bcan pos who were not khri: Royal titulature and the succession to the throne in the Tibetan Empire

Joanna Bialek
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany
Email: bialekjo@hu-berlin.de

Abstract
The paper surveys the distribution of the titles bcan po and khri in historical and non-historical documents of the Tibetan Empire. Their patterns of usage suggest the existence of strict rules that governed the bestowal of the titles within the royal family. In the second part of the paper a new chronology of succession to the throne in the Tibetan imperial dynasty is put forward, based not only on Tibetan imperial documents and post-imperial historiographical works but also on Chinese written sources.

Keywords: Tibetan Empire; Succession to the throne; Titulature; khri; bcan po

Introduction
One aspect peculiar to forms of address of Tibetan rulers in official nomenclature has already attracted the attention of scholars working on early Tibetan history: the syllable khri regularly preceding the name of a bcan po. However, when the title bcan po is followed by a proper name, this proper name can take one of two forms: it may, or may not, be preceded by the syllable khri – khri is customarily pre-posed to some names, but not others. This paper on alleged bcan pos that are not termed khri in documents of the Tibetan Empire examines forms of address used with respect to the members of the royal family who, it seems, at some point in their life might have been conceived of as heirs to the throne, but did not necessarily take over the reign.1

The paper is divided into two parts. The first is a philological study of royal names that are not preceded by the syllable khri, even though some of the persons are titled bcan po. The survey begins with the evaluation of historical documents that either stem from Central Tibet (inscriptions) or can be proven to have their origins in this region (the Old Tibetan Annals, OTA). It is assumed that these historical sources strictly accorded to

1 Several terms that are repeatedly used in the paper require clarification. “Old Literary Tibetan” (OLT) refers to the language of non-translatory documents composed roughly within the period of the Tibetan Empire. OLT should be distinguished from both Classical Tibetan (CT), and from Old Tibetan (OT). The latter was a spoken language dated approximately to 640s–800 (see Bialek 2018c). OLT differs from CT primarily in its vocabulary, phraseology and the coherent use of titles characteristic of the epoch of the Tibetan Empire. The frequently used phrase “Old Tibetan documents/texts/sources” refers to non-translatory records composed during the Tibetan Empire.
official protocols in matters of naming and titulature and therefore constitute a more fundamental corpus for the present study. Following the examination of historical sources, contemporary records composed in Central Asian colonies will be surveyed for their use or omission of *khri* in imperial titulature. This part concludes with an etymological analysis of the term *bcan po* and its use in OT sources. The second part of the paper is historical and aims to present a new chronology of the succession to the throne in the Tibetan imperial dynasty. It examines historical documents of the period in the light of the textual and linguistic analyses undertaken in the first part.

The paper is based on primary sources that can be characterized by two criteria: their historical status (historical vs non-historical documents) and their place of origin (Central Tibet vs Central Asian colonies of the Tibetan Empire). There can be no doubt about the historical status of the documents originating in Central Tibet, but the status of the remaining records might require some justification. Since a detailed survey of each and every document is not possible here, I restrict myself to presenting more general arguments in favour of their historical validity.

All the documents were originally written in OLT and therefore represent the non-translatory branch of OT literature. They were undoubtedly written during the Tibetan Empire (between 764 (ゾル) and c. 850), which is confirmed by their language and content. Moreover, they share their phraseology and, as I will argue, agree in the application of strict rules to the use of official titles, rules that were apparently no longer recognized in post-imperial times. The paper puts forward coherence in the application of official titles as one of the indicators that can help us to validate OT documents. Irrespective of their individual subject matter (historical, historiographical, religious, administrative, etc.), the sources used in the paper all make references to historical personages (*bcan po* or members of the royal family) and places. Such references can hardly be justified if one presumes the documents were composed in Central Asia after the fall of the Tibetan Empire; the contemporaneousness of the Tibetan Empire is the *raison d’être* for the existence of the records (see also Zeisler 2016: 468, 484f.). Even though it has been demonstrated that Tibetan language remained in use in Central Asia after the fall of the Tibetan Empire, the subject matter of the texts identified as post-imperial differs considerably from that of the texts discussed in the paper. Neither do we have unambiguously dated post-imperial documents comparable in their content and language to those under discussion; for instance, the pillar inscription of Rgyal-lug-lhas, tentatively dated to 1012 by Richardson (1957: 65), markedly diverges in its linguistic traits and thematic interests from the imperial inscriptions. Any hypothesis arguing for the post-imperial date of the sources used in the paper would have to indicate persons or institutions that could have had not only (propagandic) interest but also financial means to sponsor the literary activity of the circles in Central Asia that were primarily concerned with composing eulogies to the Tibetan royal family or creating prayers dedicated to Tibetan *bcan po*. There is no reason why any of the non-Tibetan rulers in Central Asia should commission such works after the demise of the Tibetan polity and should even pay the scribes for writing eulogies to its rulers. As long as no alternative politico-historical context has been offered and convincingly argued, the traditional view, dating the documents to the imperial period, has to be preferred.

---

2 See the list of Cited Old Tibetan documents at the end of the paper.
3 See Uray 1981; Takeuchi 2004; 2012. For an overview of topics with which post-imperial Central Asian texts written in Tibetan were concerned, see Takeuchi 2004: 341.
4 For the text of the inscription, see Richardson 1957: 66f.
I. (Lack of) *khri* in official titles

Before presenting the historical data, I shall make some lexical observations on the syllable *khri*. Its most general lexical meaning was “a ceremonial (raised) seat for a distinguished person". The syllable also formed part of the throne-title of legitimately established rulers of the Tibetan Empire. One notes the semantic proximity of *khri*, which was added to the name at the enthronement (see below), and the etymology of Eng. *enthronement*. The fact that setting a new ruler on the “throne” in the Tibetan Empire was a part of the ceremony of choosing a new ruler is additionally supported by the phrase *rgyal sa nas phab* “overthrew from the throne” (cf. example (3) below). The word *khri* was used as a throne-title and in this case did not denote the object on which the *bcan po* was seated. The latter was clearly referred to as *rgyal sa*.

Tibetan *khri* has cognates in other Trans-Himalayan (TH) languages (see STEDT #335). The data suggests that the primary meaning of their etymon might have been **“foot”**. The semantic shift from **“foot”** to **“(raised) seat”** finds its parallel, for instance, in Eng. *pedestal/Ger. Piedestal, Eng. podium/Ger. Podium, Ger. Podest*, all ultimately derived from Lat. *pēs* **“foot”** or Gr. *podēs* **“id.”**

Tucci (1947: 310, fn. 8) recognized *khri* as a title bestowed on a *bcan po* with the ascension to the throne. On the other hand, Hummel and Zeisler, discussing the lexical meanings of the term, rejected any connection between the use of *khri* in regnal names and the meaning **“(raised) seat”**. Hummel saw its origin in the language of the Žaň-žuň people. Accordingly, he maintained that the word was an equivalent of OLT *sens* and proposed translating it as “a being” (Ger. **“Wesen”**, Hummel 1993: 240). Zeisler (2015: 758) proposed reconstructing the meaning of *khri* as **“star”**. She objected to the translation **“throne”**, “for [it] does not really make sense in the names of archaic tribal leaders” (ibid.: 758). Neither Hummel’s nor Zeisler’s interpretations account for the cultural usage of *khri* in the name-changing ceremony of *bcan pos*.

In his illuminating paper Brandon Dotson (2015) investigated Tibetan practices related to the naming of people. His main focus was on the naming of the *bcan pos* in the imperial period. Dotson argued that name-giving was **“a central part of the Tibetan royal accession”** (ibid., p. 8) or even that **“the phrase ‘naming the king’ is the appropriate Tibetan equivalent of ‘coronation’”** (ibid., p. 11). According to Dotson, renaming by adding the syllable *khri* to the proper name was one of the means by which an heir was recognized as a rightful ruler, i.e. **the *bcan po***. All the persons called **“bcan po + khri + proper name”** are known (also from foreign sources) to have ruled Tibet and there is no doubt about that. The present paper draws the obvious conclusion from Dotson’s work in asserting that if *khri* was univocal with **enthronement**, the lack of *khri* meant no enthronement.

---

5 The Tibetan script is transliterated according to the principles put forward in Bialek 2020b. Tibetan proper names are hyphenated in order to enhance their readability in the text flow. If not otherwise stated, passages quoted from OT sources have been transliterated by the author on the basis of scans made available on the IDP and Gallica. The OLT orthography is strictly followed. The “reversed gi gu” is transliterated as *i*. No distinction is made between a single and a double *cheg* in the transliteration. The passages from Tibetan texts have been translated by myself.

6 Hummel’s study is utterly ahistorical. Neither is it clear whether he understood *khri* in names like *Na-khri* or *Sa-khri* as identical with *khri* at the head of regnal names of historical personages.

7 Zeisler overlooked two facts: 1. cognates of OLT *khri* are well attested in TH languages and the primary meaning seems to have been **“foot”**; and 2. the more general meaning of *khri* was **“(raised) seat”** and not necessarily **“throne”** (for other CT meanings, see J: 50a). Zeisler’s **“stellar interpretation” of *khri* was based on an incorrect reading of a passage from PT 1038 (for its critical assessment, see Bialek 2018a: 2.569, fn. 3). For *khri* in titles of later times, compare *khri* *chen* and *khri* *pa* used by Buddhist hierarchs.
Central Tibetan documents

One finds the following forms of address devoid of khri (arranged chronologically):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bcan po</th>
<th>lha sras</th>
<th>yo lde spu rgyal</th>
<th>Khri I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bcan po</td>
<td>gčen</td>
<td>sroṅ rcan</td>
<td>PT 1288: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bcan po</td>
<td>gčen</td>
<td>lha bal pho</td>
<td>ITJ 750: 152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bcan po</td>
<td>sras</td>
<td>rgyal gcug ru</td>
<td>ITJ 750: 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bcan po</td>
<td>sras</td>
<td>lhas bon</td>
<td>ITJ 750: 287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bcan po</td>
<td></td>
<td>sroṅ lde brcan</td>
<td>ITJ 750: 291</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To these one can also add:

| bcan po | khri sroṅ lde brcan daṅ lde sroṅ | yab sras | Rkoṅ I |

which can be interpreted as “bcan po, Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan and [bcan po] Lde-sroṅ, father and son”. Below I shall briefly comment on the above forms of address.

Yo-lde Spu-rgyal was a legendary person, so one can omit him from the discussion. The titles with which his name is provided in the documents are anachronistic and apparently reflect the contemporary practice of the period in which the texts were composed.

Sroṅ-rcan is addressed as bcan po gčen sroṅ rcan together with his younger brother (gčuṅ) Bcan-sroṅ:

1. bcan po gčen sroṅ rcan daṅ / gčuṅ bcan sroṅ gniśī nol nas (PT 1288: 8)
   Both bcan po, the elder brother Sroṅ-rcan, and the younger brother Bcan-sroṅ, fought.

From this passage Dotson (2015: 9) inferred that Sroṅ-rcan was the pre-accession name of the bcan po, otherwise called Khri Sroṅ-rcan in the OTA. The problem is the chronology, because earlier (l. 6 of the same document) the bcan po is already called Khri Sroṅ-rcan:

2. bcan po khri sroṅ rcan gyis / śuld byaṅ lam du pyuṅ ste / (PT 1288: 6)
   bcan po Khri Sroṅ-rcan left [his] traces on the northern road.

One can hypothesize that, because the Preamble (ll. 1–16) was written after the annalistic practice had been initiated in 650/1, the events reported therein were presented anachronistically and one inadvertently used the regnal name Khri Sroṅ-rcan, causing the inconsistency.

Lha-bal-pho is mentioned on the occasion of his dethronement:

3. poṅ lag raṅ du bcan po gčen lha bal pho rgyal sa nas phab / (ITJ 750: 152)
   At Poṅ-lag-raṅ, [they] overthrew the bcan po, the elder brother Lha-bal-pho, from the throne.

From this laconic account we can infer that Lha-bal-pho acceded to the throne illegally, without the necessary ceremonies that accompanied the enthronement, and for that reason was not addressed with khri. On the one hand, the kinship term gčen “elder brother” is used and, on the other, Lha-bal-pho is called bcan po. One also notices that Khri Ydus-sroṅ died in the winter of 704/5, whereas Lha-bal-po was removed from the throne in the summer of 705/6. It follows that the latter remained on the throne for no longer than six
months. We know from Chinese sources that the succession to the throne after the death of Khri Yuds-sroṅ was disputed among rivalrous heirs and their supporters. History was more favourable to Rgyal-gcug-ru who eventually became the next bcan po.

Lhas-bon must have been the heir to the throne, since in (5) he is called where the syllables the throne (Beckwith 2003 [1983]: 279f., fn. 9; Petech 1988: 1087). Qi-li-nu-xi-long transcribes Khri enthroned; the rightful ruler was then (i.e. in the years 739 – 750) Lhas-bon reported in the year 745/6 (ITJ 750: 302).

Lhas-bon must have been the heir to the throne, since in (5) he is called bcan po sras. It seems that he died very young (his birth is not recorded), long before he could have been enthroned; the rightful ruler was then (i.e. in the years 739–42) Khri Lde-gcug-rcan who ruled well into the 750s. Lhas-bon’s mother was jo mo Khri-bcun whose funeral is reported in the year 745/6 (ITJ 750: 302).

According to Tongdian 通典, a compendium of knowledge written by Do You from 766 to 801, a certain Qi-li-ba-bu died in 705/6 and his son Qi-li-nu-xi-long, who was then seven years old, ascended the throne (Beckwith 2003 [1983]: 279f., fn. 9; Petech 1988: 1087). Qi-li-nu-xi-long transcribes Khri Yuds-sroṅ, whereas the syllables ba bu in Qi-li-ba-bu have been reconstructed as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>拔 bā</td>
<td>Y. p’a, L. p’a:i:t, E. bāt/bāt</td>
<td>LH bu, OCM *bāts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>布 bù</td>
<td>Y. p’u, L. pu’o, E. p’o</td>
<td>LH pu, OCM *pāh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>途</td>
<td></td>
<td>MC puH, OCM *p’a-s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beckwith (2003 [1983]), followed by Petech (1988: 1087), reconstructed Qi-li-ba-bu as *Khri Bal-po, which is plausible but creates two problems: 1. *Khri Bal-po is otherwise not known as ruler; and 2. the syllable khri indicates that he must have been enthroned. The account is certainly distorted, for Khri Yuds-sroṅ was not the son of Qi-li-ba-bu if the latter should be identified with Lha-bal-po. On the other hand, jiu Tangshu reports that it was Khri Lde-gcug-rcan who was enthroned at the age of seven (Bushell 1880: 456; Pelliot 1961: 12). The validity of Tongdian is additionally impugned by the statement that Qi-li-ba-bu was the grandson of Khri Sroṅ-racen who succeeded him to the throne in 650 (Petech 1988: 1087). In the OTA, Lha-bal-pho is called gān, whereas Rgyal-gcug-ru (alias Khri Lde-sroṅ-racen) is referred to as sras. In Bialek (2021a: 18) I have argued that kinterms were used with reference to the ruling bcan po up to his funeral. This means that gān and sras (both occurring in the summer of 705/6) had the same point of reference, a person for whom Lha-bal-pho was an elder brother, but Rgyal-gcug-ru a son. Analysing the use of kinterms in the OTA, I have concluded that Lha-bal-pho must have been an elder brother of Khri Yuds-sroṅ (born to Khri Man-slōn Man-racen and Man-paṅs) and so could not have been a legitimate ruler (Bialek 2021a: 14f.). In this case the OTA are correct in not calling Lha-bal-pho khri, but the sophisticated rules governing the succession to the throne in the Tibetan Empire were not well understood by the Chinese who, hearing of an enthronement, added khri to his name, producing Qi-li-ba-bu. Lha-bal-pho must have been enthroned (or better: put on the throne) because in (3) we read that he was overthrown from the throne (rgyal sa), but his enthronement was illegal and therefore the lack of the title khri. Alternatively, he might have received the title khri from his supporters (as suggested in Ch. Qi-li-ba-bu), but the official Tibetan chroniclers omitted it due to him being a usurper. According to this hypothesis, however, his throne name would have been *Khri Bal-po, which considerably diverges from all the other throne names of the epoch (see Table 1, Appendix).

Cf. Bushell 1880: 456; Pelliot 1961: 12. The events are also alluded to in the OTA when in 705/6 a revolt is recorded (ITJ 750: 150–2).

The appositional phrase bcan po sras “bcan po, the son” should be distinguished from the determinative bcan po sras “bcan po’s son”; see Bialek 2021a: 17.

Post-imperial sources address Khri-bcun with the title jān mo (cf. Haarh 1969: 56); I interpret the title jo mo as referring to the first consort of a bcan po after she had given birth to an heir to the throne (see OTD). jān mo is a later folk etymology, which fact is confirmed by the morphology of the title: jān mo instead of the expected *jān baṣ (compare other titles listed by Haarh). Moreover, Khri-bcun is a typical Tibetan name and since other
Of Rgyal-gcug-ru, Sroṅ-lde-brcan, and Lde-sroṅ, we know that they later became rulers and their names were changed to Khri Lde-gcug-rcan, Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan, and Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan respectively:

(6) bcan poe mchan rgyal gcug (186) ru las / khri lde gcug rcan du gsold / (ITJ 750)
[One] bestowed the name of the bcan po as Khri Lde-gcug-rcan instead of Rgyal-gcug-ru.

(7) bcan poe mcan khrī sroṅ lde brcan du bond / (Or.8212/187: 17)
[One] gave [him] the bcan po’s name as Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan.

None of the preserved historical sources documents the name-giving ceremony of Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan. In these three cases it can be reasonably argued that their previous names were pre-regnal and were replaced at the moment of their enthronement.12

Central Asian documents

In no known OT document is the name Ywu yı-dun-brtan prefixed with khri.13 This is also true for PT 134 on which Richardson asserted “Khri-ywu yı-dun-brcan [sic] is the beneficiary of a long prayer in PT 134” (1998b [1992]: 190). In fact, the document begins with the following formula: bcan po lha sras ywu yı dun brtan kyi sku yon du bsti bo sbya smon lam du gsol pay (l. 1). The name recurs in the penultimate line of the text as bcan po ywu yı dun brtan. The syllable khri was evidently added by Richardson but is not attested in the text; Yamaguchi (1996: 253) did the same without stating his reasons. The last and unfortunately incomplete sentence of PT 1286 informs us that Ywu yı-dun-brtan was a younger brother of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan (l. 69) and thus could not have legitimately succeeded the latter; because Khri Gcug-lde-brcan had been enthroned (khri), only his son could have succeeded him.14

Yet another OT document reads: lha sras khri yod sruṅs brcan yum [s]r[as] (PT 230: 7).15 Therefore, according to the disclosed patterns of the official imperial nomenclature, the names Ywu yı-dun-brtan and Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan indicate that the former was not enthroned whereas the latter was enthroned as a legitimate ruler.

---

12 See Dotson 2015: 9.
13 One finds two variants of his name in OLT: Ywu yı-dun-brtan (PT 134) and Ywu yı-dun-brcan (PT 1286). The second syllable can be reconstructed as *dun; -n assimilated to -m before bilabial b-: -n > -m / -m̄-. The alternation yw- ~ y-, unless a scribal error, is known from ywa ~ yo “fox” in ywa/yo dom “fox-pendant” (PT 1071 and PT 1072, passim). The vowel o in yo might have resulted from assimilation to dom; a hypothesis not considered in previous studies (see Coblin 1994; Hill 2006). I will use the form Ywu yı-dun-brtan as it seems to be the older variant. The address rgyal po qu rum dpal (PT 83: 8.11) certainly does not refer to Ywu yı-dun-brtan as suggested by Richardson (1998b [1992]: 190).
14 In this context one may recall the rules of succession in the Ladakhi kingdom: according to the Ladakhi Chronicle, the succession to the throne was always from father to son (Petech 1939: 17). The Buddhist stories that justify the regicide of Ywu yı-dun-brtan may be an attempt to explain the murder of an illegitimate ruler; they have transferred his unlawful status as a ruler to the sphere of religion, claiming his departure from Buddhism. Ywu yı-dun-brtan was unrighteous not in a Buddhist sense but in terms of law of royal succession.
15 Chinese sources provide his name as Qi-li-hu (Bushell 1880: 523; Pelliot 1961: 134), the first two syllables of which render OLT khri (Richardson 1998e [1971]: 49; Beckwith 1993: 169, fn. 167). For its analysis, see section Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan below.
But the issue is not as straightforward as presented above. The following formulas are attested in OT records:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bcan po</th>
<th>lha sras</th>
<th>ywuyi dun brtan</th>
<th>PT 134</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yod sruñ</td>
<td>PT 131/PT 999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yod sras</td>
<td>PT 840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lha sras</td>
<td>khri</td>
<td>yod sruñ bcan</td>
<td>PT 230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presuming that these documents follow the official naming-protocol, it is conspicuous that Ywuyi-dun-brtan is titled bcan po. On the other hand, Khri Yod-sruñ-bcan is not called bcan po, but the syllable khri (and -bcan) informs us that he ascended the throne (Richardson 1998e [1971]: 50 and 1998f [1988]: 108).17

The above analysis is based on the assumption that PT 134 and PT 230 conformed to the official naming-protocol. The texts could have been written in different circles that supported one or other pretendant to the throne, and so may be irreconcilable. An alternative hypothesis will be presented below.

In this connection I would like to draw attention to yet another significant occurrence of the formula “bcan po + PROPER NAME” discussed in more detail by Dotson (2007b: 8ff.). In the so-called Yphana than ma catalogue – apparently a document originally composed in the imperial period – a certain bcan po Mu-rug-bcan is attributed a commentary on Samdhinirmocanasūtra.18 Mu-rug-bcan is called elder brother (gchen) of bcan po Khri Lde-sroñ-bcan in Žwa W 48. The same inscription relates a quarrel (thugs nois) between the elder brother (gchen) of Khri Lde-sroñ-bcan (i.e. Mu-rug-bcan) and their father (yab), i.e. Khri Sroñ-Lde-bcan (ll. 9–10). If we gather together these scattered pieces of information we obtain the following picture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bcan po</td>
<td>Mu-rug-bcan</td>
<td>Yphana than ma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bcan po)</td>
<td>Lde-sroñ</td>
<td>Rkoń</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gchen</td>
<td>Mu-rug-bcan</td>
<td>Žwa W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bcan po</td>
<td>Khri</td>
<td>Žwa W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lde-sroñ-bcan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Khri</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lde-sroñ-bcan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 He is also given the title bcan po in the Yphana than ma catalogue; see below and Halkias 2004: 82.
17 The syllable brcan was spelled rcan in the names of the first bcan pos, but changed its form to brcan from Khri Sroñ-Lde-brcan onwards (see also van Schaik and Doney 2007: 183f.; Dotson and Helman-Ważyń 2016: 126, fn. 104). (The assumed variant bcan in the Brag inscription is a misreading by Heller (1997: 389) as recently observed in Bialek 2021a: 27, fn. 68). Two possible explanations can be put forward: 1. The initial b- might have been added by analogy with bcan in bcan po; or 2. The etymological form brcan was enforced in consequence of standardization of orthography. I suggest the following development: the etymological form was rcan- and its basic meaning was “mighty” (the complex onset br- does not occur in non-verbal etymons); owing to the military expansion of the polity, the syllable received b- by analogy with bcan po yielding brcan-. In the last step, it merged with bcan- – the only variant known in CT sources for the word “mighty”. The distribution of rcan vs brcan in the royal names seems to have had a temporal frame and was not triggered by the phonetic environment of the syllable. However, this alone does not suffice to date a document for, as remarked by Dotson and Helman-Ważyń (2016: 126, fn. 104), not all texts attest to a coherent use of either rcan or brcan. Texts which have only bcan for earlier brcan are late in absolute dating, but those that use (b)rcan are not necessarily earlier owing to the conservatism and a tendency to use archaism typical of written languages (the oldest dated occurrence of brcan is attested in ITJ 750: 291 for 742/3). bcan- for the etymological rcan- must not be confused with bcan in bcan po which, as I demonstrate in this paper, had a distinct etymon. As I will show below, the principles governing the use of the title bcan po rule out any connection with the word rcan- “mighty”. Finally, the former was a noun and the latter an adjective; this explains their seemingly complementary distribution in OT records.
18 yphags pa dgeos pa nes par byrgel payi mdo bṣad pa bcan po mu rug bcer gyis mjad (Halkias 2004: 83); see also Halkias (2004: 56f.).
The data suggest that Mu-rug-brcan, the elder brother of Lde-sroṅ, was by birth determined to become the next bcan po. However, due to unknown circumstances he was rejected and fought with his father, probably to regain his right to the throne, but eventually lost. His younger brother Lde-sroṅ was enthroned instead and acquired the regnal name Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan.19 This new interpretation allows for a new relative chronology of the above sources. The Rkoṅ inscription is assumed to have been composed during the reign of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan, between 797 and 803/4.20 Thus, there are three ways to explain the phrase bcan po mu rug bcan from the Yphān thāṅ ma catalogue: 1. The catalogue was compiled during the reign of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan when Mu-rug-brcan was still perceived as the heir to the throne;21 2. The passage that mentions bcan po Mu-rug-bcan was compiled during the reign of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan (when the assumed commentary was written) and repeated in a later re-edited work; or 3. The catalogue was compiled after the fall of the Tibetan Empire and the royal naming-protocol was not observed any more. Since we know that the Yphān thāṅ ma catalogue was composed rather late,22 only the second and third options can be considered correct. The titulature used in Yphān thāṅ ma evinces serious revisions of the text so that no secure dating of the original can be proposed; cf.: 1. Mu-rug-bcan instead of OLT Mu-rug-brcan (Żwa W); 2. Dbaṅ-dum-brtan (Halkias 2004: 57) for OLT Ywuyi-dun-brtan and Yuyi-dum-brtan (see above);23 3. The use of the title rgyal po: rgyal po lha sras brcan sgam po and yphul gyi rgyal po khri sroṅ lde bcan (Halkias 2004: 64).24 One notices, however, a significant incoherence: the title rgyal po is used in the colophon (Halkias 2004: 64) but in the body of the

19 From the phrase khri sroṅ lde brcan daṅ / ches poṅ za rma rgyal ldong skar du būs po yi sras / mu ne brcan daṅ / lde sroṅ brcan / (PT 1286: 67–8) Dotson inferred that Mu-ne-brcan was another ruler who reigned between Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan and Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan (2007b: 10f.). However, one should be careful with data provided by PT 1286 unless unanimously confirmed by other OT historical documents. The text does not adhere to the naming-protocol of the Tibetan Empire; the names are only randomly given the syllable khri therein. Certainly, the document has much less historical value than the other sources analysed above, but if we agree that Lde-sroṅ-brcan had another elder brother (Mu-ne-brcan) who obviously died (young?) without leaving any offspring (gdun chad, PT 1286: 68), we could propose the following scenario: Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan had four sons (falsely attributed in KhG (Ja 126r2–3) to bcn mo đ che-ba-spon (read: Ches-poṅ-bzaṅ Me-tog-sgron). The first one was born to Rgyal-mo-brcan in 760/1 (cf. Or.8212/187: 39) and is alluded to in the inscription on the Bsam-yas bell. The son, however, died young and his mother became a nun. (This interpretation was put forward by Richardson (1980: 64 and 1985: 32), and is only valid if Rgyal-mo-brcan-jo mo Byaṅ-chub (Khra 10); according to KhG, Ybro-bzaṅ Khri-rgyal-mo-brcan’s ordained name was Byaṅ-chub-rje (Ja 98v1–2). KhG (Ja 126r3) confirms that the eldest son of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan died young.) Mu-rug-brcan, the second eldest son of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan from another wife, was subsequently foreseen as the heir (he could have been born after the death of the first son). However, yet another wife (according to KhG (Ja 98v1) Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan had five wives), Ches-poṅ-za Rma-rgyal-ldon-skar, later gave birth to two sons: Mu-ne-brcan and Lde-sroṅ-brcan. The former died young (PT 1286: 68) and so only Mu-rug-brcan and Lde-sroṅ-brcan were left. It does not seem probable that Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan had two wives from the Ches-poṅ family: Ches-poṅ-za Rma-rgyal-ldon-skar (PT 1286: 67–8) and *Ches-poṅ-bzaṅ Me-tog-sgron (KhG, Ja 126r2–3). The names are very different but some later historiographers indeed identified the two (see Yamaguchi 1969: 154–5, fn. 48).

20 See Li and Coblin (1987: 208). Bialek (2021a: 22, fn. 46) discusses the “controversy” of whether one should count one or two Rkorn inscriptions.

21 Assuming that his father was still alive when the catalogue was composed, one would expect *bcan po sras and not only bcan po. On the use of kinterms in historical documents from the Tibetan Empire, see Bialek 2021a.

22 Halkias argued that the Yphān thāṅ ma catalogue was compiled after Dkar chag ldan dkar ma (c. 812) and Sygra sbyor bam po phis pa (814; 2004: 55) but was based on the former and the still missing catalogue Dkar chag bsam yas mchims phu ma (Halkias 2004: 48; see also Uray 1989: 15 and Dotson 2007b: 2ff.). Yamaguchi (1996: 243) dated the Yphān thāṅ ma catalogue to a period after the reign of Yuyi-dun-brtan. The latter is mentioned in the text.

23 The replacement of the OLT yw- by db- in the name of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan’s brother might indicate that the former was pronounced as [w].

24 Since the catalogue was published only in modern printed letters (Halkias 2004: 58f.) and no reproduction has been made available thus far, it is also possible that some of the changes in spelling were added by the editor.
catalogue we find: *bcan po* Khri Sron-lde-bcan (ibid., p. 80), *bcan po* Dbay-dun-brtan (p. 82), and *bcan po* Mu-rug-bcan (p. 83). It follows that large parts of the catalogue were re-edited in post-imperial times but there are still linguistic features that indicate its imperial provenance.

The above survey has concentrated on the names of *bcan pos* that lacked the syllable *khri*. The latter formed part of a regnal name and its bestowal constituted an important element of the enthronement ceremony. The custom is reflected in OT historical documents but its remnants can likewise be traced in non-historical records that were re-edited in post-imperial times. This finding has far-reaching consequences for the reconstruction of the royal dynasty: persons whose names are never provided with the title *khri* were not legitimate (i.e. enthroned) rulers. This concerns such widely discussed personages as Lha-bal-pho, Mu-rug-brcan, or Ywu-yi-dun-brtan, to mention just the most famous ones. Now one can reasonably ask: why were they nevertheless called *bcan po*?

The following cases of *bcan pos* who were not *khri* have been collected from historical documents dating back to the Empire:

| *bcan po* | Yo-lde Spu-rgyal | Khri I, Treaty E 5  
|------------|-----------------|-----------------  
| *bcan po* | Sron-rcan       | PT 1288: 8        
| †bcan po  | Lha-bal-pho     | ITJ 750: 152      
| *bcan po* | Rgyal-gcug-ru   | ITJ 750: 150, 153  
| †bcan po  | Lhas-bon        | ITJ 750: 287      
| *bcan po* | Sron-lde-brcan  | ITJ 750: 291      
| *bcan po* | Ywu-yi-dun-brtan| PT 134: 1, Ypha'n than ma  
| †bcan po  | Mu-rug-bcan     | Ypha'n than ma  

Some of them were later enthroned and acquired the title *khri* (these are marked with *). Some might have been foreordained to become *bcan pos* by virtue of their primogeniture, but never succeeded to the throne (marked with †). In texts they are additionally referred to by a kinterm, either *sras* or *gc'en*, depending on their kin relation to the ruling *bcan po*. But of Ywu-yi-dun-brtan, a younger brother of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan, we know that under normal circumstances he would never have ascended the throne (he is also never titled *khri*). Why are all these persons (leaving aside Yo-lde Spu-rgyal) called *bcan po*? And why is Khri Yod-sru-brcan, despite the title *khri*, never addressed as *bcan po*? Apparently the rules for the application, and thus also the distribution, of the titles *bcan po* and *khri* differed.

The solution might lie in the etymology of the term *bcan po*. The latter has almost unanimously been understood as a mere title, i.e. devoid of lexical meaning, and has usually been related to CT *bcan* “mighty”. However, its true nature was already alluded to early in the history of Tibetan studies by Francke (1914: 51): “In Ladakh the title or name *bcan*, *bcan-po*, would indicate that a certain person was descended from the royal family”. This description certainly applies to all persons called *bcan po* in OT documents. I think that the connotation with the royal family had its origin in the etymology of the lexeme. Zeisler (2011: 109) proposed deriving *bcan* from the verb root √ʦa, although it was Benedict (1942: 321) who first related the CT verb bca'y to cha “offspring”; he also provided a list of further potential cognates. Due to its semantics the verb was not inflected for all

---

25 In Bialek (2021a) I argued that the currently reigning *bcan po* was the point of reference (ego) for the use of kinterms within the royal family.
stems, but formed only two: \textit{act/pfv bcas} (v2) and \textit{dpass bca'y} (v3).\textsuperscript{26} The verb is glossed in CT dictionaries under the latter form with the meaning “to bear, to bring forth” (J: 434b). I assume that \textit{bcan} was derived from v3 \textit{bca'y}, lit. “was born/brought forth” (Ger. “wurde geboren”), by means of the adjectival suffix \textit{−n}, so that the etymological meaning of \textit{bcan} can be reconstructed as “*born/brought forth” (cf. Eng. \textit{born} < to bear).\textsuperscript{27} The formation \textit{bcan po} denoted a male descendant (lit. “born-he”), and \textit{bcan mo} a female one (lit. “born-she”).

Thus, \textit{bcan po} and \textit{bcan mo} denoted a male and a female offspring of the royal family and could be translated as “scion” and “scioness”, respectively. As opposed to Dotson’s assumption that “all of the Tibetan ladies referred to as \textit{bcan mo} – that is, excluding in-marrying foreign princesses – appear to be sisters of the reigning emperor” (Dotson 2009: 119, fn. 294), we actually have no historical evidence concerning their kin relations to the royal family.\textsuperscript{28} Zeisler (2011: 110) assumed that \textit{bcan po} denoted only an offspring of the heir-bearing mother. But this seems to clash with the fact that Mu-rug-brcan was called \textit{bcan po} but was born to a different mother from the actual successor Khri Lde-sro-rcan. The same objection most probably applies to Lha-bal-pho. I think it more secure to assume that \textit{bcan po} and \textit{bcan mo} denoted legal (i.e. officially recognized) offspring of an enthroned \textit{bcan po}.\textsuperscript{29}

Now a clearer picture emerges: \textit{bcan po} denoted a legal son of a Tibetan ruler, whereas \textit{khri} was a title bestowed on the heir to the throne during the enthronement ceremony. The second part of the paper is an attempt at a new chronology of the dynastic line which includes these new insights.

\section*{II. Tibetan imperial dynasty}

Considering together the conventions in language use that have been revealed with respect to the postpositions \textit{riṅ la} and \textit{sku riṅ la} (Bialek 2018b), kinterms of the royal family (Bialek 2021a), and the bestowal of the title \textit{khri} discussed in the present paper, we can put forward a new chronology of succession to the throne in the Tibetan imperial dynasty. Table 1, arranged chronologically, juxtaposes known pre-regnal names with regnal names.\textsuperscript{30}

Khri Stag-bu, Khri Slon-bcan, and Guņ-sroņ Guņ-rcan were active in the pre-historical period and therefore nothing certain can be said about the dates of their births and deaths because no documents have been preserved from before 650. The birth and death of Khri Sro-rcan, Khri Maņ-sloņ Maņ-rcan, Khri Ydus-sroņ, Khri Lde-gcug-rcan, and Khri Sroņ-Lde-brcan can be partly established on the basis of the OTA. For the remaining \textit{bcan pos}, inscriptive but also post-imperial evidence has to be included in the analysis.

\textsuperscript{26} See Bialek (2020a) for the inflectional morphology of OLT verbs. The verb root \textit{ḥsa} was most probably a nominal stem derived from \textit{cha} “offspring”.

\textsuperscript{27} Zeisler’s (2011: 109f.) explanation of the morphology of \textit{bcan} differs from the one presented here.

\textsuperscript{28} The only clear case is Sad-mar-kar called \textit{bcan mo} in PT 1287: 399, who was a sister of \textit{bcan po} Khri Sro-rcan. But PT 1287 is not a historical text and it is uncertain to what extent it followed the official naming protocol of the royal family (see also the next footnote).

\textsuperscript{29} This is of course an etymological explanation, and the real use of the terms might have changed over the course of time, first of all for \textit{bcan mo}. For instance, in the OTA the term was applied to three foreign princesses: \textit{bcan mo} Mun-čaṅ Koṅ-čo, \textit{bcan mo} ga tun, and \textit{bcan mo} Kim-šan Koṅ-čo. The Chinese princesses were not imperial daughters (Pelliot 1961: 13, 83, 95–6).

\textsuperscript{30} The bracketed names are supplemented from Central Asian documents. Lists of royal succession which reflect differing views on the chronology of Tibetan \textit{bcan pos} can be found, e.g., in Li and Coblin 1987: 25ff., Table I; Nel-pa Paṇḍita 1987: 30; Beckwith 1993: 226–9; Dotson 2007a: 416, Appendix One; 2009: 143; 2015: 27.
In what follows, I will present arguments that support the reconstructed line of succession. For data not supplied by OT sources, post-imperial historiographies have been consulted. Tucci (1947) demonstrated the general validity of bcan po’s birth and death dates which are provided in post-imperial sources—in order to arrive at the correct date one should consider only the data of the duodenary animal cycle and disregard other elements of the sexagenary cycle. Nevertheless, this approach does not always lead to correct results, and there is frequent disagreement between authors. Chinese histories like Jiu Tangshu “Old Book of Tang” and Xin Tangshu “New Book of Tang” are another source of information. Although they usually supply very detailed dates (including the day and month) one must not forget that these are the dates the particular information was delivered to the Chinese court and not the dates of the events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-regnal name</th>
<th>Regnal name</th>
<th>Regnal years</th>
<th>Years of life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Khri Stag-bu] 31</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Khri Slon-bcan] 32</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sron-rcan</td>
<td>Khri Sron-rcan</td>
<td>593–649</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcan</td>
<td>649–676</td>
<td>638–676</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khri Ydus-sron</td>
<td>685–704</td>
<td>676–704</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rgyal-gcug-ru</td>
<td>Khri Lde-gcug-rcan</td>
<td>704–754</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sron-i-de-brcan</td>
<td>Khri Sron-i-de-brcan</td>
<td>742–804</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lde-sron</td>
<td>Khri Lde-sron-brcan</td>
<td>797–815</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Mu-cu-brtan]</td>
<td>Khri Gcug-i-de-brcan</td>
<td>794–841</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Yod-srun]</td>
<td>[Khri Yod-srun-brcan]</td>
<td>841–841</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In what follows, I will present arguments that support the reconstructed line of succession. For data not supplied by OT sources, post-imperial historiographies have been consulted. Tucci (1947) demonstrated the general validity of bcan po’s birth and death dates which are provided in post-imperial sources—in order to arrive at the correct date one should consider only the data of the duodenary animal cycle and disregard other elements of the sexagenary cycle. Nevertheless, this approach does not always lead to correct results, and there is frequent disagreement between authors. Chinese histories like Jiu Tangshu “Old Book of Tang” and Xin Tangshu “New Book of Tang” are another source of information. Although they usually supply very detailed dates (including the day and month) one must not forget that these are the dates the particular information was delivered to the Chinese court and not the dates of the events.

Khri Sron-rcan

The date of birth of Khri Sron-rcan remains unknown and has long been a matter of speculation. If we agree that his grandson Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcan was born in 638...
(he must have been born before 647, see below), then Khri Sroṅ-rcan must have been born not later than at the end of the sixth or the very beginning of the seventh century. Richardson’s estimation that the year of his birth should have been somewhere between 609 and 613 (1998d [1965]: 6) is untenable because it would give an average of 18 or even 16 years for Khri Sroṅ-rcan and Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan to have become fathers (e.g. Khri Maṅ-slon Maṅ-rcan was certainly more than 27 years old and Khri Ydus-sroṅ was 29 years old when their heirs were born in 676 and 704 respectively, but Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan was 19 when his first son was born in 760/1).

However, Chinese sources report that it was Khri Sroṅ-rcan who asked Guṅ-sroṅ to have become fathers (e.g. Khri Maṅ-slon Maṅ-rcan was known only from the non-historical text PT 1286 (his regnal name in khri- is not attested). He might have died in 647 for in PT 1288: 15–6 we read that his father, Khri Sroṅ-rcan (d. 649/50) had lived three years with Mun-čaṅ Koṅ-čo before his death, so he must have married her not later than in 647 according to Tibetan reckoning. As sensibly remarked by Yamaguchi (1969: 160), a passage from the Preamble to the OTA dated to 644/5 states: bcan po khri sroṅ rcan gyi rīṅ lay (PT 1288: 13), lit. “the body of the bcan po Khri Sroṅ-rcan”. Thus, at that point Khri Sroṅ-rcan was the ruling bcan po. Yamaguchi, following Tibetan historiographers, assumed that Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan ruled for five years and accordingly he placed his reign before 644 (1969: 160). However, Chinese sources report that it was Khri Sroṅ-rcan who asked for a Chinese princess (Bushell 1880: 444; Pelliot 1961: 4, 83); thus he must have been the reigning bcan po at that point. In conclusion, Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan must have reigned either from around 641 to 644 or from 645 to 647. In the former case, Khri Sroṅ-rcan’s marriage with Mun-čaṅ Koṅ-čo might have been concluded after the burial ceremonies for Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan had ended, i.e. about two or three years after his death.

**Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan**

Thus far the name Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan has been known only from the non-historical text PT 1286 (his regnal name in khri- is not attested). He might have died in 647 for in PT 1288: 15–6 we read that his father, Khri Sroṅ-rcan (d. 649/50) had lived three years with Mun-čaṅ Koṅ-čo before his death, so he must have married her not later than in 647 according to Tibetan reckoning. As sensibly remarked by Yamaguchi (1969: 160), a passage from the Preamble to the OTA dated to 644/5 states: bcan po khri sroṅ rcan gyi rīṅ lay (PT 1288: 13), lit. “the body of the bcan po Khri Sroṅ-rcan”. Thus, at that point Khri Sroṅ-rcan was the ruling bcan po. Yamaguchi, following Tibetan historiographers, assumed that Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan ruled for five years and accordingly he placed his reign before 644 (1969: 160). However, Chinese sources report that it was Khri Sroṅ-rcan who asked for a Chinese princess (Bushell 1880: 444; Pelliot 1961: 4, 83); thus he must have been the reigning bcan po at that point. In conclusion, Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan must have reigned either from around 641 to 644 or from 645 to 647. In the former case, Khri Sroṅ-rcan’s marriage with Mun-čaṅ Koṅ-čo might have been concluded after the burial ceremonies for Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan had ended, i.e. about two or three years after his death.

**Khri Maṅ-slon Maṅ-rcan**

Post-imperial historiographical sources agree that Khri Maṅ-slon Maṅ-rcan was born in a dog year. Because his father Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan died not later than in 647, it follows that Khri Maṅ-slon Maṅ-rcan must have been born in 638, otherwise he would have been 17 in 644 or 20 in 647 when his father died (see above) and could have taken over the government; instead, his grandfather Khri Sroṅ-rcan reigned again. One can speculate that Khri Sroṅ-rcan abdicated after the son was born to Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan, securing the dynasty.

---

38 Years are counted in accordance with the Tibetan custom of including the year of birth in the count.

39 Tibetan historiographers are unanimous in stating that Khri Sroṅ-rcan was born in an ox year.

40 In Bialek (2018b: 403f.) I argued that rīṅ lay here is not the postposition “during the reign” but a simple lexeme rīṅ “body” in allative (lay), from which the postposition later developed. Hence, Yamaguchi’s assertion that the phrase marked the beginning of the second reign of Khri Sroṅ-rcan (1969: 160) can be dismissed.

41 Yamaguchi (1970: 95) set Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan’s death to 643. Sørensen proposed his regnal years to have been 641–6 (1994: 307, fn. 936).

42 The dates calculated by Yamaguchi (1969: 163f.) for Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan (birth: 621; ascension: 638; death: 643) are misguided by his assumption that Khri Maṅ-slon Maṅ-rcan was the son of Guṅ-sroṅ Guṅ-rcan and Mun-čaṅ Koṅ-čo.
Khri Maṅ-slön Maṅ-rcan must have been enthroned in 649/50 for in the record for the year 650/1 he is already referred to by his regnal name (PT 1288: 18) and no name-giving ceremony is alluded to. At the time of his enthronement he must have been at least nine years old, for otherwise he would not have been enthroned immediately after the death of Khri Yḍus-sroṅ and Khri Lde-gcug-rcan were not enthroned until they reached the age of about nine (see sections Khri Yḍus-sroṅ and Khri Lde-gcug-rcan below). This argument also supports the hypothesis that Khri Maṅ-slön Maṅ-rcan was born in 638. He died in the winter of the rat year 676/7 (ITJ 750: 66–7).

Khri Yḍus-sroṅ

Khri Yḍus-sroṅ was born in the winter of the rat year 676/7 (ITJ 750: 67), bestowed the title khri in the winter of the hen year 685/6 (ITJ 750: 92–3), and died on a military campaign in the winter of the dragon year 704/5 (ITJ 750: 148). Chinese sources state that he took over the reign at the age of eight (Bushell 1880: 451; Pelliot 1961: 9) which confirms the association of the name-changing ceremony with the enthronement.

Khri Lde-gcug-rcan

Khri Lde-gcug-rcan was born in the spring of the dragon year 704/5 (ITJ 750: 146) and bestowed the title khri in the summer of the rat year 712/3 (ITJ 750: 185–6). According to Chinese sources, he took over the reign at the age of seven (Bushell 1880: 456; Pelliot 1961: 12 and 95) which again alludes to the name-changing ceremony of 712/3. In post-imperial sources the opinion prevails that Khri Lde-gcug-rcan died in a horse year, which would correspond to 754.44

Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan

Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan was born in the horse year 742/3 (ITJ 750: 291–2) and bestowed the title khri in the summer of the monkey year 756/7 (Or.8212/187: 17) after some turbulent years of internal fights (Or.8212/187: 12–3; Žol S 5–20). His death and the succession to the throne are immersed in a fog of confusing information. Chinese sources report on three deaths of Tibetan bcan po in this order: 804, 797, and 798 (Bushell 1880: 506, 510–1; Pelliot 1961: 67, 123, 124). The years 797 and 803 or 804 – that recur in later Tibetan and Chinese sources as marking changes on the Tibetan throne – could correspond to the abdication year of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan and his death respectively.45 The abdication of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan is a recurring topic in later historiographical works (for an overview, see Richardson 1952: 141ff. and Haarh 1960: 122f.). Imperial sources do not support the hypothesis of another bcan po ruling between Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan and Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan. In my opinion, the former, after some internal disturbances caused by Mu-rug-brcan, directly ceded power to his son Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan. It seems that

43 The number nine has symbolic value in Tibetan culture and therefore might have played a role here as well; see most recently Huber (2020.1: 65 and 2: 19–20).
44 The swine year of Ldeyu-jo-sras and Mkhas-pa-ldey (see Appendix) would correspond to 747/8 (ITJ 750: 307) or 759/60. Neither of these dates is compatible with other historical facts and therefore the swine year can be dismissed. In 755/6 the OTA-II address Khri Lde-gcug-rcan as yab “father” (Or.8212/187: 12), but this account is retrospective and it is apparent that by that time Khri Lde-gcug-rcan was no more alive since his funeral is not recorded in the sources.
45 Cf. Bialek 2021a: 28. 804 as the year of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan’s death was also accepted by Richardson (1952: 141).
Tibetan authors writing in later times did not understand the nuances of the imperial official language: neither the distinction between ṅḷa “during the reign” and ṇḷa “during the lifetime,” nor the significance of the enthronement ceremony intrinsically (or even tautologically) bound to the bestowal of the title khṛi on the rightful ruler were still recognized. This has brought about the proliferation of bcan ṇ and the necessity to explain their mutual relations. The inevitable language change (not considered as a factor by Tibetan historiographers in their discussions of old sources) might be blamed for the inconsistencies encountered. Uray’s (1989: 5ff.) concise summary may serve as an example: he provides the names and the order of succession of Tibetan bcan ᇨ at the beginning of the ninth century according to later Tibetan historiographical sources.

Regarding Chinese sources, one citation from Haarh suffices to discredit their reliability for the discussed period: “For the period from the embassy in the beginning of 797 AD till the summer 803 AD, the Chinese sources show no record of diplomatic relations between the two countries.” (1960: 136; cf. also Demiéville 1952: 323, fn. 1 and Richardson 1952: 145ff.). Haarh’s own analysis must be treated with caution since he did not include OT documents as his sources, apart from a brief quotation of the OTA (p. 152). Zu-zhi-jian, the assumed successor of Khṛ Sroṅ-ṛde-bṛcan in 797, according to Chinese sources (Bushell 1880: 506; Pelliot 1961: 123), was clearly not titled khṛi by the Chinese. The same sources refer, for instance, to Khṛ Sroṅ-ṛde-bṛcan as Ji-li-su-long-li-e-zan and to Khṛ Gcug-ṛde-bṛcan as Ke-li-ke-zu. The first two syllables of the Chinese equivalents, Ji-li and Ke-li, transcribe the regnal title khṛi. A transcription of this title is visibly missing from the name Zu-zhi-jian which can in no way be a transcription of the name Mu-rug-bṛcan. Compare also Petech’s remark: “In the beginning of the 9th century it might have been pronounced approximately Tsuk-chih-tsiän. Probably the text is corrupt, because it is impossible to find a Tibetan equivalent for this name, which is so different from all the other names of Tibetan kings occurring in the T’ang-shu” (1939: 74). Luckily, recent reconstructions of Middle Chinese lend a helping hand to the problem:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>之 zhī</td>
<td>Y. tsi, L. tsywk, E. tsuawk</td>
<td>LH tsiog, OCM *tsok</td>
<td>MC tsjowk, OC *[ts]ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>煎 jiān</td>
<td>Y. tsjen, L. tsian, E. tsian</td>
<td>LH tsi, OCM *tə</td>
<td>MC tsi, OC *tə</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first syllable 足 zū is identical with the last syllable in Ke-li-ke-zu (cf. also Pelliot 1961: 125). My conjecture is that Ch. Zu-zhi-jian reproduces Gcug-ṛde-bṛcan who was apparently identified as the acceding bcan ᇨ. Khṛ Gcug-ṛde-bṛcan was born in a dog year which might have been 794 and so the Chinese sources mistook him for the acceding bcan ᇨ, who was in fact his father, Khṛ Lde-sroṅ-ṛde-bṛcan.48

---

46 See Bialek 2018b: 401ff.

47 A similarly sceptical opinion on the reliability of later Tibetan historiographical works for the study of the history of the Tibetan Empire was expressed by Uray in an earlier paper: “[…] these old data had very often reached Dpa-ybo Gcug-lag Yphren-ba in a corrupted and interpolated form, and so the information of the Mkhas pa-yi rgyal ston must be used more cautiously than in previous times, and only after careful examination of text- and source-criticism.” (1967: 505).

48 The identification of Zu-zhi-jian with Gcug-ṛde-bṛcan may seem problematic; the Chinese sources use the accession name instead of his birth name. This, however, we observe with any other Tibetan bcan ᇨ whose birth is reported. The discrepancies can be explained away by the anachronistic character of Chinese histories. If the identification is correct, the birth of Khṛ Gcug-ṛde-bṛcan in 794 might have been a direct reason for the abdication of Khṛ Sroṅ-ṛde-bṛcan – the succession was secured. Above (see section Khṛ Maṅ-slon Maṅ-rčan) I have proposed an analogous explanation of the abdication of Khṛ Sroṅ-rčan.

https://doi.org/10.1017/50041977X23000150 Published online by Cambridge University Press
Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan

It is traditionally agreed that Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan was born in a dragon year (which can only be 764, 776, or 788) but no independent evidence confirms that. If, as argued above, Ch. Zu-zhi-jian is a transcription of Gcug-lde-brcan, then the latter must have been born no later than 797, in which case his father must have been at least about twenty years old.49 This supposition is further supported by the active role Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan played as Lde-sroṅ in the Rkoṅ inscription, indicating that he had already taken over some official duties.50 Richardson (1998c [1988]: 278), following Tibetan historiographers who almost unanimously dated Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan’s death to a hen year, and analysing the contents of the Ldan 2 inscription, concluded that the bcan po must have died in 817, the year in which his death was also reported to the Chinese (cf. Bushell 1880: 512; Pelliot 1961: 125).51 Since the date of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan’s accession to the throne can be established without doubt as 815 (see next section), Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan most probably died in the same year. The latter date was also accepted by Dotson (2007a: 416).

Khri Gcug-lde-brcan

Grags-pa Rgyal-mchan maintained that Khri Gcug-lde-brcan was 21 when he took over the reign (see Appendix). This would confirm the date of his birth as 794.52 The beginning of the reign of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan can be calculated on the basis of dates given in the Treaty inscription. The latter identifies the seventh, eighth, and ninth years of his reign as the years of ox (821; E 59), tiger (822; E 63), and hare (823; E 66–7), respectively. This makes 815 the first year of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan’s reign (cf. Richardson 1952: 147). His enthronement ceremony is recorded in PT 1290: r2: bcan po mu cu brtan las/ khri gcug lde brcan du mchan gsol “The bcan po was bestowed the name of (lit. as) Khri Gcug-lde-brcan instead of Mu-cu-brtan”.53

After 817, Jiu Tangshu records only one death of a Tibetan bcan po: in 842 (Bushell 1880: 523; Pelliot 1961: 76). Aoki (1955: 77f.) concluded that this information concerns Khri Gcug-lde-brcan, who must have died in the hen year 841, as is almost unanimously maintained by Tibetan historiographers (see Appendix). However, between 831 and 839 Xin Tangshu additionally reports the death of an unnamed bcan po who reigned for about thirty years and was succeeded by his younger brother 達磨 Da-mo (Bushell 1880: 522; Pelliot 1961: 133). The name of the latter can be reconstructed as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>達 mō</td>
<td>Y. tā’, L. tāt, E. dat</td>
<td>LH dat, OCM *dāt</td>
<td>MC dat, OC *[l]at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>達 mō</td>
<td>Y. ma’, L. mua, E. ma</td>
<td>LH mài, OCM *māi</td>
<td>MC ma, OC *[m]aj</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This must have been a transcription of Dar-ma (Aoki 1955: 82). Aoki (1955: 79) remarked that the account of the death of a bcan po in 842 included in Xin Tangshu was copied from Jiu Tangshu. The reference to Dar-ma is absent from the latter work which is older.

49 Richardsdon (1952: 148) accepted the year 776.
50 The inscription was composed during the reign of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan (Bialek 2021a: 21f.).
51 In Bialek (2021a: 28 and fn. 77) I presented arguments against Richardson’s reasoning, pointing out that events related in the Ldan 2 inscription took place in 804 and not in 816 as Richardson assumed.
52 The edict to the Skar inscription preserved in KhG (ju 128v1–130v5) uses the phrase bcan po dbon sras “bcan po, the grandson and son” (129r7). In Bialek (2021a: 23f.) I dated the Skar inscription to the first years (797–804) of the reign of Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan. The compound dbon sras would therefore confirm that the heir to the throne was already born by that time.
53 The name Mu-cu-brtan does not seem to be attested in other sources.
Furthermore, the person does not bear the title *khri*. Because Khri Gcug-lde-brcan acceded to the throne in 815, he would have celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of his reign in 844, so could not have reigned for about 30 years in 839. Therefore it seems that the undated information in *Xin Tangshu* refers to the death of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan and is misplaced chronologically; it should follow the account of the year 839.

**Khri Yod-sruins-brcan**

After the death of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan the succession to the throne was contested, possibly because no heir was born to him in his lifetime. His younger brother Ywuyi-dun-brtan (PT 1286: 69) seems to have usurped the throne, but there is no trace of his enthronement, either in OT or later works. Above I have argued that Khri Yod-sruins-brcan was recognized as a legitimate successor of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan and enthroned acquiring the title *khri*. Tibetan historiographers maintained that Khri Yod-sruins-brcan took over the reign immediately after the death of Glan-dar-ma (Tucci 1947: 314 and 316). According to Chinese sources Khri Yod-sruins-brcan, not being a son of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan, succeeded the latter to the throne at the age of three (Bushell 1880: 523; Pelliot 1961: 134). The name of the new *bcan po*, transcribed as *乞離胡 Qi-li-hú* (Pelliot 1961: 134), can be reconstructed as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>乞 qì</td>
<td>Y. kʰi, L. kʰi, E. kʰi</td>
<td>LH kʰi, OCM *kʰot</td>
<td>MC kʰ+t, OC *C.qhot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>離 lì</td>
<td>Y. lì, L. lì, E. lì</td>
<td>LH lì, OCM *rai</td>
<td>MC ɾe, OC *[ɾ]ɾa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>胡 hú</td>
<td>Y. xuˊ, L. xiu, E. ɣ</td>
<td>LH ga, OCM *gã</td>
<td>MC hu, OC *[g]a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There can be no doubt that the first two syllables transcribe OLT *khri* and the last one stands for *yod*. The equation of Qi-li-hu with Yum-btaran (see Petech 1939: 83 and 1994: 650) is untenable. Neither can Qi-li-hu render Khri Gcug-lde-brcan, for the latter was a younger brother of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan born to the same mother, Lha-rgyal Man-mo-rje from the Ybro family (PT 1286: 69), and Qi-li-hu is stated to have been three years old around 842 (Bushell 1880: 523; Pelliot 1961: 134).

---

54 Tibetan *bcan po* were renamed some time after their death (Dotson 2015: 2); they obtained posthumous names under which they were known to later generations. “Glan Dar-ma” was most probably such a name. The use of the name Dar-ma in *Xin Tangshu* would therefore indicate that the information concerning this person came to the ears of Chinese historiographers only after his death.

55 Events that followed the death of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan were discussed in more detail by Richardson 1957, 1998e [1971]; 1998f [1988]; Petech 1994; Vitali 1996: 541–51; and Yamaguchi 1996: 250, for the latter was a younger brother of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan born to the same mother, Lha-rgyal Man-mo-rje from the Ybro family (PT 1286: 69), and Qi-li-hu is stated to have been three years old around 842 (Bushell 1880: 523; Pelliot 1961: 134).

56 His name is prefixed with *khri* only seldom in post-imperial works, cf.: *khri dar ma wi dar brcan* (Skyid pa'i gyur ri du dbags brdal ma 28.5–6), *ryag po khri glan dar ma dbu dum can* (GLR: 97v4), *khri dar ma yi dum bcan* (Stein 1961: 70.10). *bcan po khri dar ma geug dum* (Stein 1961: 77.5), *khri dar ma yi dum bcan* (Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub 1990: 43, fol. 144v5–6, but *bcan po glan dar ma yi dum bcan* in 145v2), *khri dar ma yun dum bcan* (Mes dbon rnam gsum gyi rnam thar by Nañ Ral-pa-čan 132v2–3; apud Serensen 1994: 409, fn. 1413). As we have seen, the *Yphain than ma* catalogue calls him *bcan po Dbay-dun-brtan* (Halkias 2004: 82) whereas the *Chos ybyun ma to tshul rgya sdban rdzogs brtan* by Nañ Ral-pa-čan, addresses him as *Dar-ma Yu-dum-bcan-po* (Meisezahl 1985: Tafel 309, fol. 463r1, but *khri dar ma yi dum bcan* in a list of Khri Lde-sroin-brcan’s sons, Tafel 302, fol. 449v1). For an overview of his names in other post-imperial sources see Haarh (1969: 59f.). For unknown reasons, Yamaguchi (1996: 236, fn. 10), following Satō, contested the brotherly relation between Ywuyi-dun-btaran and Khri Gcug-lde-brcan stating that this view was influenced by Chinese sources. Instead and in conflict with PT 1286, he maintained that the former was the son of the latter (p. 250).
Furthermore, Chinese sources mention neither regicide nor death of another bcan po shortly before or after 842, leaving no doubt that the death reported in 842 must have been that of Khri Gcug-Ide-brcan. Apart from PT 1286, three other OT documents are known that mention Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan together with his mother: in PT 131: 28–9 and PT 999: 5 the mother jo mo bcan mo ypham is mentioned first but in PT 230: 7 lha sras khri yod sruṅs brcan precedes the appositional compound yum sras.57 Luckily, PT 999

57 As an aside, there is no such possibility that pho brani in PT 999 and PT 131 could be a title of Yod-sruṅs as maintained by Richardson (1998f [1988]: 180f.). The texts read:

* bod yonis gi * [rgyal] po * chen po/ lha bal dum na bṣags pa/ jo mo bcan mo ypham gi * pho brani * yod sruṅs rjes ybanś ykhor dan bças pa (PT 131: 27–9)  
the great king of all Tibetans who stays at Lha-bal-dum, Yod-sruṅ, the court of jo mo Bcan-mo-ypham with the retinue of courtiers

* jo mo bcan mo ypham gi yum sras gi * pho brani * yod sruṅs gi sku yon du */ (PT 999: 5–6)  
as a donation from (lit. of) Yod-sruṅ, the court of jo mo Bcan-mo-ypham, mother and son.

In both cases pho brani is preceded by a genitive particle, a fact passed over in silence in previous translations (Tucci 1956: 52, fn. 1; Richardson 1998f [1988]: 108; Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 432; Petech 1994: 651; Imaeda 1998: 88); only Lalou (1940: 297) accounted for the genitive. The construction “TITLE+NAME of TITLE+NAME” is otherwise not attested in OLT and therefore I read pho brani as forming one phrase with jo mo bcan mo ypham (for examples of the phrase “pho brani of TITLE+NAME”, see Bialek 2018a: 2.281ff.). Because the compounded kinterm yum sras is otherwise used only in apposition with a preceding proper name (see OTDO for examples), I have deleted the preceding genitive particle in PT 999. The phrases are confusing and rather unusual. The reason might be that Yod-sruṅs was still a minor and his mother together with their court assumed guardianship of him (that’s why she is mentioned first in PT 131 and PT 999). I read bcan mo ypham as a proper name because monosyllabic proper names, like *ypham, are virtually unknown in OLT (see also Dotson 2015: 3 on di- and, rarely, tri-syllabic proper names in Tibetan). It could only be a family name but in the case of a woman one would expect *ypham za. Maybe bcan mo ypham is a misspelling for *bcan ma ypham (cf. Bcan-ma-thog, later spelled also Bcan-mo-tog; see Yamaguchi 1969: 154, fn. 48).

Tucci was possibly the first scholar who conceived of the term pho brani as a title, explaining that it (spelled by him as ypho brani) designated “the second son in a ruling family” (1956: 52, fn. 1). This interpretation was later contested (Vitali 1996: 296, fn. 459; Yamaguchi 1996: 256, fn. 25) but the reading of pho brani as a title has been maintained. It is maintained that later in Western Tibet pho brani was a title “reserved for those (male) members of the royal family who, after their ordination, had the duty to protect the Buddhist teachings as members of the palace or from the palace” (Jahoda and Kalantari 2015: 85). Jahoda and Kalantari followed Vitali who gave this reading to pho brani in the following passage:

* bar pa bkers yod ni dguṅ lo bṣi bcu pa ḍu ḍu pho phag gi lo la rab tu byuṅ nas/ pho brani byaṅ ḍhub yod du mchan gdol/ (Mtnav ris royal rabs; apud Vitali 1996: 62, ll. 7–8)  

I suggest an alternative interpretation:

Regarding the middle one, Bkris-yod, after (being 40 years old) [he] had entered the Buddhist order in the male water-swine year, pho brani was given the name as Byaṅ-čhub-yod.

Compare:

* bcan po khri (93) ydus[5] sroṅ du mchan gdol/ (IT) 750)  
[One] bestowed the bcan po with the name Khri Ydus-sroṅ.

It is difficult for me to see any cultural or linguistic motivation behind the alleged semantic shift “‘court; ‘residence, palace’ > ‘TITLE of a human”, even more so as the word is still attested dialectically even in western Tibet with the meaning “palace” (CDTD: 5192). Therefore I suspect that pho brani “palace” was used metonymically for the ruler rather than as his title; compare Buckingham Palace or the Palace which is commonly used metonymically to refer to the British royal family or the King as the head of state. In the same manner a word for a residence of a bcan po (pho brani) might have come to denote the person who resided in a pho brani. Certainly, more text-historical studies are required in order to ascertain the function of the lexeme pho brani in instances like those encountered in Western Tibetan chronicles. The etymology of pho brani and its use in OT sources was discussed in Denwood (1990) and Bialek (2018a: 2.278ff.).
is dated: it was composed in a rat year (l. 4) which was assumed to have been 844 (Richardson 1998f [1988]: 108; Petech 1994: 651; Yamaguchi 1996: 240). Since in PT 999 it is the mother who is mentioned first, we can conclude that in 844 Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan was still a minor, and secondly, that PT 230 postdates PT 999 and PT 131. Accordingly, the relative dating of the documents can be proposed as: (oldest) PT 134 > PT 999/PT 131 > PT 230 > PT 840 (youngest). All the texts were apparently composed in or around Dunhuang. The phrase bod yon ṭ yi [rgyal] po chen po (PT 131: 27) presents Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan as a “great king of all Tibetans” and implies that his reign was recognized as far away as Dunhuang, even before his enthronement. Moreover, PT 840, an OT text that mentions both Ywu-yi-dun-brtan (alias Dar-ma) and Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan (alias Yod-srus [sic]), does not show any traces of enmity between the two and instead “emphatically states that Buddhism was in full swing in the Land of Snow” (Karmay 1998–2005: 79) during their lifetime. The text – most probably the oldest witness of the name Dar-ma – like PT 134 undermines later Buddhist narrations about the fights that followed the death of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan and the alleged persecution of the Buddhist community and institutions.

From what has been said, the following scenario can be sketched: Khri Gcug-lde-brcan died in 841 leaving no heir to the throne. His younger brother Ywu-yi-dun-brtan took over the reign but resigned or was compelled to resign soon after Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan was born in 841. It is indeed surprising that Khri Gcug-lde-brcan did not have male descendants. If he died in 841, then he must have been between 26 (if born in 815, which is improbable) and 47 years old (if born in 794). It seems rather that Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan was in fact his (and jo mo Bcan-mo-yphans’s) son but born after Khri Gcug-lde-brcan’s death and therefore contested as the heir. This would also better match the contents of PT 999 and solve the problem, first recognized by Scherrer-Schaub (1991: 432–3, fn. 30), that the text mentions Khri Gcug-lde-brcan together with jo mo Bcan-mo-ypham and Yod-sruṅ. Should they be consort and son of Ywu-yi-dun-brtan there would be no reason for omitting the latter while mentioning Khri Gcug-lde-brcan. None of the OT sources addresses Yod-sruṅs as bcan po, but his affiliation with the royal family is established by the kinterm yum sras (PT 999: 5) in which he is referred to as sras. The lack of the title bcan po indicates either that he was contested as a legitimate son of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan or that the title itself was customarily bestowed only after the ruling bcan po had himself recognized the child (even if yet unborn) as his offspring. If Khri Gcug-lde-brcan died before the pregnancy of Bcan-mo-ypham became known, he could not have recognized his paternity and bestowed the title bcan po. Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan was enthroned very early, around 843, possibly to preclude internal

---

58 Scherrer-Schaub (1991: 432–3, fn. 30) argued that PT 999 was composed during the reign of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan in 832/3. The text does not use the official nomenclature of Central Tibetan documents and calls Khri Gcug-lde-brcan only lha sras, whereas one would expect at least the title bcan po. The reason for this variation is not known.

59 This is deduced from other similar formulas in OT historical documents; see Bialek 2021a.

60 The text in question is one of five works included in the manuscript PT 840 and was translated and analysed by Karmay (1998–2005: 76–93).

61 The “dark age of Buddhism” was nothing more than a side-effect of the disintegration of the Tibetan Empire and the ensuing decrease of institutional and financial support for the Buddhist community. Later Tibetan historiographers spilt much ink on the issue not because they were particularly interested in the historical events that had led to the decline but, composing thos (!) ybyun, they were in need of an explanation for the waxing and waning fate of Buddhist institutions in Tibet. Map 5.2 in Ryavec (2015: 16) vividly illustrates the consequences of the historical events for the condition of institutional Buddhism in Tibet; starting in the mid-ninth century no new temples or monasteries were built for about a century and those already existing fell into ruin.

62 We saw that taking over the reign, as reported in Chinese sources, was identical with the name-changing ceremony, i.e. with the enthronement. Chinese histories report that the new bcan po was three years old when he
fights that arose due to the unstable political situation and the declining economy. The worsening of the international economic situation from the 830s onward (Beckwith 2009: 158ff.) and natural disasters reported in Chinese sources (Bushell 1880: 522; Pelliot 1961: 133) only exacerbated the problems of the Empire.

Conclusions

§ 11. In Bialek (2018b; 2021a) I demonstrated the existence of language conventions with respect to the royal family, which were observed in official documents composed in the Tibetan Empire. The conventions concerned the use of the postpositions riṅ la and sku riṅ la, as well as the application of kinterms. The latter were always applied from the perspective of the currently ruling bcan po. This paper adds yet another aspect to the royal forms of address: the titles khri and bcan po. The former was a throne title bestowed on the heir to the throne at the enthronement ceremony. bcan po who were not titled khri were not legitimately recognized rulers. The title bcan po, on the other hand, confirmed that the person was of royal descent, but did not necessarily have a right to the throne.63

We can now summarize the curriculum vitae of a bcan po-to-be with respect to forms of address pertinent to various stages of his life. In the normal course of events an heir to the throne was addressed as bcan po sras, lit. “bcan po, the son”, from his birth until the death or abdication of his father. If his father, the enthroned (khri) bcan po, died when the son was still a minor, the latter became bcan po (i.e. without the kinterm sras). He acquired the title khri at the enthronement ceremony which, however, never followed immediately after the death of his father. In this interregnum the status of the nominal ruler must have been ambivalent; he was not an enthroned ruler, but he became the focus of the kin terminology as soon as the funeral ceremonies for his father were finished. From this point on, all the relations within the royal family were defined by reference to him.64 However, if while still alive the father had ceded the power to his son, who was then enthroned, the actual ruler was addressed as bcan po and became the point of reference for kinterms, whereas his father remained bcan po yab but lost his central position in the “kin tree”. In two cases an abdication seems to have taken place three years after the heir to the throne himself had become a father: Khri Maṅ-slon Maṅ-rcan was born in 638 – his grandfather Khri Sroṅ-rcan possibly abdicated in 641; and Khri Gcug-lde-brcan was born in 794 – his grandfather Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan abdicated in 797.65

The combined use of kinterms and the titles khri and bcan po resulted in a very precise description of the relative positions within the royal family. Their concerted application allowed for the identification of roles each male descendant of a bcan po played in the power game at the court. Taken together they formed a protocol of forms of address which the official documents of the Empire were bound to observe. The protocol was

---

63 This particular pattern of distribution of the titles khri and bcan po can only be explained if we accept the proposed etymology of bcan po. If, following opinio communis, we insist on its relation to CT bcan (OLT brcan) “mighty”, we will not only miss the regular pattern of its distribution but will also have to acknowledge any person called bcan po in OLT to have been a factual ruler, disregarding the title khri.

64 See Bialek 2021a.

65 By the age of three, the most critical years of childhood in terms of biological survivability might have been considered overcome. One can also think about the hypothesis that Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan was chosen as the successor of Khri Sroṅ-lde-brcan exactly because he had already become a father and Mu-rug-brcan perhaps not. The significance of having an offspring seems to be alluded to in PT 1287: 301 where the account of Khri Sroṅ-rcan’s accession to the throne is followed by a remark that he did not yet have an offspring.
supplemented with expressions that narrowed down the temporal frame of the events to the reign (rīṅ la) or life (sku rīṅ la) of a bcān po. With the disintegration of the Tibetan Empire and the dissolution of the hierarchical structure of society with the royal family at its head, likewise the protocol lost its authority and actually, its applicability. It is no wonder that Tibetan historiographers composing in later times did not recognize the pattern in the forms of address and misinterpreted information contained in documents of yore to which some of them indeed might have had access.

Acknowledgements. I would like to acknowledge financial support provided by grant BI 1953/1-1 of Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft in 2017–2020. I wish to thank two anonymous reviewers for their perceptive remarks. All shortcomings remain my own responsibility.

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yphags</td>
<td>Yphags-pa (1238–80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDRC</td>
<td>The Buddhist Digital Resource Center: <a href="https://library.bdrc.io/">https://library.bdrc.io/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Classical Tibetan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDTD</td>
<td>Bielmeier et al. 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPASS</td>
<td>dynamic passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>east-facing inscription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Early Middle Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eng.</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ger.</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLR</td>
<td>Bsod-nams Rgyal-mchan 1750–60 [1368]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr.</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grags</td>
<td>Grags-pa Rgyal-mchan (1147–1216)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITJ</td>
<td>IOL Tib J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Jäschke 1881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KhG</td>
<td>Dpay-bo Gcug-lag Yphren-ba 1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>International Dunhuang Project: <a href="http://idp.bl.uk/">http://idp.bl.uk/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
<td>Late Middle Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lat.</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldeyu</td>
<td>Ldeyu-jo-sras 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>Later Han Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Middle Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mkhas</td>
<td>Mkhas-pa-Ldeyu 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nel</td>
<td>Nel-pa Paṇḍita 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OC</td>
<td>Old Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCM</td>
<td>Minimal Old Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLT</td>
<td>Old Literary Tibetan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or.</td>
<td>Oriental Collections of the British Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Old Tibetan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTA</td>
<td>Old Tibetan Annals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTD</td>
<td>Old Tibetan Dictionary: <a href="http://otdict.com">http://otdict.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTDO</td>
<td>Old Tibetan Documents Online: <a href="https://otdo.aa-ken.jp/">https://otdo.aa-ken.jp/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFV</td>
<td>perfective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Pelliot tibétain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>south-facing inscription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEDT</td>
<td>Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus: <a href="https://stedt.berkeley.edu/">https://stedt.berkeley.edu/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TH Trans-Himalayan
v1, v2, v3, v4 verb stems
W west-facing inscription
Y. Early Mandarin

Cited Old Tibetan documents

Inscriptions
Brag Brag-lha-mo A rock inscription
Khra Khra-ybrug bell inscription
Khri Inscription at the tomb of Khri Lde-sroṅ-brcan
Rkoṅ Rkoṅ-po inscription
Skar Skar-čhuṅ pillar inscription
Treaty Sino-Tibetan Treaty inscription
Žol Žol pillar inscription
Žwa Pillar inscriptions at Žwa-yi-lha-khaṅ

Manuscripts
ITJ 750 Old Tibetan Annals I
Or.8212/187 Old Tibetan Annals II
PT 131 Prayers for Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan
PT 134 Prayers for Ywuṣi-dun-brtan
PT 230 Prayers for Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan
PT 840 Eulogy to Tibet
PT 999 Permission to take out copies of sūtrā from a library
PT 1144 Old Tibetan Chronicles
PT 1286 Royal genealogy
PT 1287 Old Tibetan Chronicles
PT 1288 Old Tibetan Annals I
PT 1290 Old Tibetan Chronicles II
PT 1144 Catalogue of ancient principalities

References


Dotson, Brandon. 2015. “Naming the king: accession, death, and afterlife through the re-, un-, and nick-naming of Tibet’s kings”, Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie 23, 1–27.


Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.


Appendix

Cells coloured dark grey contain historically confirmed information. Light grey colour marks dates suggested in the paper and their compatibility with other sources (only the names of the year are accounted for, not the assumed age). The first, plain number denotes the age, whereas the bracketed number refers to the number of years that passed; e.g., "13 (15)" should be read “enthroned (қ) at the age of thirteen, reigned for 15 years”. Bracketed year name, e.g. (dog), means that the year is inferred from other data in the source, but is not stated explicitly. The following symbols are used in the table:

- * Birth
- қ Enthronement
- † Death

Cite this article: Bialek J (2023). bcan po s who were not khri: Royal titulature and the succession to the throne in the Tibetan Empire. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 86, 121–146. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X23000150
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>OTA</th>
<th>Nel</th>
<th>Ldeṣu</th>
<th>Mkhas</th>
<th>Bu-ston</th>
<th>Grags</th>
<th>Yphant</th>
<th>GLR</th>
<th>KhG</th>
<th>Ch.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>650–764</td>
<td>1283</td>
<td>1230–40</td>
<td>1261&lt;</td>
<td>1322</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>1368</td>
<td>1545–65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Khri Sron-rcan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>†649</td>
<td>hen</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**[Gün-son Gün-rcan]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>snake</th>
<th>snake</th>
<th>snake</th>
<th>snake</th>
<th>snake</th>
<th>snake</th>
<th>snake</th>
<th>snake</th>
<th>snake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>†649</td>
<td>rab</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Khri Man-slon Man-rcan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>†649</td>
<td>dog</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Khri Ydus-son**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>rat</th>
<th>rat</th>
<th>rat</th>
<th>rat</th>
<th>rat</th>
<th>rat</th>
<th>rat</th>
<th>rat</th>
<th>rat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>†676</td>
<td>rat</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Khri Lde-gcug-rcan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>dragon</th>
<th>dragon</th>
<th>dragon</th>
<th>dragon</th>
<th>dragon</th>
<th>dragon</th>
<th>dragon</th>
<th>dragon</th>
<th>dragon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>†704</td>
<td>dragon</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Khri Sron-Lde-brcan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>horse</th>
<th>horse</th>
<th>horse</th>
<th>horse</th>
<th>horse</th>
<th>horse</th>
<th>horse</th>
<th>horse</th>
<th>horse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>†742</td>
<td>horse</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>(42)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Khri Lde-sron-brcan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>ox</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>†815</td>
<td>sheep</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>OTA</th>
<th>Nel</th>
<th>Ldeɣu</th>
<th>Mkhas</th>
<th>Bu-ston</th>
<th>Grags</th>
<th>Yphags</th>
<th>GLR</th>
<th>KhG</th>
<th>Ch.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>650–764</td>
<td>1283</td>
<td>1230–40</td>
<td>1261&lt;</td>
<td>1322</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>1368</td>
<td>1545–65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Khri Gcug-lde-brcan</th>
<th>*794</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>68</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>rat*72</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>dog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>815</td>
<td>sheep</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>(24)</td>
<td>12 hen (24)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>841</td>
<td>hen</td>
<td>36 hen</td>
<td>40 sheep</td>
<td>rat*67</td>
<td>36 hen</td>
<td>36 hen</td>
<td>36 hen</td>
<td>36 hen</td>
<td>36 hen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[Khri Yod-sruṅs-brcan]</th>
<th>*841</th>
<th>hen</th>
<th>swine</th>
<th>monkey</th>
<th>monkey</th>
<th>ox</th>
<th>swine</th>
<th>dog*71</th>
<th>hare</th>
<th>842</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>843</td>
<td>swine</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(dog)</td>
<td></td>
<td>ox</td>
<td>(ox)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>ox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†

---

67 *byi* might be an erroneous reading for *bya*.
68 Falsely called Khri Lde-sron bcan (Bu-ston 1990: 43.6).
69 Falsely called Khri Lde-sron-bcan (Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub 1990: 7.8).
70 *Bod kyi rgyal rabs*; data *apud* Tucci (1947: 310–4).
71 Tucci’s “dog” (1947: 316) might be a typo for “hog” (my “swine”).
72 *byi* might be an erroneous reading for *khyi*.
73 *byi* might be an erroneous reading for *bya*.
74 *Bod kyi rgyal rabs*; data *apud* Tucci (1947: 315 f.).
75 Data from Chinese sources quoted after Bushell (1880) and Pelliot (1961).