, the hunting scenes described are those of heroes, or at least *dramatis personae*, in ritual narratives, and as such they are by nature heroic or dramatic rather than documentary. The same could even be said of the hunting scenes in rock art, which, as Bellezza himself has pointed out, sometimes also have a ritual character. Furthermore, the hunting scenes in rock art and those on coffin panels cannot be said to definitively depict the “encircling” of yaks. These circumstances, alongside the difficulty of successfully hunting yak in this way with bow and arrow,<sup>18</sup> make it difficult to conclude with confidence that the phrase “to encircle yaks” refers to an actual hunting practice, whether it be a ring hunt inherited from speakers of an Indo-European language or not. Such observations about the dramatic character of these scenes also apply to the forms of hunting described in Sad mar kar’s song and in ritual narratives and divination prognoses. Obviously the division of space into upper, middle, and lower is a schematic one that may not correspond to the lay of the land in an actual hunt, and as exaggerated or stylized hunting scenes in narrative, they may not reflect actual practice. At the same time, this obser-

18 Toni Huber relates that contemporary Tibetan hunters who saw similar scenes of pre-historic Tibetan rock art on the Byang thang told him that such hunting would be impossible due to the yak’s thick hide and its ability to outrun horses when threatened; personal communication, 23 July 2011. One possible method, also suggested by Huber, would be the use of poisoned arrows. Indeed an Old Tibetan medical text, IOL Tib J 756, mentions “arrow poison” (*mda’ dug*) and what to do with a patient who is afflicted by it (ll. 293 and 299; Luo, *et al.*, 2002: 10, 149). I am grateful to Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim for this reference.

vation does not rule out the possibility that groups of hunters worked in concert and performed actions similar to what Sad mar kar describes. Nor does it disprove out of hand that hunters “encircled yaks.”

### The Hunt in Historical Context

Turning to documentary evidence in administrative records and inscriptions, we do not find a perfect corroboration of the terms or techniques described in the literary depictions of the hunt. Rather, we encounter another term, *lings*, which indicates a large group hunt. The importance of the *lings* hunt is indicated by the fact that it is noted in the official records. The *Old Tibetan Annals* mentions a yak hunt (*gnag lings*) in its entry for 653–654 and a “stag hunt” (*sha lings*) in 656–657, both led by the chief minister, Mgar Stong rtsan (*DTH*: 30–31; Dotson 2009: 84–85). The *Annals of the 'a zha Principality* mentions the hunt in a damaged passage: “They made a large hunt, and wild animals...” (*lIngs ched po bgyis te / / rI dags kyang*; IOL Tib J 1368, l. 7). The missing words that follow are likely something like “many were killed” (*mang po bkum*).

The *lings* hunt is also mentioned in the Haldeikish graffito in the Hunza valley in northern Pakistan. The inscription is not very clear, and seems to be written in only semi-literate Tibetan, but it appears to say something like, “The hunt transferred from Dmu to that valley, Dra'i srug Grove, and many deer – about a hundred – were killed.”<sup>19</sup>

This “grove” (*tshal*) where the *lings* hunt took place recalls a place called Byar lings tshal, apparently identical with Skyi Byar lings tsal, recorded in *Old Tibetan Annals* as a council site in the winters of 704–705, 728–729, and 746–747. The term *tshal* appears as the final element of numerous council sites, and it means “grove” or “park.” The combination *lings tshal* may indicate a “hunting park,” that is, an area rich with game, and into which game was herded for the hunt (Dotson 2009: 84, n. 135).

The phrase “to make a *lings* hunt and counsel...” (*lings gdab pa dang/ gros*) also appears in a Buddhist divination text, IOL Tib J 474, recto, l. 4, but this occurs just where the right end of the *pothi* is torn, so it adds little to our understanding of *lings*.

These references inform us that the *lings* hunt was important enough to be recorded as an affair of state in official records, and that it was a large hunt in which many animals were killed. We can glean a few other details: the Haldeikish graffito and the *Old Tibetan Annals* both mention deer, and the latter also mentions a *gnag lings*, which is to say a hunt of yak and 'bri (Dotson 2009: 84, n. 135). The two hunts recorded in the *Old Tibetan Annals* were led by the chief minister and not by the emperor. Unfortunately, these documentary records tell us next to nothing about what the *lings* hunt was and

19 Neelis (2001: 238–39, 374) suggests an early eighth century date for the inscription. He transcribes the text as follows: [dra'i] srug tshal dmu nas de lung pa la lings phyung[s] bsha brgya tsam bsad pa mang pa. Examining an image from the Felsbildarchiv of the Forschungsstelle Felsbilder und Inschriften am Karakorum Highway Forschungsstellen the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, I read it slightly differently: dra[i] srug tshal d[m]u[r] [m]do lung [thang] la lings phyungs ba sha brgya bo ma psad pa ma[r] pa. Damaged letters and unclear readings notwithstanding, it is clear that one hundred or so deer are either killed or not killed in the course of a hunt. At Haldeikish there are numerous graffiti, mostly in Brāhmi and Kharoṣṭhī, but also in Sogdian, Bactrian, Chinese, and Tibetan. The above graffito is one of two graffiti in Tibetan. There are also numerous drawing of ibexes and other ungulates at Haldeikish (in Burushaski: “place of the male ibexes”).



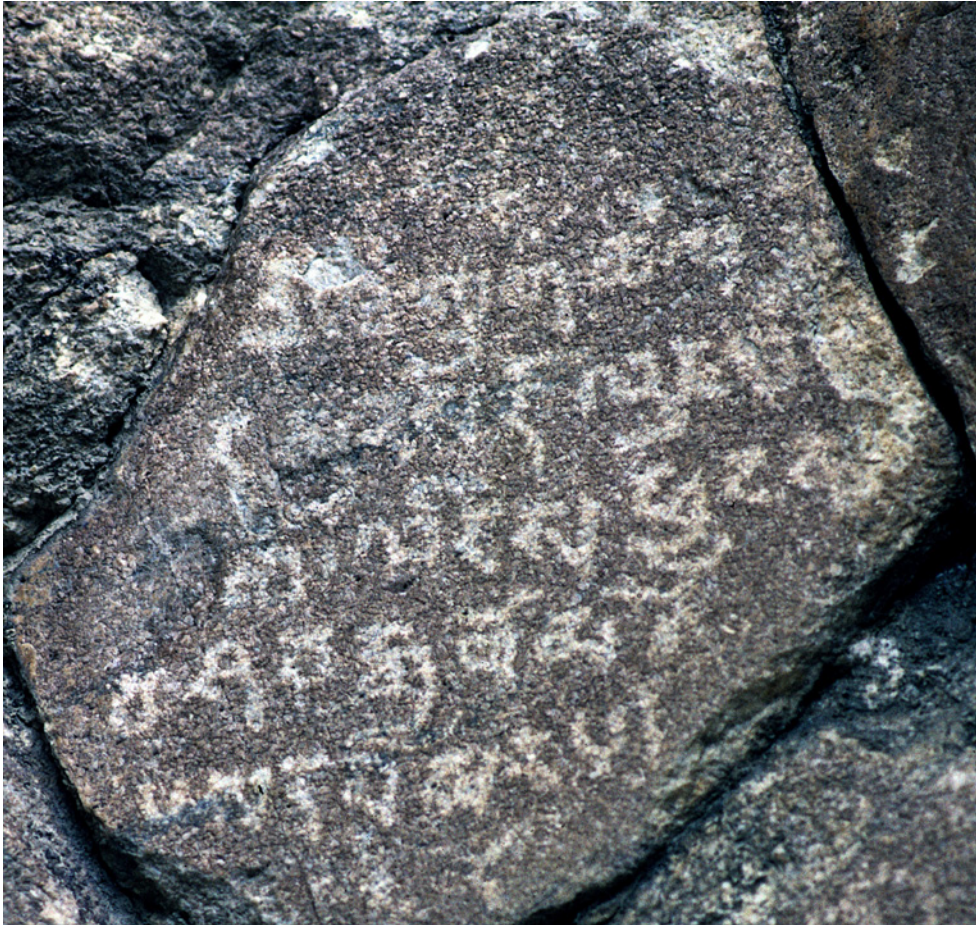


Figure 3: Image of Haldeikish graffito, Felsbildarchiv, Heidelberg Akademie der Wissenschaften (used with permission).

how it was performed. For a glimpse into the nature of the *lings* hunt, we must turn to the hunting laws, P. tib. 1071 and P. tib. 1072.

These laws are highly schematic in that they set out the appropriate legal process and punishments for accidental death and for cowardice in the course of the hunt when, respectively, someone is accidentally shot by an arrow, or someone is trapped under a yak. In the latter case, there are punishments for bystanders who fail to rescue, and rewards for those who do. Punishments are based on the class and rank of each party involved and include execution, banishment, steep monetary fines as compensation for high-ranking ministers, and smaller fines as compensation for commoners and servants.<sup>20</sup> The scope of the legal statutes, which cover Tibetan society from the highest

20 For a presentation of the classes and ranks of Tibetan society that the hunting laws describe, see Dotson 2009: 59–64.

rank (e.g., the chief minister) to the lowest (e.g., barbarian prisoners), suggests that they aim to be comprehensive. In reckoning the legal status of the relatives of ranking ministers who hold insignia, for example, the statutes go into some detail, and mention not only fathers and grandfathers, but mothers, grandmothers, unmarried sisters and daughters, and so forth (Richardson 1998: 151; Dotson 2009: 65–66). This is not to say that grandmothers and so on would have been involved in the hunt; rather, they are included here in order to provide a legal precedent and point of reference in this code so that it may be applicable to other scenarios. This is important, since one strategy employed in early Tibetan legal codes was to resolve one crime by referring it to the law relevant to another class of crime. In the law of theft, for example, we find similarly schematic statutes that aim to cover all cases of theft, according to the class of the victim, and the amount taken, in *srang*.<sup>21</sup> In the case of theft from travellers or merchants – those outside of the idealized, stratified society described in the legal codes – then a different method applies. The amount stolen is reckoned in *srang*, and this number is then converted into the number of horses that such an amount could purchase. The thief is then punished according to the law governing horse theft:

“The law concerning theft from a dwelling that is not a household of the *khrom*.<sup>22</sup>

“If one steals from the dwelling of a traveller or a merchant, which is not a dwelling of the *khrom*, whether he steals from a tent, steals from a “doghouse” (*khyi brang*), or steals from a *rtse’u brang*, if he steals from one of them, it is not [considered] breaking into a house. If one has stolen from such places, the amount is reckoned in *srang* and then that amount is reckoned in numbers of horses. If [according to the law of horse-theft] the number of horses should legally result in execution, then he shall be killed. Should it legally result in banishment, he shall be banished an appropriate distance according to the level of his offence. Should it legally result in serving a punishment, then he shall serve a punishment.

“Seal.”

*§ :/ khrom gyi brang ma lags pa’ brang gzhan nas rkus pa’I khrims / khrom gyi brang ma lags pa’I slad na ’dron po tshong pa zbig / gi / brang nas / rkus / na / spra zbig / gi / nang nas / rkus / kyang rung khyi / brang zbig gi nang nas rkus / kyang rung rtse’u brang nga zbig nas rkus / kyang rung de rnams shig / la / rkus na / khyim phugs / ma / lagso de rnams lta zbig / las rkus / su / lags na lod srang / du / brtsis / te / lod / gyi rta grangs su brtsiste / rta grang gyis dgum pa’i khrims la bab na’ang / dgumo / spyugs pa’I khrims la bab na ’ang spyugs yul nye ring gyi bka’ grims gyi thang bzhin du spyugo / chal ’jal pa’I khrims la bab nang chal ’jalo phyag rgya (P. tib. 1075, ll. 25–31).*

While this offers us one way to understand why the hunting laws attempt to cover all cases, their comprehensive nature might also suggest that we have here a clear example of a legal code that, like many medieval legal codes, is more concerned with the symbolic projection of a civilized ideal by and for the literate classes than it is with practical

21 See Thomas 1936 and Dotson 2007: 14–16.

22 Here *khrom* may either mean the jurisdiction of the regional military government (*khrom*), or the confines of the market city (*khrom*). On the former meaning, see Uray 1980 and Dotson 2009: 41–42.

application.<sup>23</sup> Indeed the hunting laws are projections of royal (or administrative) power, and in this sense they are performative in much the same way as the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* is a performance of the social contract between kings and their subjects. At the same time, we have already seen that there is documentary evidence for a large hunt as an affair of state, and the scenario that these laws govern, in which members of all strata of society are present in one place where any one of them might be killed by a stray arrow or by falling under a yak, does not contradict the documentary evidence concerning the *lings* hunt. While they do not cover the specifics of hunting techniques, statutes at the end of the hunting laws, which come almost as an appendix to the lengthy sections on accidental shooting and failure to rescue, do supply a clearer picture of what the *lings* hunt entailed.

The first of these appendix statutes gives the “protocols for the shares when a game animal is killed” (*ri dags khums na don dbang ba’i thang*): yak are to be butchered into six shares (*mda’*), *bri* into three shares, and animals ranging from deer and onager down to gazelle are to be divided into two shares (ll. 436–46; Richardson 1998 [1990]: 159). The specifics are given in some detail, but I shall not focus here on the butchering terminology.

The second statute is the “law [covering a case] where a man grasps an arrow stuck in a game animal and says that he killed the animal, but his claim is not upheld” (*ri dags la / mda’ tshang na / ri dag khums zhes mchir myi gnang ba’i khrims*). It essentially states that unless witnessed or vouched for, such claims will not be believed (*ri dags la / myI cig gi / lag na mda’ chang ba nI / myi phano / / myI dus ’phangs pa brtsI ’i / ma mthong ma ’tshal ces / mchI / mchIs myI brtsa’o / /*; ll. 449–51; Richardson 1998 [1990]: 160).

The third statute is “the law [covering a case] where someone steals an arrow stuck in an animal or finds an arrow on the ground” (*ri dags la / mda’ dkus pa dang / mda’ sa las rnyed pa’I khrims*). For the former, the punishment is a fine of two arrows, but the latter is not an offense (*/::/ ri dags la mda’ zugste / mchIs / pa la / mda’ byungste / rkus na’ / mda’ gnyis dkud dbabo / / mda’ sa nas rnyed na dkud myi dbabo / mda’ ngos / bIn<sup>24</sup> na’ / gyi na slar lon zhig /*; ll. 452–54; Richardson 1998 [1990]: 160.) The second and third statutes underline the importance of the bow and arrow, but do not rule out the possibility that other weapons were used.<sup>25</sup>

23 For such reflections in the context of Tibetan legal codes, see Pirie 2008: 157. In the case of early Tibetan law, we are fortunate to have one complete legal code (hunting laws), two partial codes (dog bite and theft), and references to a law of homicide, a law of fratricide, and a law of horse theft. More importantly, we have documentary evidence in the form of legal decisions, petitions, and drafts of petitions, which can be profitably compared with the legal codes in order to, among other things, assess some of their claims.

24 Read *zin*.

25 The bow and arrow is also a key element in Tibetan warfare, as seen in Old Tibetan military documents (*g.yul yig*) such as IOL Tib J 1360 and P. tib 2218; see Uray 1961. As part of their tax obligations, landholders also had to provide materials for bow and arrow manufacturing. Kazushi Iwao (2009: 92–93) has treated IOL Tib J 788, a document that shows how men’s *ryka* (estates) had to provide the following taxes in kind to an arms factory: *shing mda’* and *mda’ shing* (the two seem to be distinguished – the former may be wooden shafts for arrows, and the latter perhaps suitable wood for making arrows), *rgyus pa* (“sinews,” which might have been used for tying on feathers or flints, for backing the bow, and for making the bowstrings), *spyin rko* (glue) and *sgro cheg* (Iwao leaves this untranslated, but it

The fourth statute is particularly intriguing:

The law for allowing game to escape from the enclosed area. The punishment when distinguishing by the type of game animal: forty lashes if a yak escaped; twenty lashes if a female yak (*'dri*) escaped; forty [sic] lashes if an onager (*rkyang*) escaped;<sup>26</sup> eight lashes if a blue sheep (*rna ba*), argali sheep (read *gnyan* for *smyan*?), or antelope (read *gtsod* for *gcod*) escapes; and six lashes if a gazelle (*rgo ba*) escapes. The men of the hunt – the heads of little hundreds and leaders of tens – shall be given the relevant (i.e., same) number of lashes.

\$ / / ri dags khong sa nas / btang ba'I khrims la /::/ ri dags bye na' bye ba'i chad pa' nI / g.yag cIg shor na / nya tsha bzhi bcu stsaldo / 'bri cig shor na / nya tsha nyi shu stshal / rkyang cIg shor na nya cha bzhi bcu stsaldo / rna ba smyan / dang gcod gshor na / nya tsha brgyad stsal / / rgo ba shor na nya tsha drug stsal / lIng myi brgya'u rje dang bcu sna'i chad pa nI / jI 'os pa nya tsha' grangs phral la stsaldo /; ll. 455–58; Richardson 1998 (1990): 160.

This short statute is extremely valuable in that besides listing the varieties of game animals (notably the sheep, which have a rocky habitat that contrasts with those of the other game animals), it shows that the animals were hunted in an enclosed or delimited area (*khong sa*; Richardson translates this with “hunting encirclement”), from which they were not allowed to escape. It also demonstrates that there was a military hierarchy in which commanders such as the “heads of little hundreds” (*brgya'u rje*) were responsible for the organization and conduct of the men in their units, to the extent that the leaders received the same punishments as their men.<sup>27</sup> This clear overlap between military organization and that of the hunt suggests that the *lings* hunt was used as a training ground for soldiers to perfect their maneuvers and develop cohesion within brigades.

The final part of this statute details the punishment for stealing any of the kill: one year's confinement for the guilty and a stallion as a reward for whoever apprehends and/or informs on him (*lings gyi ri dags kyI sha zbig la rkus na / mkhar / tsud lo gcIg gis gcado / su 'dzIn 'dzen su 'dam 'dam be'i byad gar 'og rta stsal* to; ll. 458–61; Richardson 1998 [1990]: 160).

The fifth statute concerns the distribution of meat from the hunt.

The law [covering a case] where a *zhes ra pha*<sup>28</sup> takes care of the meat and blood, and the flesh is allotted to the people of the area, but the *zhes ra pha* steals the people's al-

certainly has to do with fletching; *sgro* means “feather,” and *cheg* may be a unit, as in some clauses here and in similar texts such as IOL Tib J 878 and IOL Tib J 879, demands are made for *cheg* where *sgro* seems to be left off by way of shorthand).

26 Given that the punishments are given in descending order, forty lashes for letting a *rkyang* escape is probably an error for ten lashes.

27 On the office of *brgya'u rje* / *brgye'u rje*, which Uray takes to mean “heads of lower administrative units of a nominal size of fifty households or fifty soldiers to be raised,” see Uray 1964: 186–87 and Uray 1982: 545–46. Gertraud Taenzer (in this volume) argues that the *brgya'u rje* / *brgye'u rje* is, in Tibet-ruled 'a zha at least, was the head of a *brgya tshan*, a unit of one hundred men.

28 Richardson (1998 [1990]: 160) suggests a gloss of *zhes ra pha* with *bshan ra pa*, a reading echoed by Gnya' gong (1995: 313, n. 29).



lotment. The *zhes ra pha*, having hunted,<sup>29</sup> shall not go to his wife, but shall go to the village and give [the meat] to the old and the indigent. If he first gives the allotment [of meat], it is considered to be given. If he does not first give it, and, saying that he has given it, steals the allotment [of meat], then both of his eyes shall be gouged out.<sup>30</sup>

*zhes ra phas / sang sha khumste / yul myi / la sha btam pa dang / / zhes ra phas yul myi / tshal ma / phrog pa'I / khrims la /::/ / zhes ra phas / ba sha shor shor te / mchis brang du ma mchIs / grong du / mchis dang / grong myes rad pa stsald zbig / cha<sup>31</sup> ma sngun nas 'tshal na / 'tshal du baso / sngu nas ma 'tshal na / 'tshal ces mchi / tshal ma phrog na / dmyig nyi ga gdod do /; ll. 462–65; Richardson 1998 (1990): 160.*

Some of the language in this passage is obscure, and I have left off the final sentence, concerning the fate of the wronged villagers, but it appears to demonstrate a concern with the public and “civic” aspect of the hunt and the proper distribution of meat to the common people.

The sixth and final statute is the “law prohibiting *phyi sha*” (*phyi sha myi gnang ba 'I khrims*). It states: “If one is not granted *phyi sha*, but then does *phyi sha*, then whoever catches him and apprehends him will be given the reward of a stallion” (*phyi sha ma gnang bar / phyi sha bgyid dang / sus kyang / zung zbig / 'dzIn 'dzin pa 'byad gar / 'og rta stsald*; ll. 467–68; Richardson 1998 [1990]: 160). Richardson remarks that this is an “obscure clause about someone who does not supply *phyi sha*,” and Gnya' gong does not offer any glosses. Obscure though it may be, the phrase *phyi sha dgyid* implies that *phyi sha* is an action that one performs, and not a thing that one supplies. The verb *gnang* is therefore not relevant to “supplying” *phyi sha*, but to allowing someone to “do” *phyi sha*. *Phyi* means “outside” and *sha* is “meat” or “deer.” One possibility is that it is an expression that indicates hunting outside of the context of the *lings* hunt, perhaps a contraction of something like [*lings kyi*] *phyi* [*su*] *sha* [*shor*]. This would then assert the royal prerogative to grant hunting rights, and punish those who essentially hunt without a permit.

The hunting laws furnish us with some fascinating details about the *lings* hunt. Even assuming that the highly schematic and perfectly stratified society that the laws imagine may be as much or more aspirational than documentary, one can hardly doubt that the *lings* hunt that the hunting laws govern is a historical reality. There was a military hierarchy and a specialization and division of labor by which game animals – some from the plains but some from the mountains – were herded or chased into an enclosed area or delimited space (*khong sa*) where they were then shot with arrows and perhaps killed with other weapons. The hunters attributed their kills by their arrows. Huntsmen (*lings myi*), “heads of little hundreds” (*brgya'u rje*), and “leaders of ten” (*bcu sna*)

29 *ba sha shor shor* : it is uncertain what the *ba* is doing here. Gnya' gong (1995: 313, n. 32) reads this as *bsha shor shor te*, which he takes to mean that the butcher fled with the meat for butchering. It we follow the gloss of *ba sha* with *bsha*, then we can assume that it has to do with butchering, but at this point the clause is still prescriptive, so *shor* does not mean “to flee.” And if it does not mean to hunt, it would seem to be verbalizing his butchering. Given that *bshor* is a form of the same verb *shor* and *'chor*, it could be a spelling error caused by anticipating the prefix *ba* in *shor*. Unfortunately, there are no deletions here to verify this, but it should be noted that the text is full of errors.

30 Read *gcod* for *gdod*.

31 Read *tshal*.

coordinated maneuvers, and they were responsible for the conduct of their men. The aristocracy as well as the lowest strata – barbarian prisoners – took part in the hunt, with their roles surely matching their status.<sup>32</sup> The butchering and distribution of the kill, part of which was given to the local people, was performed according to strict protocols. No dogs or falcons are mentioned, but the main clauses show that participants in the *lings* hunt were both on foot and on horseback. The former is clear from clauses governing rescue of someone from under a horse or yak, and the latter is clear from a clause concerning restitution when one's mount (*g.yar*) is accidentally hit by an arrow (P. tib. 1071, ll. 321–24; P. tib. 1072, ll. 43–47; Richardson 1998 [1990]: 155; 164, n. 38).

### *Tibetan Lings and the Eurasian Royal Hunt*

These observations, though they leave aside the important matter of how the hunt may have interacted with or been partly dictated by economic and ecological factors,<sup>33</sup> are sufficient for our present purposes of assessing Sad mar kar's image against the context of relevant Tibetan hunting traditions. Before bringing historical context to bear on literary image, however, I find it difficult to ignore the question of the larger areal context of the *lings* hunt, and will therefore briefly outline the problem as I see it. First of all, the Tibetan *lings* is almost certainly a loan word, given that it did not undergo the usual *li* > *zh* sound change identified by Benedict (1939: 215), and observed, for example, in the change from proto Tibet-Burman \**bli* for the numeral “four” to Tibetan *bzhi* and Burmese *liy*.<sup>34</sup> One possible source for the borrowing is a Chinese term for hunting, *ling* 田 (Karlgren 1972 [1957]: 104; 362a). On the other hand, this character's primary (and pictographic) meaning is “field” (*tian*), so it is possible that this term was borrowed into both Chinese and Tibetan from a common source. Whatever the case, the word, and possibly also the hunting tradition it describes, is of foreign origin.

Those familiar with Thomas Allsen's recent book, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History*, may have already experienced a sense of *dèjà vu* in reading the above conclusions about *lings*. Allsen describes the royal hunt from Britain to Manchuria, and from the earliest records until recent times. He focuses most of his attention on the geographical core of the Iranian plateau, and on Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Turkestan, North India, and Transcaucasia. Drawing on descriptions of the royal hunt of the Assyrians, Manchus, Mongols, Mughals, Chinese, and others, Allsen underlines a clear group of shared features that makes possible the breadth of his topic and indeed the title of his book. To briefly summarize some of the salient aspects of the royal hunt in Eurasia that Allsen emphasizes: it was a massive mobilization of people and infrastructure, with

32 One can easily imagine bondservants and commoners performing a role akin to “beaters” while the high-ranking ministers waited to begin the kill once the time was right.

33 For such contextualization, and a more comprehensive treatment of Tibetan hunting up until more recent times, I refer the reader to Toni Huber's forthcoming book. Another point that I've left to one side is the use of the hunt as a form of divination to determine the fortunes of the coming year. Macdonald (1955: 112–13) has addressed this question in the context of Indian and surrounding cultures, including Chinese, and concludes of a certain type of hunt does have this function, and that it constitutes a sort of “divination coercitive.” I shall briefly turn to the ritualization of the hunt in the conclusion to this chapter.

34 For further discussion of this sound law, see Hill 2011b: 445.

thousands – and often tens of thousands – of people involved. They used coordinated maneuvers to chase animals into one area – sometimes a game park – and then encircled them by tightening the perimeter, often with a fence (Allsen 2006: 25–29). Following protocols, the king himself – or a retainer or envoy whom the king wished to honor with the privilege – entered the circle and began the kill (203–05). The slaughter would then begin, with sometimes tens of thousands of animals slain. Hunters often employed animals such as dogs and falcons, and sometimes used trained hunting cheetahs. The king's own “bag” of kills would be shared with those to whom he wished to show favor, and sometimes with the general public as an act of royal benefaction (197–99). While also viewed as a public service of taming the wilderness and subduing wild beasts, the royal hunt was a performative act of projecting royal power, and was of a piece with other theatricals and spectacles of court life (201–02). The centerpiece of the hunt often involved the king on foot, slaying a lion or tiger (131–33; 138). The royal hunt displayed the king's putative superhuman physical abilities (124), his mastery over the untamed natural world (158–62), and his ability to marshal order, labor, and military manpower. An outdoor royal court where allegiances could be won and careers made, the hunt served to train warriors and build solidarity within a unit, but also fostered “national” identity by affording different groups intimate access to the king (218). In Allsen's words, “[t]he royal hunt thus served as an effective reaffirmation of a ruler's capacity to manage large-scale enterprises, that is, to govern” (8).

Is the *lings* hunt a Tibetan iteration of the Eurasian royal hunt? There is nothing inherently troubling about the proposition: *lings* is a loan word, and the Eurasian royal hunt is the sort of culturally embedded tradition that does not easily translate. This is apparent from the Mongolian use of Persian loan words for the ring hunt, such as *nerge*. Nor is there any great problem with the proposition of a Central Eurasian context for Tibetan cultural practices. Assertions of a Central Eurasian context for aspects of early Tibetan culture tend to be dwarfed by more prominent comparisons with Indic or Chinese traditions, but they are by no means a novelty.<sup>35</sup> The main hazard in asserting that *lings* is of Central Eurasian origin – besides the difficult matter of tracing the source languages and cultures and the time of the borrowing – is one common to all comparative research, namely, the pitfall of allowing rich descriptions of ostensibly similar practices to inform how one reads and interprets a sparse account.

In the case of *lings*, this observation relates to the equation of (Skyi) Byar *lings* tshal – and perhaps also the Dra'i srug tshal of the Haldeikish graffito – with hunting parks. Cross culturally, such hunting parks served as key military staging grounds, and it is well known that it is from the term for such parks (Neo-Babylonian *par-de-su*; Elamite *bar-te-tash*; Persian *paridaida*; Greek *paradeisos*) that we have the English term “paradise” (Allsen 2006: 34–51). Like all of the council sites, the “(Skyi) Byar hunting park” would have to be full of resources to host the council and provide the necessary infrastructure.

35 See Walter and Beckwith 1997; and Walter 2009. For art-historical evidence of Eurasian influences in early Tibet, with reference to drinking vessels, plates, and textiles, see Heller 2003. Eurasian, and especially Iranian and/or Turko-Iranian influences on Tibetan art and textiles is fairly well documented. For a discussion of Iranian or Turko-Iranic influences on the depiction of mounted warriors and hunting scenes in the western Himalayas from the late-10<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, see Flood 1991 and Papa-Kalantari 2010.

Similarly, the hunting site at Hunza may have served as a staging ground for the Tibetans in their struggles with the Chinese for control of this territory, as the Hunza valley is a luscious area for resting an army and is to this day famed for its hunting. Cutting through this thick comparative description, however, we have nothing but the occurrence of a single place name, (Skyi) Byar lings tshal, and the fact that another *lings* hunt once took place in a “grove” (*tshal*). On this basis we cannot assume the existence of Tibetan hunting parks that doubled as military rest areas in the same way as Allsen describes.

The evidence for Tibetan *lings* as a ring hunt is also inconclusive. One linguistic argument for *lings* as a ring hunt would be to view Tibetan *lings* (and Chinese *ling* 田) as loans from an unidentified Indo-European language, perhaps ultimately deriving from the Proto Indo-European root *\*krenghos*, meaning “ring.” Were one able to make such a case – and, as with *\*ker*, I shall not make it here as I am ill-equipped to pass judgement on reconstructed Proto Indo-European semantics – it would still remain to demonstrate that the *lings* was a ring hunt in practice and not only in name. The hunting laws punish men for allowing game animals to escape from the *khong sa*, which I’ve translated with the intentionally vague “enclosed area” or “delimited area,” in contrast to Richardson’s less equivocal “hunting encirclement.” Alongside Allsen’s examples of makeshift fencing and ringed enclosures practiced by Mongols and Chinese, it is easy to imagine that *khong sa* describes something similar. On the other hand, the term *khong sa* itself allows many other interpretations, and in the absence of compelling evidence, it is probably best not to translate it so narrowly as to rule out, for example, the area where the kill takes place in a drive hunt or in another form of hunt.

The evidence for *lings* as a royal hunt, and for the existence of a royal hunt in Tibet, is more compelling. First of all, it is clear that a tradition of royal hunting existed in imperial Tibet. Hunting is valorized in literary depictions, and royal hunts are attested in documentary sources such as the *Old Tibetan Annals*. That hunting was a royal virtue is dramatized in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*’s eulogy to Khri ’Dus srong’s (686–704) youthful heroism, which resonates with descriptions of warrior kings across cultures: “From the time when Emperor Khri ’Dus srong was small, although he was young, he slaughtered wild boar, fettered wild yaks, seized tigers by their ears, and so forth” (*btsan po khri ’dus srong / / sku chung nas gzhon gyis kyang / / phag rgod la bshan gyIs mdzad / g.yag rgod sg[r]og du bcug / / stagI rna ba la bzung ba la stsogs pa*; P. tib. 1287, ll. 328–29; *DTH*: 149). That this tradition of “fettering yaks” is perhaps something more than a literary image is suggested by the *Old Tibetan Annals*’ entry for 724–725: “in the summer the emperor resided in Spel and departed [to the] north for sport. At Kho nye du ru he hunted (lit. ‘made sport with’) wild yak, and fettered wild yak” (*bt-san po dbyard spel na bzhugs shing/ byang roldu gshegstel/ kho nye du rur/ g.yag rgod sgrog du bchug/*) (Dotson 2009: 114).<sup>36</sup> The Tibetan emperor’s encounter with the yak

36 This image of the fettered wild yak is suggestive of the *Jiu Tangshu*’s statement that to honor foreign envoys, Tibetans “always bring out a yak for the guest himself to shoot, the flesh of which is afterwards served at the banquet” (Bushell 1880: 411; Pelliot 1961: 2). It also calls to mind the Dulan coffin panel scenes where a yak tied to a tether is shot at close range with bow and arrow (Heller: in this volume, and Plate II). This may be a ritual act, as Heller argues. The Tibetan emperor’s encounter with the yak may also be a sort of ritualized combat: Haahr (1969: 332) assumed the existence of a coronation rite in which the emperor had to re-enact a battle with a yak. Hazod (2000: 218–21), also drawing on Sad mar kar’s hunting metaphor and the division of the fallen yak, sees an intimate connection between the ruler

occurs on one of many royal hunting trips to the north, documented in the laconic style of an administrative text that leaves us no clue as to whether these royal hunts were large or small affairs. Five times – in 664–665, 698–699, 724–725, 744–745, and 746–747 – the *Annals* simply states that the emperor “departed to the north for sport” (*byang rol du gshegs*).<sup>37</sup> One such trip, by Emperor Khri ’Dus srong, is noted in the *Old Tibetan Annals*’ entry for 698–699, the same year that his conflict with the Mgar clan came to a head (Dotson 2009: 99–100). In the *Jiu Tangshu* we have an intriguing account of what is most likely the same hunting trip.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Shengli (699) the tsanp’u Ch’inuhsilung [Khri ’Dus srong], having come to years of discretion, held a secret council with his chief minister, Lunyen, and others, at a time when Ch’inling [Mgar Khri ’bring] was abroad. The tsanp’u then announced that he was going on a hunting expedition, collected warriors, and having taken over 2000 of the relatives and confederates of Ch’inling, put them to death. (Bushell 1880: 454; Pelliot 1961: 11)

At first glance, this sounds like a very good story, but one that historians would tend to discount. On the other hand, given the existence in Tibet of the sort of hunt that the hunting laws describe, which seems to have been a massive undertaking that employed large brigades of soldiers to execute the hunt correctly, and which featured an enclosed or delimited area in which one makes the kill, the *Tangshu* account should not be too lightly dismissed. If we believe the account to be more than a fabrication, then the *Tangshu*’s entry informs us that the Tibetan royal hunt, like the *lings* hunt described in the hunting laws, was very large and well organized. Further, it would constitute an instance in which such hunts, like the Eurasian royal hunt, blurred the lines between hunting party and expeditionary army and illustrate how the one can mask, or shade into, the other.

While this would suggest that the royal hunting trips were not dissimilar in scale to the *lings* hunt, it does not fully equate the emperor’s hunting trips with the *lings* hunt. As noted above, the *lings* hunts recorded in the *Annals* were led by the chief minister, Mgar Stong rtsan (d. 667). These both occurred during the minority of Emperor Khri Mang slon (c.643–676). Unfortunately, this circumstance means that their performance by the chief minister can be read either as evidence for or against *lings* as a royal hunt. On the one hand, the record clearly states the hunt was led by a Mgar, the chief minister. On the other hand, one could see Mgar as standing in for the young Emperor Mang slon, or one could even see Mgar as usurping the royal prerogative in a performative act that served to publicly declare himself equal to the rulership. The latter conjecture could be seen to fit with Mgar’s performance of other major administrative measures,

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and the yak. Hazod’s analysis points to how in taming or defeating the yak, the ruler is simultaneously victorious over and assimilated to the natural world. This is precisely the point that Allsen (2006: 162) makes regarding a king’s single combat with the lion in the Eurasian royal hunt, and it points to the king’s liminal and paradoxical role: he simultaneously assimilates, embodies, or absorbs the untame, yet is the tamer *par excellence*.

It should also be noted, in the context of fettering yaks, that the hunting laws make reference to yaks that are led inappropriately by a rope or by other means in cases where this has led to someone being trapped under the yak and killed (P. tib. 1071, ll. 402–08).

37 On this expression see Dotson 2009: 87, n. 151; and 114, n. 268. See also Hill 2011a: 33–35.

including law-giving, in the 650s before Emperor Mang slon came of age. The matter warrants further consideration.

To conclude this brief excursus on the origin of the Tibetan *lings* hunt, it is clear that based on the extant evidence we ought to remain agnostic. As a loan word, the *lings* hunt is likely of foreign origin, and the Eurasian royal hunt, whether transmitted from China, from the west, or a combination of both, remains a compelling candidate for the borrowing. However, the evidence for *lings* as a Tibetan iteration of the Eurasian royal hunt is too thin to warrant a firm conclusion. At the same time, one can observe that the *lings* hunt certainly performs some of the same functions as the Eurasian royal hunt in terms of training soldiers for battle, sharing the kill with the common people, and constituting a public and performative demonstration of the capacity to marshal and organize men for a coordinated and complex spectacle. It is also clear that there was a tradition of royal hunting during the period of the Tibetan Empire, and an emphasis on the importance of the yak as a royal quarry.

## Conclusions

In considering both the literary and historical sources for Sad mar kar's song of the hunt, this enquiry has descended through mimetic layers of representation. The choice of the hunt and the just distribution of the kill as a metaphor for Tibetan society and the sharing of the spoils of conquest could not be more apt. The group hunt, like the act of parricide that Freud imagines at the origins of ritual and religion, is one of the popular candidates for the primal scenes that gave rise to human culture.<sup>38</sup> Paleoanthropologists cite the coordinated group hunt as one of the most fundamental, socially constitutive acts for early humans, and one that spurred their evolution. For the classicist and theorist Walter Burkert, the hunt lies at the origins of ritual and of sacrifice, and it is this role that becomes more elaborate among sedentary peoples for whom the hunt was no longer a necessity (Burkert 1983: 12–22). In this sense, the performative and ceremonial aspect of the hunt, both in Tibet and across Eurasia, is a ritualized refiguration of an earlier, more essential act. Furthermore, this ritualized reinvention of the group hunt constitutes a prefiguration of the visual representation of the hunt on coffin panels and perhaps also in rock art, and its narrative refiguration in divination prognoses, ritual narratives, and in an episode from Tibet's chronicle epic. What was reinvented as a ritualized act is also refigured in image and in words.

Sad mar kar's image of the hunters using shouts and streamers draws on a stereotyped and schematic depiction of the hunt found in divination prognoses and ritual texts. It is malleable, and in Sad mar kar's mouth it is elaborated such that there are hunters in the upper, middle, and lower parts of the valley. The Tibetan emperor is added to this group of three when the yak is butchered and the spoils are distributed in an idealized representation of Tibetan society. This representation is mirrored in some ways by the hunting laws, which, while they likely had practical application, also envision a well-ordered hunt in which all strata of society were present and all fit within a rigidly defined social hierarchy. The hunting laws govern the *lings* hunt, a

38 For Freud's scene of a horde of sons killing and devouring the patriarch, see Freud 1950 (1913): 141ff.



massive group-hunt tradition that is also recorded in official administrative records and in a rock inscription. Whether we conclude that the *lings* hunt was a Central Eurasian-style royal ring hunt or not – and the evidence I’ve given in my brief assessment of the question is too thin to warrant such a conclusion – it is clear that the Tibetan *lings* hunt performed similar functions to those of the Central Eurasian royal hunt. In the main, it was a performative act of administration and governance that served to organize men into military units and develop a cohesive hierarchy. As a historical reality underlying Sad mar kar’s literary depiction of the hunt, the *lings* hunt may inform her image indirectly by its similar emphasis on propriety, stratification, and the blurred distinction between hunting and warfare that gives her image its crucial metaphorical power as a coded exhortation to war.

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|-----------------------------|--|
| IOL Tib J 474               | Buddhist divination text that organizes its prognoses into each “limb” of the Pratitya-samutpāda.                |
| IOL Tib J 732               | Ritual text.   |
| IOL Tib J 734               | Ritual text containing <i>glud</i> antecedent tales.   |
| IOL Tib J 739               | Dice divination text with short introduction.  |
| IOL Tib J 756               | Medical text incorporating ritual methods.   |
| IOL Tib J 788               | Register ( <i>dkar chag</i> ) of materials levied for an arms factory, and register of <i>khum shing</i> levies. |
| IOL Tib J 878               | Register of materials levied for an arms factory.  |
| IOL Tib J 879               | Register of materials levied for an arms factory.  |
| IOL Tib J 1360              | Tibetan military document ( <i>g.yul yig</i> ).  |
| IOL Tib J 1368              | <i>Annals of the 'a zha Principality</i> .   |
| P. tib. 1038                | Three theories on the origin of the kings.   |
| P. tib. 1040                | Funerary text.   |
| P. tib. 1043                | Dice divination text.  |
| P. tib. 1047                | Divination text.   |
| P. tib. 1071                | Hunting laws.  |
| P. tib. 1072                | Hunting laws.  |
| P. tib. 1087                | Letter requiring appearance for legal proceedings.   |
| P. tib. 1134                | Funerary text.   |
| P. tib. 1136                | Funerary text.   |
| P. tib. 1283                | Report on peoples living in north Asia.  |
| P. tib. 1285                | Ritual text.   |
| P. tib. 1287                | <i>The Old Tibetan Chronicle</i> .   |
| P. tib. 1289                | Ritual text.   |
| P. tib. 2218                | Tibetan military document ( <i>g.yul yig</i> ).  |
| Tibetan Haldeikish Graffito | Short rock inscription in Hunza valley, northern Pakistan, that mentions the <i>lings</i> hunt.                  |

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