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

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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The paper surveys the distribution of the titles *bcan po* and *khri* in historical and non-historical documents of the Tibetan Empire.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; Titlature; *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 The survey begins with the evaluation of historical documents that either stem from Central Tibet (inscriptions) or can be proven to have their origins in this region (the *Old Tibetan Annals*, OTA).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 titlature 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 titlature. 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,² 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 (Žol) 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 pos* 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 contemporaneity 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.³ 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.⁴ 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 pos*. 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 titles⁵

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. *podós* ‘‘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-zuň people. Accordingly, he maintained that the word was an equivalent of OLT *sems* and proposed translating it as ‘‘a being’’ (Ger. ‘‘Wesen’’, Hummel 1993: 240).⁶ 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).⁷ 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 *ī*. 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 *Ña-khri* or *Ša-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):

<i>bcan po</i>	<i>lha sras</i>	<i>yo lde spu rgyal</i>	Khri I
<i>bcan po</i>		<i>yo lde spu rgyal</i>	Treaty E 5
<i>bcan po</i>	<i>gčen</i>	<i>sroñ rcan</i>	PT 1288: 8
<i>bcan po</i>	<i>gčen</i>	<i>lha bal pho</i>	ITJ 750: 152
<i>bcan po</i>	<i>sras</i>	<i>rgyal gcug ru</i>	ITJ 750: 150
<i>bcan po</i>		<i>rgyal gcug ru</i>	ITJ 750: 153
<i>bcan po</i>	<i>sras</i>	<i>lhas bon</i>	ITJ 750: 287
<i>bcan po</i>		<i>sroñ lde brcan</i>	ITJ 750: 291

To these one can also add:

<i>bcan po</i>	<i>khri sroñ lde brcan dañ lde sroñ</i>	<i>yab sras</i>	Rkoñ I
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which can be interpreted as “*bcan po*, Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan and [*bcan po*] Lde-sroñ, 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.

Sroñ-rcan is addressed as *bcan po gčen sroñ rcan* together with his younger brother (*gčuñ*) Bcan-sroñ:

- (1) *bcan po gčen sroñ rcan dañ / gčuñ bcan sroñ gñīs nold nas* (PT 1288: 8)
Both *bcan po*, the elder brother Sroñ-rcan, and the younger brother Bcan-sroñ, fought.

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

- (2) *bcan po khri sroñ rcan gyīs / súld byañ lam du pyuñ ste /* (PT 1288: 6)
bcan po Khri Sroñ-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 Sroñ-rcan, causing the inconsistency.

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

- (3) *poñ lag rañ du bcan po gčen lha bal pho rgyal sa nas phab /* (ITJ 750: 152)
At Poñ-lag-rañ, [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-sroñ died in the winter of 704/5, whereas Lha-bal-pho 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.⁸ We know from Chinese sources that the succession to the throne after the death of Khri Ydus-sroñ was disputed among rivalrous heirs and their supporters.⁹ History was more favourable to Rgyal-gcug-ru who eventually became the next *bcan po*.

Lhas-bon is only spoken of in the context of his death:

- (4) *sras lhas bon dron na bźugs / bźugs* (282) *pa las nois /* (ITJ 750)
The son Lhas-bon, upon abiding in Dron, passed away.
- (5) *bcan po sras lhas bon dan / bcan mo khoñ čo gñis gyi* (288) *mdad btañ /* (ITJ 750)
[One] prepared the funeral for both the *bcan po*, the son Lhas-bon, and *bcan mo Khoñ-čö*.

Lhas-bon must have been the heir to the throne, since in (5) he is called *bcan po sras*.¹⁰ 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-bcun¹¹ whose funeral is reported in the year 745/6 (ITJ 750: 302).

⁸ According to *Tongdian* 通典, a compendium of knowledge written by Do You from 766 to 801, a certain 乞梨拔布 Qi-li-ba-bu died in 705/6 and his son 乞梨弩悉笼, 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-lung transcribes Khri Ydus-sroñ, whereas the syllables *ba bu* in Qi-li-ba-bu have been reconstructed as:

	Pulleyblank (1991)	Schuessler (2007)	Baxter and Sagart (2014)
拔 <i>bá</i>	Y. pa', L. pfiat, E. bəit/bɛ:t	LH <i>bas</i> , OCM *bāts	MC <i>beat</i> , OC *b ^ʰ <r>ot
布 <i>bù</i>	Y. pu', L. puə̃, E. p ^h	LH <i>pā^c</i> , OCM *pāh	MC <i>puH</i> , OC *p ^ʰ a-s

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 Ydus-sroñ 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 Sroñ-rcan who succeeded him to the throne in 650 (Petech 1988: 1087). In the OTA, Lha-bal-pho is called *gčen*, whereas Rgyal-gcug-ru (alias Khri Lde-sroñ-rcan) 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 *gčen* 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 Ydus-sroñ (born to Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcan and Mañ-pañs) 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).

⁹ 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).

¹⁰ The appositional phrase *bcan po sras* ‘*bcan po*, the son’ should be distinguished from the determinative *bcan poyi sras* ‘*bcan po*’s son’; see Bialek 2021a: 17.

¹¹ Post-imperial sources address Khri-bcun with the title *ljan 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). *ljan mo* is a later folk etymology, which fact is confirmed by the morphology of the title: *ljan mo* instead of the expected **ljan bzay* (compare other titles listed by Haarh). Moreover, Khri-bcun is a typical Tibetan name and since other

Of Rgyal-gcug-ru, Sroñ-lde-brcan, and Lde-sroñ, we know that they later became rulers and their names were changed to Khri Lde-gcug-rcan, Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan, and Khri Lde-sroñ-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 khri sroñ lde brcan du bond* / (Or.8212/187: 17)
 [One] gave [him] the *bcan po*'s name as Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan.

None of the preserved historical sources documents the name-giving ceremony of Khri Lde-sroñ-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 Ywuyi-dun-brtan prefixed with *khri*.¹³ This is also true for PT 134 on which Richardson asserted “Khri-yuyi-dum-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 ywuyi dun brtan kyi sku yon du bsno bayi smon lam du gsol pay* (l. 1). The name recurs in the penultimate line of the text as *bcan po ywuī 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 Ywuyi-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 sruñs brcan yum* [s]r[as] (PT 230: 7).¹⁵ Therefore, according to the disclosed patterns of the official imperial nomenclature, the names Ywuyi-dun-brtan and Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan indicate that the former was not enthroned whereas the latter was enthroned as a legitimate ruler.

foreign princesses are always called by their birth names transcribed in OLT we have no reason to presume that she was a foreign princess.

¹² See Dotson 2015: 9.

¹³ One finds two variants of his name in OLT: Ywuyi-dun-brtan (PT 134) and Yuyi-dum-brtan (PT 1286). The second syllable can be reconstructed as **dun*; -*n* assimilated to -*m* before bilabial *b*:- *-n > -m / -_ob-*. 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 Ywuyi-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 Ywuyi-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 Ywuyi-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. Ywuyi-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-sruñs-brcan below.

But the issue is not as straightforward as presented above. The following formulas are attested in OT records:

<i>bcan po</i>	<i>lha sras</i>	<i>ɣwuyi dun brtan</i>	PT 134
		<i>ɣod sruñ</i>	PT 131/PT 999
		<i>ɣod srus</i>	PT 840
	<i>lha sras</i>	<i>khri</i>	PT 230
		<i>ɣod sruñs brcan</i>	

Presuming that these documents follow the official naming-protocol, it is conspicuous that *Ywuyi-dun-brtan* is titled *bcan po*.¹⁶ On the other hand, *Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan* is not called *bcan po*, but the syllable *khri* (and *-brcan*) 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 *Yphañ thañ 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 (*gčen*) of *bcan po* Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan in *Žwa W* 48. The same inscription relates a quarrel (*thugs nois*) between the elder brother (*gčen*) of Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan (i.e. Mu-rug-bcan) and their father (*yab*), i.e. Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan (ll. 9–10). If we gather together these scattered pieces of information we obtain the following picture:

TITLE		NAME	SOURCE
<i>bcan po</i>		Mu-rug-bcan	<i>Yphañ thañ ma</i>
(<i>bcan po</i>)		Lde-sroñ	Rkoñ
<i>gčen</i>		Mu-rug-bcan	<i>Žwa W</i>
<i>bcan po</i>	Khri	Lde-sroñ-brcan	<i>Žwa W</i>
<i>bcan po</i>	Khri	Lde-sroñ-brcan	<i>Žwa E</i>

¹⁶ He is also given the title *bcan po* in the *Yphañ thañ 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-Ważny 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 *brc-* 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-Ważny (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*)*brcan* are not necessarily earlier owing to the conservatism and a tendency to use archaisms 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 *ɣphags pa dgois pa ñes par ɣgrel payi mdo bśad pa bcan po mu rug bcan gyis mjad* (Halkias 2004: 83); see also Halkias (2004: 56f.).

The data suggest that Mu-rug-brcan, the elder brother of Lde-sroñ, 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-sroñ was enthroned instead and acquired the regnal name Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan.¹⁹ This new interpretation allows for a new relative chronology of the above sources. The Rkoñ inscription is assumed to have been composed during the reign of Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan, between 797 and 803/4.²⁰ Thus, there are three ways to explain the phrase *bcan po mu rug bcan* from the *Yphañ thañ ma* catalogue: 1. The catalogue was compiled during the reign of Khri Sroñ-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-brcan was compiled during the reign of Khri Sroñ-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 *Yphañ thañ ma* catalogue was composed rather late,²² only the second and third options can be considered correct. The titlature used in *Yphañ thañ ma* evinces serious revisions of the text so that no secure dating of the original can be proposed; cf.: 1. Mu-rug-brcan instead of OLT Mu-rug-brcan (Žwa W); 2. Dbay-dun-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 sroñ bcan sgam po* and *yphrul gyi rgyal po khri sroñ 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 sroñ lde brcan dañ / ches poñ za rma rgyal ldoñ skar du bśos pa yi sras / mu ne brcan dañ / lde sroñ brcan* / (PT 1286: 67–8) Dotson inferred that Mu-ne-brcan was another ruler who reigned between Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan and Khri Lde-sroñ-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-sroñ-brcan had another elder brother (Mu-ne-brcan) who obviously died (young?) without leaving any offspring (*gdun čhad*, PT 1286: 68), we could propose the following scenario: Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan had four sons (falsely attributed in KhG (ja 126r2–3) to *bcun mo Čhe-ba-spoñ* (read: Ches-poñ)-bzay 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* Byañ-čhub (Khra 10); according to KhG, Ybro-bzay Khri-rgyal-mo-bcan's ordained name was Byañ-čhub-rje (ja 98v1–2). KhG (ja 126r3) confirms that the eldest son of Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan died young.) Mu-rug-brcan, the second eldest son of Khri Sroñ-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 Sroñ-lde-brcan had five wives), Ches-poñ-za Rma-rgyal-ldoñ-skar, later gave birth to two sons: Mu-ne-bcan and Lde-sroñ-brcan. The former died young (PT 1286: 68) and so only Mu-rug-brcan and Lde-sroñ-brcan were left. It does not seem probable that Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan had two wives from the Ches-poñ family: Ches-poñ-za Rma-rgyal-ldoñ-skar (PT 1286: 67–8) and *Ches-poñ-bzay 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 Rkoñ 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 *Yphañ thañ ma* catalogue was compiled after *Dkar čhag ldan dkar ma* (c. 812) and *Sgra sbyor bam po gñis pa* (814; 2004: 55) but was based on the former and the still missing catalogue *Dkar čhag bsam yas mčhims phu ma* (Halkias 2004: 48; see also Uray 1989: 15 and Dotson 2007b: 2ff.). Yamaguchi (1996: 243) dated the *Yphañ thañ ma* catalogue to a period after the reign of Ywuyi-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 Sroñ-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 Ywuyi-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:

<i>bcan po</i>	Yo-lde Spu-rgyal	Khri I, Treaty E 5
* <i>bcan po</i>	Sroñ-rcan	PT 1288: 8
† <i>bcan po</i>	Lha-bal-pho	ITJ 750: 152
* <i>bcan po</i>	Rgyal-gcug-ru	ITJ 750: 150, 153
† <i>bcan po</i>	Lhas-bon	ITJ 750: 287
* <i>bcan po</i>	Sroñ-lde-brcan	ITJ 750: 291
<i>bcan po</i>	Ywuyi-dun-brtan	PT 134: 1, <i>Yphañ thañ ma</i>
† <i>bcan po</i>	Mu-rug-bcan	<i>Yphañ thañ ma</i>

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 *gčen*, depending on their kin relation to the ruling *bcan po*.²⁵ But of Ywuyi-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-sruñs-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.

bcan po

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 $\sqrt{\text{tsa}}$, although it was Benedict (1942: 321) who first related the CT verb *bcay* 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: ACT/PFV *bcas* (v2) and DPASS *bcay* (v3).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 *bcan* was derived from v3 *bcay*, lit. “was born/brought forth” (Ger. “wurde geboren”), by means of the adjectival suffix *-n*, so that the etymological meaning of *bcan* can be reconstructed as *“(born/brought forth)” (cf. Eng. *born* < *to bear*).²⁷ The formation *bcan po* denoted a male descendant (lit. “born-he”), and *bcan mo* a female one (lit. “born-she”).

Thus, *bcan po* and *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 *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.²⁸ Zeisler (2011: 110) assumed that *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 *bcan po* but was born to a different mother from the actual successor Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan. The same objection most probably applies to Lha-bal-pho. I think it more secure to assume that *bcan po* and *bcan mo* denoted legal (i.e. officially recognized) offspring of an enthroned *bcan po*.²⁹

Now a clearer picture emerges: *bcan po* denoted a legal son of a Tibetan ruler, whereas *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.

II. Tibetan imperial dynasty

Considering together the conventions in language use that have been revealed with respect to the postpositions *riñ la* and *sku riñ la* (Bialek 2018b), kinterms of the royal family (Bialek 2021a), and the bestowal of the title *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.³⁰

Khri Stag-bu, Khri Slon-bcan, and Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcañ 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 Sroñ-rcañ, Khri Mañ-sloñ Mañ-rcañ, Khri Ydus-sroñ, Khri Lde-gcug-rcañ, and Khri Sroñ-lde-brcañ can be partly established on the basis of the OTA. For the remaining *bcan pos*, inscriptional but also post-imperial evidence has to be included in the analysis.

²⁶ See Bialek (2020a) for the inflectional morphology of OLT verbs. The verb root $\sqrt{\text{tsa}}$ was most probably a denominal stem derived from *cha* “offspring”.

²⁷ Zeisler’s (2011: 109f.) explanation of the morphology of *bcan* differs from the one presented here.

²⁸ The only clear case is Sad-mar-kar called *bcan mo* in PT 1287: 399, who was a sister of *bcan po* Khri Sroñ-rcañ. 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).

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 *bcan mo*. For instance, in the OTA the term was applied to three foreign princesses: *bcan mo* Mun-čañ Koñ-čo, *bcan mo* ga tun, and *bcan mo* Kim-šañ Khoñ-čo. The Chinese princesses were not imperial daughters (Pelliot 1961: 13, 83, 95–6).

³⁰ The bracketed names are supplemented from Central Asian documents. Lists of royal succession which reflect differing views on the chronology of Tibetan *bcan pos* can be found, e.g., in Li and Coblin 1987: 25ff., Table I; Nel-pa Pañḍita 1987: 30; Beckwith 1993: 226–9; Dotson 2007a: 416, Appendix One; 2009: 143; 2015: 27.

Table 1 Tibetan royal dynasty

Pre-regnal name	Regnal name	Regnal years	Years of life
	[Khri Stag-bu] ³¹	?	?
	[Khri Slon-bcan] ³²	?	?
Sroñ-rcan	Khri Sroñ-rcan	?–649	593?–649
	[Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcan]	641–644(?)	?–644
	Khri Mañ-slön Mañ-rcan	649–676	638?–676
	Khri Ydus-sroñ	685–704	676–704
Rgyal-gcug-ru	Khri Lde-gcug-rcan	712–754	704–754
Sroñ-lde-brcan	Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan	756–797	742–804
Lde-sroñ	Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan	797–815	?–815
[Mu-cu-brtan]	Khri Gcug-lde-brcan	815–841	794?–841
[Yod-sruñs]	[Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan]	843?–?	841?–?

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.³³ Tucci (1947) demonstrated the general validity of *bcan pos*' 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.³⁴ Chinese histories like *Jiu Tangshu* “Old Book of Tang” and *Xin Tangshu* “New Book of Tang” are another source of information.³⁵ 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.³⁶

Khri Sroñ-rcan

The date of birth of Khri Sroñ-rcan remains unknown and has long been a matter of speculation.³⁷ If we agree that his grandson Khri Mañ-slön Mañ-rcan was born in 638

³¹ Cf. *bcan po khri stag bu* (= Stag-bu Sña-gzigs of other sources) in PT 1144: v3 and v4.

³² Cf. *bcan po yab khri slon bcan* in PT 1287: 83, 180, 184, 291. The bestowal of the titles *bcan po* and *khri* on Stag-bu and Slon-bcan may be an anachronism, but at the same time confirms the existence of the convention in the official titlature at the time of the text composition.

³³ The Appendix provides an overview of the sources examined.

³⁴ The best illustration of the complicated nature of post-imperial sources is Uray's (1989) survey on the dating of the *Vyutpatti*-Treatises and the “Great Revision”. His study revealed great confusion among Tibetan historiographers concerning even the most basic information like the order of succession to the throne and the names of the *bcan pos*. However, if we look at the table in the Appendix to this paper we discover an interesting pattern: later historiographical sources provide correct duodenary dates for events that are recorded in the OTA (grey cells), but seldom for any other.

³⁵ I have used the translations of Bushell (1880) and Pelliot (1961). One should not forget that, even though based on contemporary accounts, both histories took shape in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Petech 1994: 649).

³⁶ Imaeda 2012: 114.

³⁷ Cf., e.g., Yamaguchi 1970: 85ff.; Richardson 1998d [1965]; Hazod 2000; Dotson 2007a: 59ff.

(he must have been born before 647, see below), then Khri Sroñ-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 Sroñ-rcan and Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcan to have become fathers (e.g. Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcan was certainly more than 27 years old and Khri Ydus-sroñ was 29 years old when their heirs were born in 676 and 704 respectively, but Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan was 19 when his first son was born in 760/1).³⁸ Hazod (2000, esp. 175, fn. 4) and Dotson (2007a: 61f.) proposed the ox year 605 for the birth of Khri Sroñ-rcan,³⁹ which I consider the latest possible date, although 593 seems to me the most plausible date (Bialek 2021b: 359f.). Concerning the death of Khri Sroñ-rcan (recorded in PT 1288: 15), Richardson, based on Chinese sources, opted for the first months of 650 (1998a [1965]: 7) which correspond to the last months of the hen year 649/50 (PT 1288: 15).

Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcan

Thus far the name Guñ-sroñ Guñ-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 Sroñ-rcan (d. 649/50) had lived three years with Mun-čan Koñ-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 sroñ rcan gyi rin lay* (PT 1288: 13), lit. “the body of the *bcan po* Khri Sroñ-rcan”.⁴⁰ Thus, at that point Khri Sroñ-rcan was the ruling *bcan po*. Yamaguchi, following Tibetan historiographers, assumed that Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcan ruled for five years and accordingly he placed his reign before 644 (1969: 160).⁴¹ However, Chinese sources report that it was Khri Sroñ-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, Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcan must have reigned either from around 641 to 644 or from 645 to 647. In the former case, Khri Sroñ-rcan's marriage with Mun-čan Koñ-čo might have been concluded after the burial ceremonies for Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcan had ended, i.e. about two or three years after his death.⁴²

Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcan

Post-imperial historiographical sources agree that Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcan was born in a dog year. Because his father Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcan died not later than in 647, it follows that Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-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 Sroñ-rcan reigned again. One can speculate that Khri Sroñ-rcan abdicated after the son was born to Guñ-sroñ Guñ-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 Sroñ-rcan was born in an ox year.

⁴⁰ In Bialek (2018b: 403f.) I argued that *rin lay* here is not the postposition “during the reign” but a simple lexeme *rin* “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 Sroñ-rcan (1969: 160) can be dismissed.

⁴¹ Yamaguchi (1970: 95) set Guñ-sroñ Guñ-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 Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcan (birth: 621; ascension: 638; death: 643) are misguided by his assumption that Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcan was the son of Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcan and Mun-čan Koñ-čo.

Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-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 Sroñ-rcan – Khri Ydus-sroñ and Khri Lde-gcug-rcan were not enthroned until they reached the age of about nine (see sections Khri Ydus-sroñ and Khri Lde-gcug-rcan below).⁴³ This argument also supports the hypothesis that Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcan was born in 638. He died in the winter of the rat year 676/7 (ITJ 750: 66–7).

Khri Ydus-sroñ

Khri Ydus-sroñ 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 Sroñ-lde-brcan

Khri Sroñ-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 pos* 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 Sroñ-lde-brcan and his death respectively.⁴⁵ The abdication of Khri Sroñ-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 Sroñ-lde-brcan and Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan. In my opinion, the former, after some internal disturbances caused by Mu-rug-brcan, directly ceded power to his son Khri Lde-sroñ-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-ldeyu (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 Sroñ-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 *riñ la* “during the reign” and *sku riñ la* “during the lifetime”,⁴⁶ nor the significance of the enthronement ceremony intrinsically (or even tautologically) bound to the bestowal of the title *khri* on the rightful ruler were still recognized. This has brought about the proliferation of *bcan pos* 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 pos* at the beginning of the ninth century according to later Tibetan historiographical sources. By-and-large a great conundrum prevails.⁴⁷ 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: 145f.). 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 Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan in 797, according to Chinese sources (Bushell 1880: 506; Pelliot 1961: 123), was clearly not titled *khri* by the Chinese. The same sources refer, for instance, to Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan as Ji-li-su-long-lie-zan and to Khri Gcug-lde-brcan as Ke-li-ke-zu. The first two syllables of the Chinese equivalents, Ji-li and Ke-li, transcribe the regnal title *khri*. 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-brcan. Compare also Petech’s remark: “In the beginning of the 9th century it might have been pronounced approximately Tsiuk-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:

	Pulleyblank (1991)	Schuessler (2007)	Baxter and Sagart (2014)
足 <i>zú</i>	Y. tsý, L. tsywk, E. tsuawk	LH tsiog, OCM *tsok	MC tsjowk, OC *[ts]ok
之 <i>zhi</i>	Y. tʂɿ, L. tʂi, E. tʂi/tʂi	LH tsə, OCM *tə	MC tʂyi, OC *tə
煎 <i>jiān</i>	Y. tsjen, L. tsian, E. tsian		

The first syllable 足 *zú* 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-lde-brcan who was apparently identified as the acceding *bcan po*. Khri Gcug-lde-brcan was born in a dog year which might have been 794 and so the Chinese sources mistook him for the acceding *bcan po*, who was in fact his father, Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan.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 Dpaṅ-bo Gcug-lag Yphreñ-ba in a corrupted and interpolated form, and so the information of the *Mkhas paṅi dgaṅ 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-lde-brcan may seem problematic: the Chinese sources use the accession name instead of his birth name. This, however, we observe with any other Tibetan *bcan po* 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 Khri Gcug-lde-brcan in 794 might have been a direct reason for the abdication of Khri Sroñ-lde-brcan – the succession was secured. Above (see section Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcañ) I have proposed an analogous explanation of the abdication of Khri Sroñ-rcañ.

Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan

It is traditionally agreed that Khri Lde-sroñ-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-sroñ-brcan played as Lde-sroñ in the Rkoñ 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-sroñ-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-sroñ-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:

	Pulleyblank (1991)	Schuessler (2007)	Baxter and Sagart (2014)
達 dá	Y. ta', L. tñat, E. dat	LH dat, OCM *dât	MC dat, OC *[i]ʰat
磨 mó	Y. mɔ', L. mua, E. ma	LH mǎi, OCM *mâi	MC ma, OC *mʰaj

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 Richardson (1952: 148) accepted the year 776.

⁵⁰ The inscription was composed during the reign of Khri Sroñ-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 (ja 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-sroñ-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*.⁵⁴ 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-sruñs-brcan*⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶ Above I have argued that Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan was recognized as a legitimate successor of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan and enthroned acquiring the title *khri*. Tibetan historiographers maintained that Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan took over the reign immediately after the death of Glañ-dar-ma (Tucci 1947: 314 and 316). According to Chinese sources Khri Yod-sruñs-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 Qǐ-lí-hú (Pelliot 1961: 134), can be reconstructed as:

	Pulleysblank (1991)	Schuessler (2007)	Baxter and Sagart (2014)
乞 <i>qǐ</i>	Y. k ^h i', L. k ^h it, E. k ^h it	LH k ^h it, OCM *khət	MC khj+t, OC *C.qhət
離 <i>lí</i>	Y. li', L. li, E. liə'/li	LH liai, OCM *rai	MC lje, OC *[r]aj
胡 <i>hú</i>	Y. xu', L. xfiuə', E. ɣo	LH ga, OCM *gâ	MC hu, OC *[g]ʰa

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-brtan (see Petech 1939: 83 and 1994: 650) is untenable. Neither can Qi-li-hu render Ywuyi-dun-brtan (see Yamaguchi 1996: 250), for the latter was a younger brother of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan born to the same mother, Lha-rgyal Mañ-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 pos* were renamed some time after their death (Dotson 2015: 2); they obtained posthumous names under which they were known to later generations. “Glañ 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. I think that without any external or new evidence such as archaeological finds or discovery of hitherto unknown OT documents, the study of the Tibetan history of the period following the death of Khri Gcug-lde-brcan on the basis of post-imperial works alone is juggling with dates with no foothold in reality. Certainly some of the dates are more plausible than others but we lack an independent benchmark to judge which of them might be the correct ones.

⁵⁶ His name is prefixed with *khri* only seldom in post-imperial works, cf.: *khri dar ma wi dur brcan* (Skyid payi *gyuñ ruñ du gdugs brdal* ma 28.5–6), *rgyal po khri glañ dar ma dbu dum can* (GLR: 97v4), *khri dar ma yu dum bcan* (Stein 1961: 70.10), *bcan po khri dar ma gčig dum* (Stein 1961: 77.5), *khri dar ma yu dum bcan* (Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub 1990: 43, fol. 144v5–6, but *bcan po glañ dar ma yu dum bcan* in 145v2), *khri dar ma yuyi dum bcan* (Mes dbon *nam gsum gyi nam thar* by Nañ Ral-pa-čan 132v2–3; *apud* Sørensen 1994: 409, fn. 1413). As we have seen, the *Yphañ thañ ma* catalogue calls him *bcan po* Dbay-dun-brtan (Halkias 2004: 82) whereas the *Čhos ybyuñ me tog sñiñ poyi sbran rciyi bčud* by Nañ Ral-pa-čan, addresses him as Dar-ma Yu-dum-bcan-po (Meisezahl 1985: Tafel 309, fol. 463r1, but *khri dar ma yu dum bcan* in a list of Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan's sons, Tafel 302, fol. 449v1). For an overview of his names in other post-imperial sources see Haahr (1969: 59f.). For unknown reasons, Yamaguchi (1996: 236, fn. 10), following Satō, contested the brotherly relation between Ywuyi-dun-brtan 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-lde-brcan. Apart from PT 1286, three other OT documents are known that mention Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan together with his mother: in PT 131: 28–9 and PT 999: 5 the mother *jo mo bcan mo yphan* is mentioned first but in PT 230: 7 *lha sras khri yod sruñs brcan* precedes the appositional compound *yum sras*.⁵⁷ Luckily, PT 999

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

*bod yoñs gyi [rgyal] po čhen po/ lha bal dum na bźugs pa/ jo mo bcan mo yphan gyi pho brañ yod sruñ/ rjes ybaris
ykhor dañ bčas pa* (PT 131: 27–9)
the great king of all Tibetans who stays at Lha-bal-dum, Yod-sruñ, the court of *jo mo Bcan-mo-yphan* with
the retinue of courtiers
jo mo bcan mo yphan gyi yum sras gyi pho brañ yod sruñ gi sku yon du// (PT 999: 5–6)
as a donation from (lit. of) Yod-sruñ, the court of *jo mo Bcan-mo-yphan*, mother and son.

In both cases *pho brañ* is preceded by a genitive particle, a fact passed over in silence in previous translations (Tucci 1956: 52, fn. 1; Richardson 1998 [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 brañ* as forming one phrase with *jo mo bcan mo yphan* (for examples of the phrase “*pho brañ* of TITLE+NAME”, see Bialek 2018a: 2.281f.). 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-sruñs 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 yphan* as a proper name because monosyllabic proper names, like **yphan*, are virtually unknown in OLT (see also Dotson 2015: 3 on di- and, rarely, trisyllabic proper names in Tibetan). It could only be a family name but in the case of a woman one would expect **yphan za*. Maybe *bcan mo yphan* is a misspelling for **bcan ma yphan* (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 brañ* as a title, explaining that it (spelled by him as *ypho brañ*) 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 brañ* as a title has been accepted. It is maintained that later in Western Tibet *pho brañ* 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 brañ* in the following passage:

*rab pa bkris yod ni dguñ lo bži bču pa čhu pho phag gi lo la rab tu byuñ nas/ pho brañ byañ čhub yod du mchan
gsol/ (Mñay ris rgyal 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 brañ* was given the name as *Byañ-čhub-yod*.

Compare:

bcan po khri (93) *ydu[s] sroñ du mchan gsold / (ITJ 750)*
[One] bestowed the *bcan po* with the name *Khri Ydus-sroñ*.

It is difficult for me to see any cultural or linguistic motivation behind the alleged semantic shift “¹court; ²residence, palace” > “TITLE of a human”, even more so as the word is still attested dialectally even in western Tibet with the meaning “palace” (CDTD: 5192). Therefore I suspect that *pho brañ* “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 brañ*) might have come to denote the person who resided in a *pho brañ*. Certainly, more text-historical studies are required in order to ascertain the function of the lexeme *pho brañ* in instances like those encountered in Western Tibetan chronicles. The etymology of *pho brañ* 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).⁵⁸ Since in PT 999 it is the mother who is mentioned first, we can conclude that in 844 Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan was still a minor,⁵⁹ 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 yoñs gyi [rgyal] po čhen po* (PT 131: 27) presents Khri Yod-sruñs-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 Ywuyi-dun-brtan (*alias* Dar-ma) and Khri Yod-sruñs-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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹

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 Ywuyi-dun-brtan took over the reign but resigned or was compelled to resign soon after Khri Yod-sruñs-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-sruñs-brcan was in fact his (and *jo mo* Bcan-mo-yphan’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-yphan and Yod-sruñ. Should they be consort and son of Ywuyi-dun-brtan there would be no reason for omitting the latter while mentioning Khri Gcug-lde-brcan. None of the OT sources addresses Yod-sruñs 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-yphan became known, he could not have recognized his paternity and bestowed the title *bcan po*. Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan was enthroned very early, around 843,⁶² 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 *čhos* (!) *ybyuris*, 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

fighters 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 *riñ la* and *sku riñ 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 pos* 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 Mañ-slon Mañ-rcan* was born in 638 – his grandfather *Khri Sroñ-rcan* possibly abdicated in 641; and *Khri Gcug-lde-brcan* was born in 794 – his grandfather *Khri Sroñ-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

took over the reign (Bushell 1880: 523; Pelliot 1961: 134). 843 was a swine year and this year recurs in some post-imperial sources as either *Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan*’s birth year or the year of accession, or both (see Sørensen 1994: 435, fn. 1555).

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-sroñ-brcan* was chosen as the successor of *Khri Sroñ-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 Sroñ-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 (*rin la*) or life (*sku rin la*) of a *bcan 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.

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Abbreviations

Yphags	Yphags-pa (1238–80)
ACT	active
BDRC	The Buddhist Digital Resource Center: https://library.bdrclibrary.org/
CT	Classical Tibetan
CDTD	Bielmeier et al. 2013
DPASS	dynamic passive
E	east-facing inscription
E.	Early Middle Chinese
Eng.	English
Ger.	German
GLR	Bsod-nams Rgyal-mchan 1750–60 [1368]
Gr.	Greek
Grag	Grag-pa Rgyal-mchan (1147–1216)
ITJ	IOL Tib J
J	Jäschke 1881
KhG	Dpay-bo Gcug-lag Yphren-ba 1962
IDP	International Dunhuang Project: http://idp.bl.uk/
L.	Late Middle Chinese
Lat.	Latin
Ldeyu	Ldeyu-jo-sras 1987
LH	Later Han Chinese
MC	Middle Chinese
Mkhas	Mkhas-pa-ldeyu 2010
Nel	Nel-pa Paṇḍita 1987
OC	Old Chinese
OCM	Minimal Old Chinese
OLT	Old Literary Tibetan
Or.	Oriental Collections of the British Library
OT	Old Tibetan
OTA	<i>Old Tibetan Annals</i>
OTD	Old Tibetan Dictionary: http://otdict.com
OTDO	Old Tibetan Documents Online: https://otdo.aaklc.org/
PFV	perfective
PT	Pelliot tibétain
S	south-facing inscription
STEDT	Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus: https://stedt.berkeley.edu/

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-γbrug bell inscription
Khri	Inscription at the tomb of Khri Lde-sroñ-brcan
Rkoñ	Rkoñ-po inscription
Skar	Skar-čhuñ pillar inscription
Treaty	Sino-Tibetan Treaty inscription
Žol	Žol pillar inscription
Žwa	Pillar inscriptions at Žwayi-lha-khañ

Manuscripts

ITJ 750	<i>Old Tibetan Annals I</i>
Or.8212/187	<i>Old Tibetan Annals II</i>
PT 131	Prayers for Khri Ḳod-sruñs-brcan
PT 134	Prayers for Ḳwuyi-dun-brtan
PT 230	Prayers for Khri Ḳod-sruñs-brcan
PT 840	Eulogy to Tibet
PT 999	Permission to take out copies of <i>sūtra</i> from a library
PT 1144	<i>Old Tibetan Chronicles</i>
PT 1286	Royal genealogy
PT 1287	<i>Old Tibetan Chronicles</i>
PT 1288	<i>Old Tibetan Annals I</i>
PT 1290	Catalogue of ancient principalities

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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., "𑄎 13 (15)" should be read "enthroned (𑄎) 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

𑄎 Enthronement

† Death

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Source	OTA	Nel	Ldeyu	Mkhas	Bu-ston	Grags ⁷⁰	Yphags ⁷⁴	GLR	KhG	Ch. ⁷⁵	
Date	650–764	1283	1230–40	1261<	1322		1275	1368	1545–65		
Khri Sroñ-rcañ	*	ox			ox ⁶⁹	ox	ox	ox			
	𑖦	(69)	13 (69)	13 (69)		13	13 (69)	(70)	13 (72)		
	†649	hen	82	82 ⁶⁶	82	82	82 rat ⁷³	82 dog	82 dog	650	
[Guñ-sroñ Guñ-rcañ]								snake	snake		
	𑖦641/645	dragon/monkey	13 (5)	13 (5)	(5)	13	(5)	13 (5)	13 (5)		
	†644/647	sheep	18	19	19	18		18	18		
Khri Mañ-slon Mañ-rcañ	*638	dog	dog	dog	dog	dog	dog	dog	dog		
	𑖦649	hen	(15)	14	15	(15)	13 (15)	(15)	13 (15)		
	†676	rat	27 (rat)	27	rat	27 (rat)	27 rat	27 (rat)	27 (rat)	679	
Khri Ydus-sroñ	*676	rat	rat	rat	rat	rat	rat	rat	rat		
	𑖦 685	hen		(rat)	rat			(29)	(29)	8	
	†704	dragon	29 dragon	29 dragon	dragon	29	29 dragon			705	
Khri Lde-gcug-rcañ	*704	dragon	dragon	dragon	dragon		dragon	dragon	dragon		
	𑖦712	rat		(dragon)						7	
	†754	horse	62 horse	55 swine	55 swine	63 horse	63 horse	63		755	
Khri Sroñ-lde-brcañ	*742	horse	horse	horse	horse	horse	horse	horse	horse		
	𑖦756	horse	13 (42)	13		13	13 (13)	(43)	8		
	†804	monkey	56 ox	56	59	69	56 ox	56 ox	56 ox	61 ox	797/804
Khri Lde-sroñ-brcañ			dragon	dragon	dragon	dragon	dragon		dragon		
	𑖦797	ox		25	13	4	(31)	24 (31)	14	4 (32)	805
	†815	sheep	54 hen	44 sheep	sheep		54 hen	54 hen	54 hen	54	817

(Continued)

(Continued)

Source	OTA	Nel	Ldeyu	Mkhas	Bu-ston	Grags ⁷⁰	Yphags ⁷⁴	GLR	KhG	Ch. ⁷⁵
Date	650–764	1283	1230–40	1261<	1322		1275	1368	1545–65	
Khri Gcug-lde-brcan	*794 dog	dog	dog	dog	⁶⁸	dog	rat ⁷²	dog	dog	
	ལ815 sheep	12 (24)	(22)	12	18	21 (24)	12 hen (24)	12	12	817
	†841 hen	36 hen	40 sheep	rat ⁶⁷	36 hen	36 hen	36 hen	36 hen	36 hen	842
[Khri Yod-sruñs-brcan]	*841 hen	swine	monkey	monkey	ox	swine	dog ⁷¹		hare	842
	ལ843 swine	(3)				(3)	(dog)			3
	†	ox	(ox)	ox	63	ox	63 ox		snake (39)	

⁶⁶ The edition of 1987 reads *brgya bču gya bži* (Ldeyu 1987: 117.21).

⁶⁷ *byi* might be an erroneous reading for *bya*.

⁶⁸ Falsely called Khri Lde-sroñ bcan (Bu-ston 1990: 43.6).

⁶⁹ Falsely called Khri Lde-sroñ-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).