(M) ro- (B) [ro-] (Th) rot- (R) õ-, hõ-

to satisfy
(M) [pin-] (Ti) [piŋ-] (Ks) plen- (Ku) [pöŋ-] (B) [pin-] (Th) pin- (R) pin-

to be full/ satisfied
(Ti) biŋ- (Ku) bəŋ- (B) biŋ- (G) kə pke (ZZ) gang

to wash
(M) tšàk- [tšh-] (Ku) tši- (B) kyi- (Th) ur- (R) ur-

to give
(M) rɑn- (Ti) rɑn- (Ks) raṭ /ṇ- ~ ke- (Ku) rən- ~ ke- (B) da- (Th) da-/khe- (R) khyɔ̃- (D) bhito (G) ka-mṅer

to steal
(M) #ku- (Ku) khu- (B) kù- (Th) khut-

to buy
(M) tsum- (Ti) [yog-] (Ks) khaŋ- (Ku) zoŋ- (B) yok- (Th) #t͟šoŋ- (R) tšhɔ̃-

to sell
(M) làŋ- (Ti) [ɬaŋ-] (Ku) ren- (B) laŋ(g)- (Th) rəŋ- (R) raŋ-

to weave
(M) rhɑn- (Ku) tag- [-ŋ] (B) ran- (Th) tak- (R) rhən-

to sew
(M) pèn- (Ku) [pon-] (B) phan- (Th) pu-/on- (R) -phan- (D) hamto

Zhangzhung and its next of kin in the Himalayas

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1. Introduction

Zhangzhung is an extinct Tibeto-Burman language once spoken in what today is western Tibet. What little we know about the language and about the history of the people who once spoke it supports the old hypothesis proposed by Frederick William Thomas and propagated by Robert Shafer, Erik Haarh and Helmut Hoffmann that Zhangzhung belongs to the same branch of the Tibeto-Burman family as the languages still spoken today in adjoining tracts on the southern flank of the Himalayas. An ethnolinguistic relationship between Zhangzhung and the language communities that speak Manchad, Bunan, Rangkas, Kinnauri and related languages has always been the most obvious hypothesis in terms of both history and geography, and this hypothesis also happens to be the one best supported by the linguistic data seen to date. In the following I shall address two questions: What are the linguistically relevant cultural and historical facts about the people who once spoke Zhangzhung? What is the state of the art in the linguistic study of Zhangzhung?

2. Who spoke Zhangzhung?

Zhangzhung was an indigenous tongue of western Tibet spoken in the region around the headwaters of the Indus, which was then known as Zhang-zhung. The Zhangzhung polity, with its capital at Khyung-lung west of Mount Kailash, was conquered and annexed by Tibet in the seventh century. The ultimate reason for the extinction of the Zhangzhung language is that Zhangzhung society linguistically assimilated to their neighbours, the Tibetans, as Zhangzhung became incorporated into the nascent Tibetan state. The annexation of Zhangzhung by Tibet probably took place either in 644 or in 645 during the reign of Srong-brtsan sGam-po. In the past, based on what was believed to be a literal reading of the Old Tibetan Chronicle, some scholars argued that the Zhangzhung kingdom was annexed by Tibet in 653, whereas other scholars argued that the incorporation of Zhangzhung into Tibet only occurred in the eighth century. The controversy hinged about the view propounded by Giuseppe Tucci (1956: 106) and Siegbert Hummel (1974: 488) that the Tibetan princess Sad-mar-kar was the daughter of the Tibetan king Khri-srong lDe-brtsan,

who ruled in the middle of the eighth century. However, studies by Chang Kun (1960) and Uray Géza (1968, 1972) showed that princess Sad-mar-kar was, in fact, the sister of the Tibetan king Khri Srong-brtsan, i.e. Srong-brtsan sGam-po. This fact is crucial to the chronology of events, as the fall of the Zhangzhung state was a more or less direct consequence of the discomfort suffered by this Tibetan princess, or so the story goes.

At the time of the annexation, the Tibetan royal family in the Yarlung valley had been united through marriage with the Lig dynasty which ruled over Zhangzhung. Not only had the sister of the Tibetan king Srong-brtsan sGam-po, princess Sad-mar-kar, been wed to king Lig Myi-rhya of Zhangzhung, Siegbert Hummel tells us that Srong-brtsan sGam-po had himself also taken the Zhangzhung princess Lig Thig-dman as one of his wives (1974: 488). As fate would have it, king Lig Myi-rhya was disinclined to consummate his marriage with Sad-mar-kar. The unwillingness of king Lig Myi-rhya to perform his marital duties caused great discomfort to Sad-mar-kar, and in a song of woe, studied by Uray Géza, the queen laments what Uray calls 'her bleak life in Žaṅ-žuṅ'. The discontent caused to Sad-mar-kar by the king's neglect was great enough, in fact, to constitute a *casus belli*, for in her song she calls upon her brother, the king of Tibet, to attack Zhangzhung in order to rescue her from her plight and punish the people of Zhangzhung for the failure of their monarch to perform his marital duties. If this story is taken at face value, the demise of the Zhangzhung kingdom and the subsequent extinction of the Zhangzhung language were ultimately the consequence of what happened or, rather, of what did not happen in the regal bedchambers at Khyung-lung.

Whatever may be the truth behind this story, the annexation of Zhangzhung was not an isolated incident in the foreign policy of the nascent Tibetan state. As the Tibetans emerged from the Yarlung river valley, they not only annexed Zhangzhung, but during the reign of Srong-brtsan sGam-po also conquered other areas which lay beyond what at that time was still the western frontier of Tibet, such as gLo and Se-rib. These are the areas which today are respectively known as Upper and Lower Mustang in the Kālī Gaṇḍakī Valley of west-central Nepal. David Jackson (1978: 199) tells us that in later Bon-po geography these areas are known as Zhang-zhung-smad 'Lower Zhangzhung', although there is nothing which corroborates a connexion with Zhangzhung in the sources on the early history of Se-rib. Subsequent Tibetan conquests extended far beyond this area as the successors of Srong-brtsan sGam-po perpetuated his expansionist policies. The turbulent period of military conquest and internal strife continued until the Tibetan military machine fell into desuetude and Tibet broke up into many local princedoms after the assassination of the last king of the Yarlung dynasty, Khri 'U'i Dum-brtsan, *alias* gLang-dar-ma (*imperabat* 838-842). In the tenth century, the area of the former Zhangzhung polity was incorporated in the Tibetan kingdom of La-dwags 'Ladakh', which had been established by Tibetan noble families and which continued to

flourish until the nineteenth century.

The reason why the Zhangzhung language did not vanish without a trace is that Zhangzhung is purported to be the tongue in which the original teachings are said to have been propagated of the religion which now goes by the name of Bon. Uray Géza (1964) explains that the Tibetan verb *bon* means 'implore, beseech, murmur, recite chants, invoke, summon' and that the term *bon-po* 'mutterer' originally designated a type of shaman. Zhangzhung, though extinct, is still the sacred language of the Bon religion. David Snellgrove (1967) tells us that the Tibetan term *bon* is originally a translation of the Zhangzhung word *gyer*, which means 'chant'. The first translation of a major Bonpo text was Anton Schiefner's famous German translation of the seminal Bonpo work, the White Sūtra of the Ten Thousand Nāgas, published posthumously in 1880. Subsequently, Berthold Laufer formulated the theory that Bon was not an indigenous religion of Tibet, as had hitherto been thought, but a religion which had its roots further west in Bactria and Sogdiana:

> Es ist irrtümlich, wie bisher zuweilen geschehen, die Bon-Religion ohne weiteres mit der einheimischen tibetischen Volksreligion zu identificiren. ...Sie ist... keine tibetische, sondern eine fremde Religion, die auf persischer Grundlage basirt ist, mit allen möglichen fremden Elementen vermischt in Dardistan entwickelt wurde, von da zunächst nach Guge in den westlichen Teil Tibets und später in das centrale Tibet gelangte... Ihre ältesten Traditionen weisen aber, wie gesagt, deutlich genug auf Persien hin. (1908: 13)

Laufer's theory seems to be supported by later studies on the Bon religion by Helmut Hoffmann (1950) and David Snellgrove (1967). Snellgrove adopted and developed Laufer's theory and reported that the theory in fact represents the view held by leading Bon-po authorities. According to this view, the Bon religion of Zhangzhung represents the first wave of Buddhism into Tibet, and the great Bon-po preceptor gShen-rab (also spelt gShen-rabs), known as dMu-ra in Zhangzhung, is in fact the Buddha. The Bon religion came to Zhangzhung from Bactria and Sogdiana, an area which early Tibetan historians refer to as Ta-zhig or Tag-zig and which, according to Snellgrove (1987: 400), is cognate with 'Tajik'. In later Bon-po and Buddhist sources, the etymologizing spellings sTag-gzig or rTag-gzigs were adopted, with their decidely more Tibetan appearance. This hypercorrect development is very much in keeping with the tendency of Tibetologists and others familiar with Classical Tibetan of giving Tibetan spellings to place names which are not originally Tibetan. Snellgrove did this for a number of places in central Nepal, and scholars in Bhutan have on occasion assigned Classical Tibetan spellings to toponyms at variance with the cues and promptings afforded by local pronunciation, e.g. dGongs-'dus for the settlement in Kheng district locally pronounced /goŋduk/,

or Khrum-shing-la for the lofty pass in the Bumthang speaking area locally known as /phrumseŋya/.

In his version of Laufer's theory, Snellgrove explains that Bon was an early 'form of partly understood Buddhism, perhaps strongly affected by the vague philosophical ideas and sincere meditational practices of travelling yogins' (1987: 473). When a more orthodox version of Buddhism was later introduced as the state religion under Srong-brtsan sGam-po, the practitioners of the earlier heterodox form, later to become known as Bon, initially objected because the new teachings were at variance with their previous conception of the religion. Yet, as ever more Buddhist teachings reached Tibet from India, it ultimately became evident that the second wave of Buddhism represented a less adulterated form than the first. This process explains the many phases of accommodation which Bon went through in response to the later, more orthodox forms of Buddhism which came to Tibet. Bon is therefore neither an indigenous religion nor strictly speaking a pre-Buddhist religion, but, in Snellgrove's words, a 'composite religious development, drawing heavily on Buddhist sources before any central interest was taken in the new religion... it had drawn upon previous forms of Buddhism, which already from the first century onward had spread from the Kushāna empire northward and eastward across Central Asia' (1987: 473). Not only the Kuṣāṇa ruling classes but also the Dardic speaking peoples, who had initially sought refuge in the mountains from the Kuṣāṇa onslaught, were exposed to Buddhism throughout the Kuṣāṇa period, and Gandhāran Buddhist art flourished until the advent of the Huns in the fifth century. The term *Chos*, the Tibetan translation for Sanskrit *Dharma*, was originally used to refer to the Bon religion of Zhangzhung and Tibet, and only later came to be exclusively applied to orthodox Buddhism.

Where in the west did the first wave of Buddhism, or Bon, originate? Berthold Laufer pointed out that the language known in Tibetan as Bru-sha is first mentioned during the reign of Khri-srong lDe-brtsan in the mid eighth century as a language spoken to the west of Baltistan. Laufer lists several arguments for localising Bru-sha and its language in Gilgit. According to tradition, Bru-sha, Bru-zha or 'Bru-zha was a language more sacrosanct than Zhangzhung, and from which scriptures had been translated into Zhangzhung and later into Tibetan. Bru-sha is evidently Burushaski. Bru-sha was sacred to Padmasambhava, the wizard, exorcist and sorcerer from Swat in what today is Pakistan who must have passed through Gilgit on his way to the court of king Khri-srong lDe-brtsan. Whether Bru-sha ever actually had a literature written in the 'Bru-tsha or 'Bru-tshag script, supposedly a precursor of the Tibetan dBu-can script and likewise derived from the earlier Gupta script, as the tradition would have it, is a moot point. If so, no solid evidence remains to substantiate this tradition.

In his account of Bon family lineages in this volume, Döndrup Lhagyal recounts that the Bru lineage is one of the five great clans of Bon tradition, second

only to the gShen family, which was said to be related to sTon-pa gShen-rab himself. The Bru family is said to have descended from heaven to earth at Bru-sha and to have taken up the roles of preceptors of Bon. The arrival of the Bru clan in Tibet was preceded by an episode of bellicose exchanges between Bru-sha in the west and a federation of the three kingdoms of Mang-yul, sPu-rang and Zhangzhung in mNga'-ris in the east. The armies of these three polities in what today is western Tibet are recorded to have marched against Bru-sha four times, but in the end their commander and monarch was captured and held for ransom in exchange for his weight in gold, and as a result the Bru-sha emerged as victors. Four scions of the Bru clan came to mNga'-ris at the invitation of king rTse-lde, alias 'od-lde in the eleventh century. The importance of the Bru family in the transmission of Bon was effectively curtailed after their monastery dBen-sa-kha, which had been established at gYas-ru in gTsang in the early thirteenth century, was destroyed in the fourteenth century 'by a flood owing to the jealousy of the Buddhists' (Shar-rdza bKra-shis rGyal-tshan, quoted by Döndrup Lhagyal, p. 23) and never rebuilt. In this way, not only the people of Zhangzhung but also people who once spoke Zhangzhung contributed to the overall ethnic make-up of the modern Tibetan people. Yet the dissemination of Bon to Tibet from Gilgit preceded the advent of the Bru lineage to Tibet.

Gilgit and Zhangzhung lay along the route of transmission to Tibet of both the early heterodox form of Buddhism later known as Bon and the more orthodox forms of Buddhism which were introduced afterwards. These areas were Buddhist in Kuṣāṇa times, and at the local village level some type of Gandhāran folk Buddhism with a heavy shamanist substrate would have flourished. It is likely, therefore, that the indigenous shamanism practised by the Burúsho was a formative element in the Bon religion. Although the Burúsho were converted to Islam centuries ago, on another level they practise an indigenous form of shamanism even today. Some tell-tale traces of the indigenous Burúsho religion that were documented in early studies and travelogues may now have been obliterated by Islam. It may also be that the first diffusion of Buddhism from Bactria and Sogdiana via this route is what is being recounted in a passage from a Bonpo text translated by Sarat Chandra Dás, i.e. the eighth book of *Grub-mtha' Shel-kyi Me-long* 'The Looking Glass of the Doctrines' (1881: 195-196). In earlier times, western Tibet was always more prone to cultural influences from the Indian subcontinent than Tibet proper, and after more orthodox forms of Buddhism became established in Tibet in the tenth century, Snellgrove observes, 'western Tibet is never again mentioned as a stronghold of Bon, while the Bon tradition has flourished precisely in eastern Tibet as far away as possible from these genuine Indian sources, which prove so easily the mistaken nature of some of its fundamental assumptions' (1987: 473).

3.   What can we say about the Zhangzhung language?

The extant material on the Zhang zhung language is limited, but this material along with what we know about Tibetan history enables us to make some inferences and entertain some informed conjectures about the genetic affinities of the Zhangzhung language. In 1907, a vast trove of ancient manuscripts, painted scrolls and mural paintings was discovered in the Dūnhuáng Caves at the western end of Gānsù province. The oldest Chinese Buddhist rock temple at Dūnhuáng dates from 366, but Dūnhuáng had become part of the Tibetan Empire in 786 or 787. The Dūnhuáng manuscripts are written in many different languages, including Sanskrit Buddhist texts in Brāhmī script, Tocharian manuscripts from both Kučā and Qarāšahr, texts in the languages of Khotan, Sogdian texts in an Aramaic script and Manichaean texts in Uighur (Stein 1921, 1933). The British scholar Frederick William Thomas provided a specimen of a language from two scrolls collected at Dūnhuáng by Sir Aurel Stein which he believed were written in 'the žaṅ-žuṅ language' (1926, 1933). These two scrolls are now kept in the Oriental and India Office Library of the British Library, where they are catalogued as VP 755 and Or 8212/188. On the basis of lexical items such as 'ag 'mouth' and other features which the language in the Dūnhuáng scroll shares with languages such as Rangkas and Kinnauri, Thomas believed that the language was related to Hodgson's 'Western Pronominalized Group', and Thomas assessed that the Zhangzhung 'had an entirely non-Tibetan, though Tibeto-Burman, speech' (1948: 14). Both of the purportedly Zhangzhung texts studied by Thomas are evidently medical texts, and one of them, VP 755, was published posthumously in facsimile along with Thomas' transliteration of the same (1967).

There were scholars who contested Thomas' identification of the language in the scrolls as Zhangzhung. For example, David Snellgrove disputed it, himself claiming that the language of the scrolls represented some other tongue which was 'in use in the northeastern extremes of the Tibetan empire' (1987: 393). Whether or not Snellgrove is correct, his contention that Thomas identified the language as Zhangzhung 'for no other reason than the Tibetan-like appearance of some of the terms' is inaccurate and unfair. Snellgrove is too cavalier when he declares that the language is but 'a dialect of Tibetan'. In a related context, Robert Shafer was quite right to have pointed out that Thomas 'always had grounds for his interpretations. And so, although one may not always agree with the latter, one must always consider them' (1950: 249). Shafer's choice of tense is curious because Thomas did not pass away until 1956 but, that having been said, Shafer did in fact accept Thomas' identification of the language in the scrolls as Zhangzhung, and years later Erik Haarh (1968) likewise did so. On the basis of Thomas's specimen, Shafer argued that the language was not Qiāngic, but Bodish. Shafer later classified the language more specifically as probably being of the 'Old Almora' group, i.e. an

earlier attested member of the 'Almora Branch' (1957: 195). Shafer's Almora Branch consisted of the languages Rangkas, Darmiya, Byangsi and Chaudangsi, which collectively formed a subset of Shafer's West Himalayish. Other West Himalayish languages are Bunan, Thebor, Kinnauri and Manchad (1955: 101; 1974: 3). Shafer also tentatively classified Thangmi and Barām together as a separate 'Eastern Branch' within West Himalayish, but we shall return to the latter point towards the end of this discussion.

A third medical text in what is evidently the same language is contained in the Pelliot collection in Paris, catalogued as P 1251. Erik Haarh listed several additional manuscripts in unknown languages in Tibetan script which are kept in Western collections and which may be Zhangzhung documents and still await further study. Other than in the Dūnhuáng scrolls the Zhangzhung language is attested mainly in titles, captions and fragments contained in Tibetan manuscripts, which have themselves allegedly been translated from the sacred language of Zhangzhung. Then in 1965, a 64-page *Tibetan Žang Žung Dictionary*, bearing the Tibetan title *sGra-yi Don-sdeb Snang-gsal Sgron-ma*, loosely 'The Brilliant Lamp of the Fascicle of Word Meanings' compiled by Nyi-ma Grags-pa, was published by the Bonpo Foundation in New Delhi, and the complete lexical material contained in this dictionary was reproduced by Erik Haarh in his study of the Zhangzhung language (1968). On the basis of this material, Haarh adduced lexical correspondences which supported Thomas' and Shafer's classification of the language, e.g. Zhangzhung *ting* 'water' vs. Byangsi *ti*, Manchad *ti*, etc., Zhangzhung *tig* 'one' vs. Byangsi *tig*, Zhangzhung *hrang* 'horse' vs. Manchad *rhang*, Zhangzhung *bing* 'four' vs. Byangsi *pi*, Zhangzhung *snis* 'seven' vs. Manchad *ñhiji*. Haarh concluded in agreement with Thomas and Shafer that the Zhangzhung language belongs to the 'complex pronominalized dialects of the Western group'.

Rolf Alfred Stein also studied the Zhangzhung items in this dictionary and proposed some Tibeto-Burman etymologies. Stein also studied a further Bonpo text which was published in Delhi in 1966 and which had been unavailable to Haarh. This book entitled *mDzod-phug: Basic Verses and Commentary*, edited by bsTan-'dzin rNam-dag and bearing the Tibetan title *Srid-pa'i mDzod-phug rTsa-'grel*, had served as one of the principal sources for Nyi-ma Grags-pa's dictionary. The commentary appended to the *mDzod-phug* was ascribed by its editor bsTan-'dzin rNam-dag to Dran-pa Nam-mkha', a famous Bonpo scholar of the eighth century. The *mDzod-phug* itself is an eclectic work apparently based to a large extent on the *Chos-mngon-pa'i-mdzod*, the Tibetan translation of the *Abhidharmakośa*. Not all the lexical material in the glossary can be traced to the *mDzod-phug*. For example, the body part terminology is from the ritual context of Bar-do literature.

In Jerusalem, Dan Martin has been analysing and systematising the Zhangzhung material contained in the *mDzod-phug* and other sources, has pointed

out that some of the Zhangzhung is evidently calqued from the Tibetan, and Martin has floated the idea that some of the Zhangzhung could even have been 'encoded'. The latter hypothesis is complex and goes beyond the idea that Bonpo scribes merely generated the Zhangzhung forms artificially from the Tibetan by applying a set of rules of encodement. It may be that the Zhangzhung prefixes were functional, and that just the more obvious regular correspondences between the two languages had been remembered and were applied in a generalised fashion to the Tibetan to yield a Zhangzhung text even after the original Zhangzhung language had been half-forgotten. This could mean that Martin's 'rules for Zhangzhung encoding' would provide a useful key to deciphering the language even if the hypothesis of artificiality is proved wrong. An example of such a rule of encodement which presumes 'added initial syllables' reads as follows:

> Rule 1a—'ti' etc. type
> Take a Tibetan word. If it has two syllables, drop the second syllable, which will henceforth be left entirely out of consideration, *regardless of its importance for the meaning.*
>   Add as the first syllable the Zhangzhung 'ti' which may also appear in the forms 'ta' 'tha' [the], 'da' and 'di' ['de'] (also possibly 'yi' and even 'hi' although the latter may result from manuscript copyists; it may be 'hidden' under forms like 'tri' and 'dri', among others).

An argument against the hypothesis of encodement and artificiality, however, is the complexity of the allomorphy and the morphophonology which characterises Zhangzhung inflection and which makes Zhangzhung morphology look like a typically organic Himalayan system. Martin has also pointed out that the original lexicographer behind the glossary made errors which were not rectified by Haarh which involved the incorrect parsing of Zhangzhung words, whereby the first two syllables of a Zhangzhung polysyllable were sometimes taken to correspond to a Tibetan bisyllabic term.

In response to skepticism expressed from the very outset about the historical reality and linguistic authenticity of the Zhangzhung forms found in Bonpo texts, Rolf Stein wrote that 'si le vocabulaire źaṅ-źuṅ dont nous disposons dans les textes bon-po relativement tardifs est certainement très arrangé, déformé et manipulé, il n'en reste pas moins que beaucoup de mots proviennent réellement d'une langue... de la famille tibéto-birmane' (1971: 252). The apparently artificial nature of the Zhangzhung corpus in later manuscripts is hardly surprising in view of the fact that the language, under the preponderant cultural influence of Tibetan, was gradually phased into extinction and remained in use only for ceremonial and ornamental purposes after it had ceased to function as a living language. A glaring feature which highlights the artificiality of this type of Zhangzhung is the lack of verb forms in the *mDzod-phug*, which is the only lengthy bilingual Zhangzhung text. The explanation may be that it is easier to reconstitute a half-forgotten language without than with the verbs. A pivotal question which must be resolved by future research is whether the language in the three medical scrolls and the tongue reflected in Bon-po ritual texts are, in fact, the same language. Although Shafer and Haarh accepted Thomas' identification of the language in the scrolls as Zhangzhung, and although this view has come to lead a robust life of its own, there is no guarantee that this identification was, in fact correct. For example, Thomas himself had originally speculated that the language in the manuscripts might represent an old form of Lepcha. There are significant discrepancies in vocabulary between the Zhangzhung of the *mDzod-phug* and the language of the medical scrolls. Therefore, the question remains whether the language in the scrolls is really Zhangzhung and what the precise relationship is between this language and the language fragmentarily reflected in Bonpo ritual texts.

Helmut Hoffmann (1967) concurred with Erik Haarh about the genetic affinity of Zhangzhung and proposed further specific comparisons with Tibeto-Burman languages of Almora, Nepal and the eastern Himalayas. Later, Hoffman (1972) proposed some etymologies of Zhangzhung words on the basis of the additional materials published by the Bonpo foundation in New Delhi in 1966. Hoffmann's etymologies suggested a close affinity between Zhangzhung and the Bunan language of Gahri. A very different idea of the affinity of the Zhangzhung language has been propounded by Siegbert Hummel (1974, 1976). On the basis of the assumption that the ancient Tibetan tribes originated in the northeast and that Zhangzhung is a remnant of one of these ancient tribes, Hummel believed that there were ethnological grounds for looking for linguistic parallels with Zhangzhung not in the languages of the western Himalayas, but in Qiāngic languages such as Tangut. Although the linguistic arguments for this idea are tenuous, Hummel has compared Zhangzhung material with Tangut and Qiāngic languages and even claims that there is evidence for a Proto-Altaic substrate in Zhangzhung (1986, 1995). Snellgrove likewise believes that the Zhangzhung originated from northeastern Tibet.

Like Hummel and Snellgrove, I believe that the linguistic ancestors of the Zhangzhung and, for that matter, of the Tibetans too originated in the northeast. Unlike Hummel and Snellgrove, however, I believe this to be irrelevant to the Zhangzhung question because we are dealing with two very different time depths (van Driem 1998). In my handbook of Himalayan peoples and languages, of which this article is a modified excerpt, I argue that the linguistic ancestors of Western Himalayan groups such as Zhangzhung, Bunan, Manchad and Kinnauri reached the western Himalayas and the western portion of the Tibetan plateau at a very early date, probably at the time of the Indian Northern or Kashmir Neolithic in the middle of the third millennium BC. For this theory linguistic evidence holds primacy above archaeological interpretation, as indeed it must. On the basis of the linguistic evidence adduced to date, the arguments for Zhangzhung, the lost tongue of western

Tibet, being most closely related to the group of languages which Shafer called Western Himalayish (perhaps minus Thangmi and Barām however) outweigh those adduced for a Qiāngic affinity. The next obvious candidates for closely related groups would be Ghale and the Tamangic languages, not least because of the historical and cultural ties between western Tibet and the Kālī Gaṇḍakī Valley, but also because Ghale and Tamangic, like Zhangzhung, show close affinity with Bodish.

Recently, the Tibetan scholar rNam-rgyal Nyi-ma Brag-dkar, a native of the Chumbi Valley presently residing at Königswinter, compiled a new Zhangzhung dictionary on the basis of all the Zhangzhung items which he was able to cull from a corpus of some 420 Tibetan liturgical texts, mainly from the bKa'-'gyur and the bsTan-'gyur. In 1998 he kindly showed me the fruits of his Zhangzhung lexicography in Leiden before handing over the material to Japanese scholars who had sponsored his research. rNam-rgyal Nyi-ma Brag-dkar's material promises to shed much light on Zhangzhung and its genetic position within the Tibeto-Burman family. Since these data have not yet become generally available, it is safe to say that the empirical basis for entertaining the hypothesis that Zhangzhung together with languages like Bunan, Manchad, Rangkas and Kinnauri constitute a subgroup within Tibeto-Burman is scanty. In addition to shared ubiquitous Tibeto-Burman vocabulary, the evidence hinges about words which might serve as lexical tracers, i.e. suspected isoglosses such as Zhangzhung 'ag 'mouth', tig 'one', ting 'water', and hrang 'horse'.

Here it is instructive to recall that the empirical basis for the proposed linguistic relationship between Thangmi and Barām the language which Hodgson called 'Bhrámú' was tenuous indeed. Even more tenuous was Shafer's classification of Thangmi and Barām together as a separate 'Eastern Branch' within West Himalayish, which in fact made both languages rather close relatives of Zhangzhung. The latter classification was explicitly tentative, and Shafer himself stressed that he did not have much to go on. In fact, it was demonstrated by Arno Loeffen in 1995 that the empirical basis for grouping Thangmi and Barām together, as Sten Konow and Robert Shafer did, could only have been based on just three lexical isoglosses, since all the other recorded forms merely represented ubiquitous Tibeto-Burman roots showing no specific phonological innovations. Never the less, on the basis of the recent and ongoing investigation of the Thangmi language by Mark Turin and my own studies on Barām, the original hypothesis of a special relationship between the two languages, even though this was essentially only a hunch based on just three curious shared lexical items, has now been borne out by numerous other specific lexical and morphological correspondences. In fact, it now appears that Barām, Thangmi and Newar together constitute a subgroup within Tibeto-Burman with very close affinity to Kiranti. This is the essence of the idea that has gained considerable publicity and in some quarters even notoriety under the

name of the Mahākirāntī hypothesis.

Resistance to the Mahākirāntī hypothesis by Newar scholars is inherently suspect, however, because the unwillingness of the Newars, with their elaborate ritual traditions, old literary tradition and advanced material culture, to be associated with the lowly Barām and Thangmi is comparable to the popular unwillingness of Dutchmen to be associated with Germans or, more precisely, their insistence on dissociating themselves from Germans. The Dutch sense of distinctness is certainly justified on historical and cultural grounds, but the intimate linguistic relationship between German and Dutch is of greater antiquity than the developments that gave rise to the distinct cultures and national identities of these two neighbouring Teutonic societies. Although their cultural distinctness significantly antedates the pivotal social and cultural developments, studied by the German sociologist Norbert Elias (1989), which caused even further cultural divergence between the two language communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the two language communities are linguistically and even culturally closer than many would be prepared to concede. Similarly, the intimate linguistic relationship between the para-Kiranti languages Thangmi, Barām and Newar are taken by linguists to antedate by a large margin the rise of the great Newar urban civilisation in the Kathmandu Valley, let alone the much later emergence in the eighteenth century of the political entity of the Kingdom of Nepal.

The relevance of these reflections for Zhangzhung is that, although the empirical basis for grouping Zhangzhung together with Bunan, Manchad, Rangkas and Kinnauri may very well be scanty and currently based only on a dozen lexical isoglosses, the hunch may none the less be correct and be borne out by future investigations. The hypothesis may be corroborated by additional lexical material such as that collated by rNam-rgyal Nyi-ma Brag-dkar and by the investigations of field researchers in the western Himalayas such as Suhnū Rām Sharmā.

Of far greater importance to the historical and comparative study of the Zhangzhung language, however, than just a dozen lexical isoglosses would be the discovery of shared phonological innovations and an understanding of the grammatical evidence, particularly the morphological features of the language. The prospects of finding such evidence and of enhancing our understanding of the Zhangzhung language are presently very good because Takeuchi Tsugohito and Nagano Yasuhiko, assisted by the statistical mathematician Ueda Sumie, have undertaken to submit the three Zhangzhung scrolls from Dūnhuáng to a rigorous analysis. However, even with the aid of glossaries such as that compiled by Nyi-ma Grags-pa and most recently by rNam-rgyal Nyi-ma Brag-dkar, the analysis and translation of the three texts is a daunting task. Even a correct and faithful reading of the penmanship presents difficulties. Moreover, it is evident that the scribes who authored these medical texts used the Tibetan script to represent polysyllabic words and words containing clusters alien to Tibetan, e.g. rhyelsa, rhyelse, ryung, mkyus,

rhyasang, khlangga. Analytical study of the scrolls will hopefully enable an informed assessment of the nature of the relationship between the language of the scrolls and the Zhangzhung preserved in Bonpo ritual texts and shed greater light on the precise linguistic affinity of the attested forms of speech.

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Preliminary Analysis of the Old Zhangzhung Language and Manuscripts

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1.   Purpose

The purpose of our research project is linguistic analysis of the oldest written records of possibly the Zhangzhung language (or Old Zhangzhung): to decipher the texts and reconstruct the linguistic forms behind them in comparison with the Zhangzhung language corpus found in the later texts (or New Zhangzhung) and other Tibeto-Burman languages. This preliminary report presents our working methods and some observations obtained during the early stage of our research.

2.   Sources

Before going into Old Zhangzhung texts, let us briefly look at the other materials regarding Zhangzhung.

A.   Modern Tibeto-Burman languages

a) Zhangzhung is considered to be a dead language, in other words, no direct descendant seems to exist. However, there may be languages closely affiliated with Zhangzhung among the modern Tibeto-Burman languages, especially of Western Himalayan branch, such as Kanauri, Rangpa, Bunan, and Byangsi. Comparison with Eastern Tibeto-Burman languages, such as Gyarong, Minyag, and Newari, should be considered as well. For more details, see the articles of Nishi and Nagano, Matisoff, and van Driem in the present volume.

b) Several Tibetan dialects along the Tibet-Nepal border contain many Zhangzhung loan-words according to Bstan-'dzin gnam-dag (in personal communication). Although they have not been systematically studied yet, they will certainly comprise important data.

B.   New Zhangzhung

In the 1960s, Tibetan Bonpo scholars published a Tibetan-Zhangzhung dictionary,[1] and a bilingual text Mdzod-phug.[2] The former is studied and reproduced in Haarh (1968). A more extensive computer database was compiled by