

TIBETAN STUDIES AND RESOURCES IN OXFORD

When the High Lama asked him whether Shangri-la was not unique in his experience, and if the Western world could not offer anything in the least like it, he answered with a smile: "Well, yes - to be quite frank, it reminds me very slightly of Oxford."

James Hilton, *Lost Horizon*

I do not propose to dwell on any imagined qualitative resemblance of Tibetan scholarship to that of Oxford although it is perhaps worth recalling that the collegiate structure and tutorial system of Oxford find close parallels in the great monastic universities of Lhasa which have so recently disappeared. Rather I intend briefly to discuss the valuable holdings in Oxford of material in Tibetan as assembled since the early 19th century. The collections are small by comparison with those of the British Library and the India Office Library but contain many items of singular interest. Together they bear witness to a continuing, if somewhat sporadic, devotion to the field of Tibetan Studies on the part of individual Oxford scholars. The collections also reflect the Bodleian's capacity to acquire material relating to important disciplines which are otherwise not represented in the University at large. The time is right for a summary appraisal because recent years have seen the dissemination of many thousands of Tibetan texts reprinted by refugees in India under a scheme administered by the US Library of Congress known as the PL480 Tibetan Comprehensive; before attempting to grasp the full dimensions of this extraordinary *embarras de richesses*, surely it is important to take stock of the older collections among which those of Oxford certainly deserve consideration.

To date the Bodleian Library possesses 188 Tibetan MSS and 329 Tibetan xylographs (designated 'blockbooks'). It has 248 primary sources in western editions and these are complemented by

a further 125 items of a similar nature under the same roof in the Indian Institute Library, which also possesses 330 works of secondary literature on Tibet. In addition to complete runs of the relevant journals, the two libraries between them have full sets of the *Serie Orientale Roma*, the *Asiatische Forschungen* and the *Sata-Pitaka Series*, all of which are important for Tibetan Studies. The Pitt Rivers Museum has four sets of Tibetan MSS, a token to the magpie nature of many army officers and civil servants in India who left their acquisitions to this 'museum of a museum'. Unfortunately most of the texts are in fragments but among them is a fine example of a Tibetan musical score, the *dByangs-yig tshangs-pa'i rol-mo* ('The Musical Notation [entitled] the Music of Brahma,' Beasley Collection 357). The library of the Oriental Institute, the Balfour Library and the Tylor Library also possess small collections of secondary literature, as do some of the college libraries. Although I shall not deal now with the collections of Tibetan art at the Ashmolean Museum (the Scratton Collection particularly), St. Antony's College (the Hailey Collection) and the Pitt Rivers Museum, the comprehensive holding of books on Tibetan art at the Library of Eastern Art in the Ashmolean should be mentioned.

The Bodleian's collections are by far the most significant. Although some work remains to be completed on their cataloguing, by and large their contents are known and accessible. This is due in great measure to the labours of Mr. John Driver, formerly of St. Antony's College, who prepared a description and report on the MSS and 'blockbooks' acquired up to c. 1970, thus furnishing material for any future descriptive catalogue. In recent years Mr. David Barrett of the Library has been engaged in preparing a complete card catalogue and this was finished in April 1980. It would have been difficult to undertake the present contribution without these materials to hand.

Turning to those items which have struck me as particularly interesting and significant, in the approximate order of their acquisition, in 1806 the Bodleian gained possession of what were probably the first documents in Tibetan to enter the country. These are found among the papers of Samuel Turner (1749-1802) who was sent by Warren Hastings in 1783 to the court of the Panchen Lama. His *An Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama, in Tibet* (London 1800) is rightly regarded as the great classic of Tibetan travel literature, but the preservation of some of his papers in Oxford is known to few people outside the Bodleian. Among one set of 28 documents bound together (MS. Tibet. a. 8.) is found the original of the letter from 'Jigs-med Seng-ge, 18th Deb Raja of Bhutan (regn. 1776-1788), which Turner reproduced on Plate XIII of his *Account* as an example of the Tibetan cursive hand. Included in this set are one further letter from the Deb Raja and three sent by the steward of the infant Panchen Lama. MS. Tibet. a. 7 (R) consists of an incomplete history of Tibet written in cursive on a scroll of 189 lines. Lacking a title and colophon and with no indications as to date or authorship, the work was perhaps hurriedly copied for Turner

at Tashilhunpo in response to a request for historical information. It covers in brief the entire period from the 7th to the 14th centuries and opens with a typical cosmology. Although representing a late and developed tradition, the work has undoubted value. MS. Asiat. Misc. a.4 contains a further 49 items, mostly correspondence received by Turner up to four years after the date of his mission. Nearly all the documents were written by munshis in the employment of the Bhutanese government in a heavily Persianised medieval court Bengali and stamped with various seals in Tibetan, Mongolian, Persian and Bengali.

In 1809 the library acquired a true oddity, only recently identified as Tibetan. This is the *Inscrip.[tio] Calmucor.[um] Sanskr.[itica]* (E.D. Clarke Or. 41), in fact a Kalmuk prayer-flag consisting of parts of two sutras containing protective *dharaṇīs* written in Tibetan on red linen. It had been obtained in a Kalmuk camp on the north-east shore of the Sea of Azov by the Rev. Edmund Daniell Clarke (1769-1822), a great traveller, antiquary and mineralogist of his day. Unintelligible to the Kalmuks at that time, the elders of the tribe had faithfully copied it out and presented it to the eccentric gentleman with much ceremony, saying it contained the essence of their religion.

This strange event on the westernmost fringe of the Tibetan cultural empire points to the source of several of the Bodleian's most valuable documents, for it was in the old region of Western Tibet, and British-administered Ladakh in particular, that the modern discipline of Tibetology was really born. The founding figure is reckoned to have been the Hungarian scholar Kőrösi Csoma Sándor (1784-1842) who set off in 1819 on a romantic quest for the origins of the Magyar people. He ended up spending about eight years in the monasteries of Zangskar and neighbouring regions, during which period he prepared his *Essay Towards a Dictionary, Tibetan and English*, published in Calcutta in 1834. Perhaps the most poignant of the Bodleian's treasures is a MS volume containing the first draft of half of the Tibetan entries in his famous dictionary. The hand is very likely that of his collaborator, the 'Brug-pa lama Sangs-rgyas Phun-tshogs, who presumably gave this draft its Tibetan title of *Bod-skad-kyi ming-mdzod* (MS. Ind. Inst. Tib. 2.).

The next acquisition by the Indian Institute does no credit to the way it was procured by its donor. It is sufficient to give the title: *Manuscripts and impressions ... taken from the interior of an idol in the Buddhist temple at Namtchee in Independent Sikkim in Feb. 1861, on the march of Colonel Gawler's force into the country ...* (I. a4(8)). From the number of mantras and yantras in this collection it seems the desecrated image was probably large and highly venerated.

It was not until 1885 that the Bodleian showed a decisive interest in Tibetan with the purchase of the large and important Schlagintweit Collection for which Emil Schlagintweit produced a MS catalogue ten years later in 1895. The collection contains some 207 works in 118 items. Perhaps the single most important item is a history of Ladakh (the *rGyal-rabs gsal-ba'i me-long*, MS. Tibet. c.7) in pursuit of which Hermann Schlagintweit had

conducted subtle negotiations in 1865 with the ex-king of Ladakh, 'Jigs-med rNam-rgyal. Emil published his own edition of this crucial document in 1866, and it was incorporated much later by A.H. Francke into his critical edition of 1926. Many of the Schlagintweit texts are standard central Tibetan blockprints and it seems most of these were obtained through the offices of a famous political monk of that time, the Chibu Lama, who acted as the representative of Sikkim in Darjeeling. Included in the collection, however, are a set of 13 Persian MSS which the Schlagintweit brothers had acquired from one Haider Khan, the hereditary Moslem ruler of Shigar, the northernmost district of Baltistan (often called 'Little Tibet'). Among these are found histories of both Baltistan and Shigar itself; as far as I am aware, none of these documents have ever been properly studied.

For me the most pleasing memento to the travels of the Schlagintweits is found outside their collection, in the Indian Institute Library which possesses a set of linen (?) proofs (Fc 4(18)) of the illustrations for Emil's *Buddhism in Tibet, illustrated by literary documents and objects of religious worship* (Leipzig 1863). The last item in the proofs never found its way into the book. It shows a so-called 'Bhutia Map' of the commercial route from Assam to Lhasa by way of Tawang, complete with mythological beasts, snow mountains and temples. It was drawn for the brothers by the 'Kauang Rajah' at Narigum in 1856. It holds a special appeal for me as I followed the same route as far as Tawang with my family last winter.

Until this century Tibet remained virtually closed to foreign scholarship and it should cause no surprise that the Bodleian's acquisitions in the 19th century all came from the fringe of the Tibetan world. In 1904 the Younghusband Expedition forced its way to Lhasa to counter an imagined Russian threat from the north and Lt.-Colonel Austine Waddell accompanied the mission to collect works of Tibetan scholarship. His activities appear to have been sanctioned as a result of the recommendations of F.W. Thomas, Librarian of the India Office Library and much later Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, whose Tibetan interests always tended to outweigh his devotion to Sanskrit. At all events, Waddell procured a huge mass of original Tibetan material, presumably by purchase though this is not clear. The collection was somewhat arbitrarily, but munificently, divided and presented by the Government of India to the British Museum Library, the India Office Library, Cambridge University Library and the Bodleian Library, the latter receiving some 131 volumes. Included among these were 91 volumes of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, the Kanjur (*bKa'-'gyur*), representing an incomplete set of the Narthang edition prepared in 1732 during the reign of the VIIth Dalai Lama. Unfortunately several of the volumes were badly mutilated by rodents, and it is not clear whether these were of the Tibetan, Indian or English variety. It is to be hoped that the Library will eventually restore the set to its full complement. Meanwhile the Derge edition has just been purchased in an Indian reprint edition and this will perhaps be followed by the acquisition

of a full set of the Tenjur (*bsTan-'gyur*), the commentaries on the canon, from the original blocks at Derge. The Chinese authorities have recently announced the reopening of the huge printery there.

The Younghusband Expedition also produced valuable results in the form of collotype facsimile copies prepared by our own Clarendon Press of two letters addressed by the Chinese Amban in Lhasa to the Tibetan public at the time of the expedition, and a letter in reply from the Tibetan cabinet (MS. Tibet. c.24). They were donated by Sir William Herschel in 1908 and still await study.

Even after the Younghusband Expedition it was really only on the western periphery which lay beyond the reach of the Tibetan government that foreign scholars could pursue their interests. The German Moravian missionaries at Leh and other centres in the Western Himalayas were all prodigious scholars. An extremely rare product of their efforts can be seen in the Bodleian's copy of A.H. Francke's [*First and Second Collections of*] *Tibetan Historical Inscriptions on Rock and Stone from West Tibet* (Tib. d.37 (1-3)). These were mimeographed in Leh in 1906 and 1907 on a portable press which now lies under dust in the old mission library, surrounded by piles of those tracts in almost every Central Asian language which used to be sent from Leh along the old caravan routes that are now closed. Francke's pioneering collections of ancient inscriptions have never received the attention they deserve. This is partly due to the importance of the Tibetan discoveries of Sir Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot at Tun-huang. It was at Merton College that Stein wrote his classic account of the discovery of the sealed polyglot library in his *Ruins of Desert Cathay* (London 1912). Few at that time realised the effect his discoveries would have on the rise and development of Tibetan studies. For the first time authentic documents dating from Tibet's dynastic period which ended in the 9th century became available to modern scholarship. Stein unfortunately had a very tenuous formal connection with Oxford. His great collections remained in London where F.W. Thomas and others soon began to glean the Tibetan treasures. Late in his career Thomas came to Balliol to occupy the Boden Chair of Sanskrit, as already noted, and here he continued to pursue his first love to the neglect, it seems, of his official bride. He is still remembered by many in Oxford today and by all students of Tibetan as the foremost British Tibetologist of the first half of this century. Some of his Tibetan texts were donated to the Bodleian and at his death the Oriental Institute Library acquired part of his personal library.

Meanwhile Dr. W.Y. Evans-Wentz, Fellow of Exeter College, was doing more than perhaps anyone to disseminate popular interest in Tibetan religion through his famous translations of Tibetan Buddhist texts, published and many times reprinted by Oxford University Press. (Indeed, the bible apart, his *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927) appears to be one of O.U.P.'s all-time best-sellers. It should also be recalled that the Press has also

published major works of Tibetan scholarship by Sir Charles Bell, Herbert Guenther, Hugh Richardson and David Snellgrove). Reading the works of Evans-Wentz today one is forced to admit that their virtues derive mainly from the contribution of his chief collaborator, the great Sikkimese scholar Dawa Samdrup, who assisted several foreigners who were themselves unable to cope with the Tibetan. Some of Dawa Samdrup's draft translations passed to the Bodleian with the death in 1964 of Evans-Wentz who bequeathed his papers to it. Among a total of 54 items are found MSS and xylographs of some value.

This briefest of surveys has concentrated more on the major collections than on the single acquisitions, and it necessarily reflects my own historical interests. Much more could be said about the liturgical, ritual and philosophical texts in Tibetan though I do not believe there are many of exceptional rarity. It should be said, however, that the Bodleian does possess the first and most beautifully illuminated volume of the collection of rNying-ma-pa tantras known as the *rNying-ma rgyud-'bum*, purchased from Sotheby's in 1909 (MS. Tibet. a.24(R)). Most of the remaining volumes of this unique MS edition appear to be preserved at the India Office Library.

In the event of Tibetan being introduced as an undergraduate option in the Honours School of Oriental Studies, the student will certainly find himself well served by the resources of Oxford. The graduate students of Oriental Philology, Buddhist Studies and Social Anthropology who have been attending my classes in literary Tibetan at the Oriental Institute for the last four years find the local libraries ample to most of their needs. Last summer about seventy scholars from many countries gathered at St. John's College for the International Seminar on Tibetan Studies. (The proceedings will be published in 1980 under the title of *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*.) In their case, however, the attraction of Oxford lay perhaps not so much in the materials for their subject assembled here as in the sentiment expressed in the quotation with which I began. Several of my foreign colleagues even went so far as to endorse it wholeheartedly.

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[*This paper was delivered at the annual conference of the SCONUL Group of Orientalist Libraries held at Wadham College, Oxford, on 11 January 1980.*]

Postscript Since the above was written my attention has been brought to the facsimile of a Tibetan passport issued to an Armenian merchant dated Earth Dragon (1688?) reproduced in Thomas Hyde, *Historia Religionis Veterum Persarum*, ..., facing p. 521 (Oxford 1700). The original document is probably still in Oxford.