

Arms and Armour in Ancient and Medieval Tibetan Literature

A Lexicographical Approach

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Abstract This article presents Tibetan terms and expressions for arms and armour originating in Tibetan sources as per research conducted for the *Wörterbuch der Tibetischen Schriftsprache*, a dictionary database that includes sources ranging from the eight to the nineteenth centuries. This survey shows that Tibetan literature bears testimony to the existence of a broad variety of arms and armour in Tibet, which are mentioned in various contexts: Bon or Buddhist sources, historiographical or mythical accounts. By tracing these terms' etymological origins and focusing on the actual use of weapons, we may gain a clearer understanding of the origin, use, and value of arms and armour in Tibetan culture.

Keywords Armour. Bow and arrow. Tibetan dictionary. Helmet. Iron hook. Lasso. Pike. Slingshot. Spear. Sword. Tibetan history. Weapon.

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To those who fought the enemy by clapping their hands.

*gri ring min thung min bang bkang /
dgra khang 'og slebs dus skyogs g.yugs //*
Although the storeroom is full of all sorts of swords,
when the enemy appears in one's cellar, it is the
kitchen ladle one throws.¹

1 Introduction

While the Western imagination ascribes to the Tibetans a peaceful life, lived in harmony and close communion with nature, looking back at Tibet's history, it becomes apparent that, for centuries, like every other civilisation, Tibetans fought in many armed conflicts both within and beyond Tibet's boundaries. Naturally, the weapons they used changed over time. In part, it is possible to trace their development through the *Old Tibetan Annals*² and other historiographical accounts that mention weapons in their narratives. Early inscriptions and other old Tibetan documents, such as the *Pelliot Tibétain* (PT) collection, as well as later sources, reveal details about the use of weapons in Tibet, during either internal conflicts or wars with neighbouring peoples, such as the Chinese, Mongolians, and Western Turkic (Dru gu) tribes.

Stories about fighting and killing or about armed or military conflicts reveal a rich terminology related to weapons and armour, and also uncover the coexistence of both autochthonous weapons and equipment adopted from abroad. While these stories might correct our image of everyday life in Tibet, they also illustrate the use of weapons within both Bon and Buddhist ritual practices. In doing so, they open up questions about violence within Tibetan societies and communities, where weapons were used as tools for wars of conquest, conversion to Buddhism, and single combat. What might be stressed with regard to the Buddhist context is that monks also used weapons as tools

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1 Lhamo Pemba, *Tibetan Proverbs*, 36; literally: 'it is filled with swords neither long nor short'. Here, I wish to thank Alice Travers and Federica Venturi for their thorough reading of and commenting on several versions of this article. Further thanks to John Bray, Singapore, and the two peer-reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

2 The *Pelliot Tibétain* (PT) documents, such as the *Old Tibetan Annals*, present written knowledge about the Old Tibetan Kingdom. The scholars A. Stein and P. Pelliot discovered them in the nineteenth century in the grottoes of Dunhuang that had been sealed in the eleventh century. Here, I refer to the edition of Spanien and Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*.

for protection within monasteries or even during combat with hostile monasteries. Commoners and monks used weapons during competitions and religious ceremonies, such as the New Year Festival.³ Monks and lay ritual practitioners also used them during their ritual practices, for example, to propitiate warrior gods or subdue demons, and weapons were the attribute of oracle priests and numerous deities.⁴

All these manifold uses in Tibetan Buddhist societies show that Tibetans fully integrated arms and armour entirely into their religious worldviews. Since to win a war was as important in Buddhist societies as elsewhere, soldiers, together with their weapons, were blessed and the government typically asked the State Oracle to predict a war's result. Generally, historical texts tend to discuss weapons in a concrete, realistic way. Other literary genres, mainly Buddhist texts and Bon sources such as Shenrap Miwo's biography *Ziji* (*Gzi brjid*, translated as 'The Glorious' or 'Confidence')⁵ repeatedly refer to weapons as instruments that are endowed with a negative connotation. Thus, they often symbolise impurity or, else serve as magical tools. Tibetan Buddhist texts, often translated from Sanskrit, also present the use of both imaginary and real weapons to metaphorically symbolise negative emotions, such as hatred and pride, and, at the same time, view them as tools for annihilating undesirable emotions.

Before investigating the written sources, I wish to briefly reflect on the definition of a weapon. Generally speaking, any common tool can serve as a weapon, whether it be a small kitchen knife, a hammer, or even a vase, which can be used to harm or even kill a person. This is exemplified also in Tibetan literature, which abounds with references to unconventional weapons. For instance, in the *Gesar Epic*,⁶ various groups defeat the enemy using specific items or activities that, under different circumstances, would not be considered weapons: spiritual teachers fight or dispel the enemy with a conch

3 For the use of weapons by monks, see, for example, Khedrup, *Tibetan Fighting Monk*; Maurer, "Obstacles in the Path". For the use of weapons during festivities and rituals, see Richardson, *Ceremonies of the Lhasa Year*, for example, 56-9, 73; and for their exhibition in monasteries, see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 11-14.

4 See, for example, Heller, "Armor and Weapons", 35-41. Numerous drawings of all kinds of weapons are provided by Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 267-310.

5 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*. The title *Ziji* refers to the biography of Shenrap Miwo (Gshen rab mi bo), the mythical founder of Bon religion. The oeuvre consists of 12 volumes, of which Snellgrove translated excerpts in his *Nine Ways of Bon*.

6 The epic of King Gesar of Ling, the mythical ancestor-hero of the Khampas, is well-known in Central and East Asia, particularly Mongolia and Tibet. It may have originated in the eleventh or twelfth centuries' nomadic communities of Inner Asia or north-eastern Tibet. Over time, the oral transmission became embedded in the Buddhist context, turning King Gesar into a Buddhist hero. For further information, see, for example, Samuel, "Gesar Epic" and FitzHerbert, "Tibetan Buddhism and the Gesar Epic".

shell, heroes or warriors use arrows, and women clap their hands.⁷

This article, however, will ignore common tools used as weapons, but instead focuses particularly on actual weapons employed in combat and warfare. As we shall see, the Tibetan texts refer to three kinds of weapon: the so-called protective weapon or armour, the offensive weapon, and the long-range weapon.⁸ Armour, as a tool of defence, protects the body of the warrior, in the cavalry, for example, including the horses. By contrast, so-called offensive weapons, such as swords and daggers, are tools for launching or warding off attacks. Long-range weapons such as slings, bows and arrows and firearms are basically assault weapons. The latter two types of instrument are designed for attacking other sentient beings, thereby diminishing or removing his or her capability regarding defence and attack. They are tools for harming a person's physical integrity or killing them.⁹

By virtue of their focus on armed and military conflicts, most of the stories that constitute the sources for this article concern men rather than women. The above example, in which women dispersed their enemies by clapping their hands, could be seen as a demonstration of the general lack of women's involvement with weapons and in warfare situations in traditional Tibet.¹⁰ In ancient societies, weapons and armour became symbols of chiefs and warlords (*dmag dpon*). A person's ability to lead and preside over a group and wage war qualified him (and, in extremely rare cases, her) to be the principal leader and king, as well as a warlord. Commonly, specific attributes, such as special clothing, headgear, or other identifiers, marked out these leaders. Among these markers were weapons and armour that were not only part of the equipment of men but also part of the attributes of Bon and Buddhist priests. In addition, they came to be related to kingship, and were regarded as symbols of chiefs, rulers, kings, and gods. In India and Tibet, as in most cultures, being a war-

⁷ Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 258, ll. 35-6: *pha bla ma brgya yis dung ded dang / stag shar brgya yis mda' ded dang / sman bu mo brgya yis thal ded yod //*.

⁸ This threefold distinction of weapons is drawn from Boeheim, *Waffenkunde*. This standard reference on the study of weaponry in its historical development from the beginning of the Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century in Europe traces the origins of weapons and etymology of the terms by which they are known, and also describes their shape in great detail, often pointing to their non-European origins.

⁹ When I reflected on the question of weapons, I came across the definition presented in the German Weapon Control Law. Although it is new, it appears generally applicable; see https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/waffg_2002/BJNR397010002.html.

¹⁰ In Tibetan society, warfare and combat were possibly, as in most traditional societies, the province of males. But more recent studies on women's active involvement in armed combat draw another picture since "there is, however, a large body of evidence pointing to females bearing arms". Hereby, "the idea of women as warriors has been denied, overlooked, dismissed as a figment of the imagination, or reinterpreted as an instrument to keep society (read women) in line"; see Jones-Bley, "Warrior Women", 35-7.

lord became for a time a necessary attribute of kingship; it was one of the seven precious attributes of royal rule.¹¹

By sampling a set of Tibet's literary sources referring to weapons, this survey makes it possible to sort through the various names for weapons and divide them into categories. These categories depend on the type of weapon, and it is hoped that future researchers might be able to classify them in more detail according to historical period or geographical area. An analysis of the textual context, such as the verbal structure or the descriptive adjectives further detailing the weapon's name, makes it possible to identify whether it might have been used in both military and non-military situations as well as identifying the material of which it was made. Based on the provided information, this preliminary investigation allows us to determine broadly which weapons withstood the test of time, i.e. remained consistently in use; as well as which ones fell out of favour at a certain point; as well as which new ones arrived during the time period analysed (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), on which more will be said below. In the same way, this analysis also provides initial insights into which weapons were favoured in one area rather than another, or by a certain group rather than another. That is to say, the survey gives us a clearer understanding of the use and social value of weapons within traditional Tibetan societies by providing a list (although non-comprehensive) of the major weapons used in Tibet from the imperial period onward.

This research is primarily based on the wealth of material collected in the *Wörterbuch der Tibetischen Schriftsprache* database, an ongoing project at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities.¹² The printed dictionary includes a text corpus starting from the early Tibetan inscriptions and documents originating in the eighth century up to the nineteenth century, the early Modern Age. Since the majority of the database sources are religious texts, which were often translated from Sanskrit, they depict the weapons' metaphoric use. Buddhist translated literature is only included if the quotes appear relevant to the understanding of a term or to complete the picture drawn in the autochthonous texts. Although the selection of sources applied in the dictionary indicates that this is by no means a general survey of the weapons used in Tibet, the autochthonous texts presented here still allow an insight into the weapons and armour's usage and associated terminology. The sources, such as the stone inscriptions (*rdo ring*) and other documents in Old Tibetan, preserve real-life stories about both internal fights and wars against the Chinese, the Western Tur-

¹¹ For a description of the Precious General as one of the seven treasures of kingship, see Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 163.

¹² For the history of the project, see Uebach, *Wörterbuch*, 1. *Lieferung*, IX-XIII, and Maurer, "Lexicography of the Tibetan Language", 129-30.

tic tribes (Dru gu), and others. They draw a picture of the weapons used in the Tibetan empire (seventh-ninth centuries). Later historiographical texts, such as Nelpa Paṇḍita's chronicle *The Flower Garland* (thirteenth century),¹³ *The Mirror of Royal Genealogies* (*Rgyal rabs gal ba'i me long*, fourteenth century), Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism* (sixteenth century), and some documents from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries testify whether or not a weapon was still in use several centuries later and what it was called. Other sources such as the *Gesar Epic* and Bon literature illustrate that weapons and armour were the tools of humans and gods, particularly warrior gods and demons threatening humans. The manifold terminology of weapons might originate from still unknown sources, such as the term *ya tsa*, that denotes a 'sword' in the Bon source *Ziji*, or *ka na ya*, another little understood term for 'sword' in Tsongkapa's (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa, 1357-1419) *Collected Works* (*Gsung 'bum*).

It should also be noted that since this article focuses on autochthonous sources and the actual use of weapons and armour, the material presented is not representative of the dictionary's sources in general. Most of the texts presented here stem from ancient and medieval sources of the eighth to the fourteenth centuries, such as Dunhuang manuscripts, the Bon source *Piercing Eye* (*Gzer mig*) and the historiographical sources *Flower Garland*, the fourteenth century historiographical text titled *Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies*, and Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism*. Sources dating into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as a poem by the Sixth Dalai Lama, a letter from the ruler Pholhané (Pho lha nas, 1689-1747), *Sources on the History of Bhutan*, and a document by the Karmapa, are relatively rare. Due to the development of the project in the seventies and the focus of Tibetan Studies during its initial stages, the database contains few later historical sources, such as the autobiographies of ministers and so on, hereby probably causing a skewed focus on traditional weapons. It includes, however, the dictionaries of Geshe Chōdrak (Dge bshes Chos kyi grags pa) and Dageyab (Brag g.yab Blo ldan shes rab), both written in the twentieth century, the *Clove Pavillion* (*Li shi'i gur khang*), and the Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionary *Mahāvīyutpatti* (eighth century).¹⁴ As a result, the Munich Dictionary presents the Tibetan vocabulary from a linguistic-historical and semantic aspect, as the transliterated quotations of the original texts, together with their translation into German, follow a chronological order.

¹³ The *Chronicle of Nelpa Paṇḍita* called *Flower Garland* is a historiographical account of the early history of Tibet, starting from mythical times up to the second propagation (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism.

¹⁴ For additional clarification, I searched specific weapon terminology in the *Mahāvīyutpatti* and the *Mongolian-English Dictionary* of Lessing which is not included in the database.

This diversity of Tibetan texts reveals the existence of a vast spectrum of weapons that were used in multiple ways. Regarding Tibetan weapons, the reader should keep in mind that frontiers have always been porous, thus often making it impossible to draw strict cultural delineations. In other words, most Tibetan weapons are not particularly 'Tibetan' and are in fact found in other cultures as well. Their shape and material were adjusted to the respective conditions, and as a result narrate stories of transitions.

This article focuses largely on real weapons, as they are of major interest regarding the study of military history. In order to offer a more thorough overview, it includes some references to magical and metaphorically-used weapons, particularly when the terms, phrases and verbal structures serve to provide a broader understanding of the relevant terminology and expressions related to weapons and armour. This article presents the project's autochthonous source material, which I searched for the various terms denoting weapons and armour. In order to attempt a chronological understanding of the diffusion of weapons in certain periods, it identifies the original sources that employ each term and, on the basis of the sources' dates, attempts to pinpoint in which time period Tibetans used a certain weapon or, *a minima* when the source is a literary one, used certain weapons' names.

Before presenting and examining the contexts of our database's terms for weapons in detail, I wish to point out that the terminology of weapons is a difficult matter in any language. Weapons 'travelled' and still 'travel' like people and words all over the globe, so their nomenclature is not entirely consistent from place to place. For example, the shape of swords shows great variety in every European country,¹⁵ and translations from Tibetan to English or German can further increase the problem. To give one example, the Tibetan term *mdung* is rendered as either *lance*, *spear* or *pike*, the pike being a stabbing weapon similar to the lance, or else, a long arrow (*mda' chen*).¹⁶ Strictly speaking, the use of a *lance* and *spear*, however, differs: the lance is applied by stabbing and the spear by throwing towards the target. The auxiliary verb that expresses the action with *mdung* is *rgyab*, a verb meaning simply 'to do' or, more specifically, 'to throw' and 'to hit'. Therefore, its use next to the noun *mdung* fails to clarify the type of action concerned.

In the texts preserved in the database, we encounter, for example, the long-range weapons lasso (*zhags pa*) and arrow (*mda'*). They

¹⁵ For some of the multiple shapes of swords, spears and lances, see Bennett et al., *Fighting Techniques*, 44, 129.

¹⁶ In our database sources, *mda' chen* occurs in literature translated from Sanskrit; see, for example, Zimmermann, *Subhāṣitaratna*, 226-7; Schneider, *Lobpreis der Vorzüglichkeit*, 86, ll. 31-2: *byams pa'i mda' chen pos khro ba'i me nye bar zhi ba yin te //* (The great arrow of love extinguished the fire of anger).

both belong to the group of objects that are considered to be among the earliest weapons. They served primarily as tools for hunting, while nomads and herders also used the lasso to catch animals. Early sources, such as those in the *Pelliot Tibétain* collection, often mention the arrow without the bow (*gzhu*) whereas, in later sources, *mda'* and *gzhu* usually create a union. Generally, however, in the Tibetan cultural areas, the arrow appears to belong to a bow, as darts or arrows were apparently not blown (unlike in the English *blowgun*, a tube with a blowdart).¹⁷ This is also valid for the English *arrow*, that originates from the Old English term *ar(e)we*, related to the Gothic language. *Arhwazna*, *arrow*, and the Latin *arcus* are terms for the bow. If we translate Tibetan *mda'* into German, it turns however into *Pfeil*, a term originating from the Latin *pilum*. The term *pilum*, however, denotes *Speer* and *Spieß*, tools unconnected with a bow. Its equivalents in English include *pike*, *spear* or *lance*.¹⁸

These brief etymological reflections demonstrate the difficulty of designating weapons in general, and particularly when dealing with Tibetan texts. Like any other object of material culture, weapons circulate across territories and once they have reached new places, the possibility to reproduce them also depends on the natural resources available in a particular area. Hence, the lack or abundance of material and/or skill of a craftsman might have changed their shape but not their name. On the other hand, weapons' functional change and use – rather than their modification – might have resulted in another name. Therefore, the analysis of written sources often creates an underlying uncertainty about the full meaning of a word. For example, it remains uncertain that Tibetan *mda'*, everywhere and at all times, denoted an *arrow* shot from a bow and never a *spear* or *lance*, a long and strong arrow, so to speak, that a warrior threw using his own physical strength.

In the following sections, I will present the various contexts in which weapons' terminology is employed in the Tibetan texts collected in the database of the Munich Dictionary. Here I will discuss the terms with their translations, based on various existing dictionaries, as well as on existing translations of the relevant excerpts and my own translations or, in order to avoid an accumulation of quotes, by paraphrasing the respective context. In each paragraph, I will start with the oldest sources available, such as one of the documents in

17 I wish to thank the scholar Jampa Panglung, former staff member of the Munich Dictionary, for discussing these and the following references with me, in Munich in November 2019. As we shall see, there may be exceptions and the so-called *mda' ste'u ka*, the arrow with a hatchet, might not belong to a bow.

18 For definitions of 'pike', 'spear' and 'lance', see the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) (<https://www.oed.com>).

the *Pelliot Tibétain* collection or *Tibetan Texts concerning Khotan*.¹⁹ In particular, when the terms are ambiguous and have several meanings, I will refer to dictionaries as well.

It is hoped that the terminological and chronological order of the sections may shed some light on the use and shape of certain weapons, as well as on their development and the possible terminological changes that occurred over time. The reader should keep in mind that this article presents preliminary results that might serve as a basis for further investigation. The illustrative sections start with the general terminology for weapons, then proceed to focusing on single weapons. It is difficult to define clear criteria for subdividing the weapon types since individual categories are often interconnected. Nevertheless, I attempted to apply criteria, such as the weapon's range, hunting weapons, and the application of iron in their manufacture, fully aware that these categories are not mutually exclusive.

The first section on individual weapons starts with the lasso and sling, then bow and arrow, long-range weapons that were also used for hunting all over the world.²⁰ Although, in particular, the manufacture of bows and arrows required certain skills, and the arrows used in war commonly had iron heads, and their manufacture was less laborious than the crafting of pole arms, such as lances, pikes, and swords. In the second group, I examine weapons that are functionally related to arrows, such as the lance, pike, and spear. Since these thrusting weapons could also be thrown at targets, they have a greater range than swords. In the third section, I review the terminology for sword-shaped instruments, the offensive weapons in close combat which were widespread in a great variety of forms. Like bows and arrows, they were used in warfare in Tibet until the twentieth century. The fourth section deals with other miscellaneous weapons, such as the iron hook, hammer, and axe. As far as can be assessed from the sources, these were rarely used. The final section outlines the terms used to refer to other protective equipment, such as helmets and armour.²¹

19 R.E. Emmerick edited and translated texts concerning the history of this ancient Buddhist kingdom on the Silk Road. His work comprises two texts: *The Prophecy of Khotan* (*Li yul lung bstan pa*) and the *Religious History of Khotan* (*Li yul chos kyi lung bstan pa*).

20 For long range weapons, see Boeheim, *Waffenkunde*, 385-430.

21 For the horses' equipment and armour, see La Rocca, "Recent Acquisitions... Part 1", 5-9.

2 General Terms for Weapon

2.1 *mtshon*, *mtshon cha* and *mtshon ka*

The generic Tibetan term for weapon or arms in general is *mtshon*, with its compounds *mtshon cha*, *mtshon ka* and *mtshon kha*. The terms *mtshon* and *mtshon cha* appear in all kinds of literature throughout the centuries, including the eighth century Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary *Mahāvvyutpatti*, whereas *mtshon ka* and *mtshon kha* are rare.²² The semantic content and use of *mtshon* in literature provide the basis for this analysis, which seeks to present examples of the term *mtshon* in all its variations given above. The examples that include verbs are intended to clarify the different meanings of *mtshon*, and possibly elucidate its different shapes and functions.

To begin with, I present a simple yet distinct definition of the term *mtshon* in one of the basic dictionaries, the *Tibetan-English Dictionary* by Jäschke. He explains *mtshon* and *mtshon cha* as “any pointed or cutting instrument”, and the expression “the four kinds of weapon” (*mtshon cha rnam pa bzhi*) as including four specific weapons, “sword, spear, dart, arrow”.²³ As we shall see, his definition as “a pointed or cutting instrument” matches predominantly the term’s use in Tibetan literature. Hence, the term *mtshon* refers to all varieties of weapons and, from the seventeenth century onward, it is also denotes firearms (*me mda’*, literally ‘fire arrow’). Several sources classify *mtshon* into three types of the cutting instrument knife (*gri*);²⁴ others regard it as a bamboo stick.²⁵

²² See Ishihama and Fukuda, *Mahāvvyutpatti*, 290, no. 6081 *mtshon rtse gcig* “one-pointed weapon”, and no. 6082 gives the synonyms for weapons: *mtshon cha’am lag cha’am mtshon*.

²³ See Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 457, s.v. “*mtshon*”. This raises the question of which tool Jäschke denotes as a “dart”. Did he mean a *plumbata*, some kind of javelin or throwing spear? The term *dart* originates from the Arabic *djerid*, a term also denoting a pike; see Boenheim, *Waffenkunde*, 307.

²⁴ For further details, see § 3.6.1.

²⁵ The *Suvarṇabhāsottamsūtra* or *Golden Light Sūtra* is a Mahāyānasūtra addressing a vast range of topics ranging from the Buddhas’ previous lives to the teaching on dependent arising (*rten ’brel*) and instructions regarding proper governance. It refers, for example, to the ethical duties of those who seek enlightenment, such as compassion. In the story of the hungry tigress, the Buddha shows his complete compassion by offering his body to feed the tigress. He cuts his throat with an old bamboo stick; see Nobel, *Das Goldglanz-Sūtra*, 160, ll. 1-6: *mtshon cha btsal na / gang nas kyang mtshon cha ma rnyed nas / des ’od ma’i yal ga lo brgya lon pa sra ba zhiḡ blangs te mgul pa bcad nas stag mo’i mdun du ’gyel to //* (When he searched for a weapon but could not find one anywhere, he took a more than a 100 year-old bamboo stick, cut his throat and fell to the ground in front of the tigress).

The oldest source for *mtshon* in the material collected in the *Wörterbuch der Tibetischen Schriftsprache* database is in the *Pelliot Tibétain* collection, in the document with the shelf-mark PT 1287. Here, someone uses the weapon to punish delinquents who participated in a conspiracy. The context leads to the interpretation of its meaning as a ‘sword’.

You will never punish others who did not participate in the conspiracy.

Like pigs, you will cleave [the delinquents] with a sword.²⁶

The other early text, dating to the year 865 CE, is the *Religious History of Khotan* where we encounter monks involved in an armed quarrel. Here, members of the clergy fight with weapons in an attempt to kill each other. The passage relates how the monkhood divided into two warring camps. The phrasing here, “fight with weapons” (*mtshon kar bkye*), fails to reveal the actual type of weapons used: they might be either swords or spears.²⁷

A famous story in Tibetan literature tells of the murder of King Langdarma (Glang dar ma) that is commonly dated to 842 CE. Its version in the thirteenth century source, Nelpa Paṇḍita’s chronicle named *Flower Garland*, reports – whether accurately or not – how the monk, Pelgyi Dorje (Dpal gyi rdo rje), prepared his equipment, that is horse, garment and weapon for the act. The text identifies the weapon as a spear (*mdung*), with which Pelgyi Dorje stabs (*rgyab*) the king through the heart.²⁸

As a cutting instrument, *mtshon* can also be a tool for slaughtering oxen, presumably a large knife or a sword:

When she served them *chang*, and they had nothing to eat, she pointed to the oxen. “Slaughter [the oxen]!” They replied: “We have no weapon”.²⁹

26 Spanien and Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 567, ll. 282-3: *gzhan blo la ma gthogs pa rnams la / bkyon re / phag dang mtshungs mtshon gyis myi dgar re //*

27 Emmerick, *Khotan*, 86, ll. 70-1: *dge ’dun yang ’phral la sde gnyis su chad de / nang ’khrugs nas mtshon kar bkye ste / dgung ma sangs par / dge ’dun gcig kyang ma lus ste / nang par dkon mchog gsum gyi mying shes shing / ’don pa myed par gyur nas //*

28 Uebach, *Nelpa Paṇḍita*, 120-1, and fol. 14b ll. 6-7: *rta dang ber dang mtshon cha la sogs pa rgyal po gsoḍ pa’i thabs bshams te [...] snying khar mdung rgyab nas bkrongso //*. Nelpa Paṇḍita remarks that, according to other authors, the king was killed by an arrow shot in the forehead.

29 The passage occurs in the *Vinayavastu* (*’Dul ba gzhi*) of the Kanjur; see *Sde dge*, vol. 1, *’Dul ba, ga*, 83b ll. 3-4: *de rnams la chang blud na ’dzar ba med nas des glang zhiḡ bstan de ’di sod cig / de rnams kyis smras pa / mtshon cha med do //*

The vast majority of the references to *mtshon* in the dictionary's database come from non-military contexts. Hence, the entries show that weapons also serve many other purposes. On the one hand, they can occur as the requisites of gods, deities, and ritual specialists be they Bon or Buddhist. During a meditation on the wrathful Bon goddess Tsochok Khagying (Gtso mchog mkha' 'gying, literally the 'Highest Leader Posing in the Sky'), for example, the adept should visualise her with charnel ground ornaments, holding a sharp weapon in her hand (*mtshon phyag na bsnams*).³⁰ Weapons characterise the Bon priests known as 'the armed Durshen' (*dur gshen mtshon cha can*) since they carry weapons as ritual items. They use them to eliminate hindrances, such as the so-called *bgegs* demons which cause problems for the living, the *chungisi* (*chung gi sri*) demons who attack children, the evil spirits (*dre*) on earth, and they use them to dig graves for the dead.³¹ Moreover, weapons such as knives and knife blades (*mtshon dang gri kha*) are singled out as instruments for *gto* rituals.³²

On the other hand, the term *mtshon* appears also in a figurative sense. In his chronicle *Flower Garland*, Nelpa Paṇḍita, for example, uses *mtshon* as an abstract concept. He refers with this term to one of the aspects characterising particular unfavourable periods of time that cause suffering for all living beings on the planet. During these times, when the Three Jewels were unknown, famine, diseases and *mtshon*, that is to say conflict or war, spread across the country.³³ This or similar three-item lists are a reoccurring trope throughout Tibetan literature. It appears, for example, in Bon ritual texts, such as *The Propitiation of the Queen of the World on the Black Female Mule* (*Srid rgyal drel nag ma'i bskang ba*), for short *Sigyel* (*Srid rgyal*), where disease, famine and war are the instruments for annihilating both the enemy and the entire country. Moreover, the term *mtshon* occurs as a metaphor for epidemics capable of destroying one's enemy.³⁴

³⁰ *Srid rgyal*, 2a ll. 3-4. This Bon source is a ritual text for propitiating demons.

³¹ This historiographical account of Tibet's history distinguishes by their specific attributes four types of Bon of Cause (*rgyu'i bon po*) and explains their activities. See Sorensen, *Royal Genealogies*, 145; Kuznetsov, *Gsal ba'i me long*, 49, ll. 7-10: *dur gshen mtshon cha can gyis / gson gyi bgegs sel / gshin gyi dur 'debs / chung gi sri gnun [...] sa'i 'dre brdung ba yin no //*. On the Bon of Cause, see also Namkhai Norbu, *Drung, Deu and Bön*, 45-6.

³² See, for example, Lin, *Systematisierung von gTo-Ritualen*, 169-70, 175-6. The edition and translation of Lin contains Mi pham's (1846-1912) collection of *Gto* rituals for all kinds of purposes related to daily life, such as avoiding disaster and disease, propitiating demons, and so on.

³³ Uebach, *Nelpa Paṇḍita*, 160-1, fol. 25b2: *dkon mchog gsum gyi sgra mi grag par 'gyur te / de'i stobs kyis mu ge dang / nad dang / mtshon gyi bskal pa bar ma byung nas / sems can thams cad shin tu nyon myons par byed do //*

³⁴ *Srid rgyal*, 11b l. 2: *nad mug mtshon gyi dgra yul cham la phob*; also 12a l. 4: *dal yam mtshon gyi dgra bo'i mtha' rgyud thul //*

In conclusion, one can state that from the earliest sources *mtshon* denotes a concrete object, either an object used in military confrontation or a ritual object. It is a tool to kill the enemy, whereby Bon and Buddhist religion legitimates its use as a tool to annihilate evil threats commonly associated with demons. In its abstract meaning, it refers to far-reaching events capable of harming or killing many people such as wars and epidemics.

2.2 *go cha, go mtshon and dgra cha(s)*

Further general terms for weapons are the compounds *go cha*, *go mtshon* and *dgra cha* or *dgra chas*. Occasionally, the monosyllabic term *go* is used alone. The etymology of the syllable *go* in the context of weapons is unclear. The dictionary of Geshe Chödrak defines *go cha* as follows: “iron garment that protects the body” (*lus skyob lcags gos*), and armour (*go khrab*). Daggyab explains it as “military equipment such as armour, helmet and so on” (*khrab rmog sogs. g.yul gyi cha lugs*).³⁵ Early dictionaries of the Tibetan language such as Schmidt, list *go* or *go cha* as “harness, shell, weapon and armour”.³⁶ Jäschke defines *go cha* as “armour” and the compound *go khang* as “arsenal”.³⁷ Both terms date back to the beginning of Tibet’s literacy, as the eighth century Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary *Mahāvvyutpatti* already uses them. In its section on weapons titled *go mtshon gi ming la*, the term *go cha* is defined as *varma*, “envelope, defensive armour, a coat of mail” or *saṃnāhaḥ*, a term which can also denote “accoutrements, armour, mail, a coat of mail (made of iron or quilted cotton)”.³⁸

In the database sources, the term *go* with its compounds occurs rarely. As a primary oral tradition, the “Conquest of the Fort of Sumpa”, a section of the *Gesar Epic*, is difficult to date but we can assume that the text preserves portions of ancient linguistic material. It uses the term *go* in the phrase *mi rta go*; that is “men, horses, and weapons”. These three were the relevant components that should be considered before a country plunged into a war.³⁹

³⁵ Geshe Chödrak, *Brda dag*, 118; Daggyab, *Tshig mdzod*, 102.

³⁶ Schmidt, *Wörterbuch*, 71: “Harnisch, Panzer, Bewaffnung, Rüstung”.

³⁷ Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 70-1 does not refer to the monosyllabic term *go* as military equipment (this is striking and worthy of further study, considering how many words related to weapons are compounds of *go*).

³⁸ See Ishihama, Fukuda, *Mahāvvyutpatti*, 288, nos. 6050 and 6051; see also Sonam Angdu, *Lishi*, 4, ll. 10-11, who gives *ya lad* as a synonym for *go cha*; Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabsal, *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 231, translates *ya lad* as “a shield, armour”. For the Sanskrit, see Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English*, 926 and 1146.

³⁹ Kaschewsky and Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 56b ll. 1-3: *mi rta go rtsis kher 'don pher nges byas nas / lung[s] rgod kyi chu bo 'bab 'dra //*.

The Bon text *Ziji* that is primary assigned to the oral transmissions as well,⁴⁰ uses the compounds *go mtshon* and *go cha*. It distinguishes nine types of weapons for the warrior gods (*sgra bla'i go mtshon sna dgu*) and nine types of armour for the *asura* (*lha min gyi go cha ling dgu*).⁴¹ For completeness of content, I wish to refer to the translated text, the “Rosary of [the Buddha’s] Life Stories” (*Skyes pa rabs kyi phreng ba*, Sanskrit *Jātatakamālā*), where *go cha* apparently also denotes a tool for protection, such as armour or a coat of mail. Here, the mind is the protection, which the arrow of sorrow cannot pierce.⁴²

The compound *dgra cha* means a ‘weapon’ and may be literally translated as a ‘tool against the enemy’. In the *Mahāvīyutpatti*, it prevents the one holding it from receiving Buddhist teachings:

To someone who holds a weapon in his hand, we will not teach the dharma.⁴³

The dictionaries of Geshe Chödrak (*Dge bshes Chos kyi grags pa*) and Dagyal (*Brag g.yab Blo ldan shes rab*) explain *dgra cha* as “arrow and bow” (*mda' gzhū*). However, they explain the term *dgra chas* differently. Geshe Chödrak describes the term as “tool against the enemy” (*dgra bo'i yo byad*) and Dagyal simply as “a type of weapon” (*mtshon cha'i rigs*).⁴⁴ In his chronicle *Flower Garland*, Nelpa Paṇḍita applies *dgra chas* to a weapon, which he considers a tool that is commonly carried on a journey (*byes na dgra chas tor* [recte *thogs*]).⁴⁵ The term *dgra chas* remained in use for many centuries, as the final reference to it in the database dates to the eighteenth century. In 1727, the ruler of Tibet, Miwang Pholhané or Pholhawa (*Mi dbang Pho lha ba*), mentions *dgra cha* in an epistle to the Chinese Emperor, where he uses it as a generic term for tools needed in military conflicts, such

40 This twelve-volume text, which contains the Bonpo Canon including a biography of Shenrap Miwo, the mythical founder of the Bon religion, is said to have been written in the fourteenth century; see Karmay, “History and Doctrines of Bon”, 110. For further information, see also the article of Kvaerne, “Canon of the Tibetan Bonpo”.

41 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 60 and vol. 1, 485.

42 Hahn and Klaus, *Mrgajātaka*, 58, ll. 9-12: *shin tu yangs pa'i snying rje'i go chas bcings par 'byung ba ni / bdag gi sems 'di sdug bsngal mda' yis phigs par mi 'gyur ro //* (My mind is armed with the shield of great compassion. The arrow of sorrow will not pierce it). For further details, see the chapter on armour. The Tibetan *go cha* translates here the Sanskrit *kavaca*, which is, according to Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English*, 262: “armour, cuirass, coat of mail”.

43 Ishihama and Fukuda, *Mahāvīyutpatti*, 402, no. 8562: *lag na dgra cha* [varia lectio] *thogs pa la chos mi bshad*, for Sanskrit *nāyudhapāṇāye dharmam deśayiṣyāmah*.

44 Dagyal, *Tshing mdzod*, 129; Geshe Chödrak, *Brda dag*, 151.

45 Uebach, *Nelpa Paṇḍita*, 68-9, fol. 4b l. 2: *yul na khral ka rtsi* [recte *lci*] / *byes na dgra chas tor* [recte *thogs*] / *bsō ka phyi sgo la gtad / phyugs khyim phugs na bso / gzhon pa ni mda' stan byed //*

as muskets (*me mda'*) and armour (*a khrab*).⁴⁶ To complete this section, I wish to point out that the *Gesar Epic* also applies *go mtshon* metaphorically by referring, for example, to the weapons of patience and insight.⁴⁷ Moreover, gods, particularly the warrior gods can reside in a weapon (*go mtshon*).⁴⁸

As we have seen, all of these terms originate in early linguistic material, since they occur either in the *Mahāvvyutpatti*, or in sources such as the *Conquest of the Fort of Sumpa*, and the Bon source *Ziji*. According to the database sources, compounds with *go* prevail in Bon literature,⁴⁹ while the dominant term for weapon remains *mtshon*. Already the entries in the *Mahāvvyutpatti* appear ambiguous since the section titled *go mtshon* includes tools called *go cha*. Despite Geshe Chödrak's explanation, since the syllable *cha* refers to any tool or implement in general, the term *go cha*, like *go mtshon*, can apparently refer to both armour and weapon.

2.3 The Collective Term '*khör gsum*

In this last section on general terms for weapons, I will introduce a compound that appears unusual. Several autochthonous texts refer to a specific group of weapons called “the three circles” or “three groups” (*'khör gsum*), an expression that might indicate an effort to classify weapons. The term occurs in a wide range of meanings, unrelated to weapons.⁵⁰ A connection with *'khör lo*, a term that can denote a discus being used as a weapon, is unlikely since “the three wheels” refer to other types of weapons.⁵¹ Jäschke cites Schmidt's dictionary for the interpretation of the “three circles” as “every thing that belongs to archery;” but specifies the term as “more correctly:

⁴⁶ Schuh, *Siegelkunde*, 83-5, ll. 34-6, 99-102: *spas se khang chen pa'i me mda' sag thag ol sbog a khrab sogs dgra chas rnam sbyin //*.

⁴⁷ Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 196, ll. 18-19: *bzod dang shes rab go mtshon las / lcags gzhu rno mtshon ma dgos kyang //* (Apart from the weapons of patience and insight, one does not need an iron bow or any other sharp weapon).

⁴⁸ Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 255, ll. 24: *go mtshon dgra lha'i rten mkhar yin //*. The *sgra bla* are identical with *dgra bla*. Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabsal, *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 43 and 45, refers from *dgra lha* to '*go ba'i lha lnga* as “the protector deities that are born spontaneously with each individual person”.

⁴⁹ It might be worth pointing out here that Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabsal, *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 37 quotes the terms *go ban* as “the crowing glory of armour, the pennant of a helmet” and *go zu* as “a garment that protects against weapons”.

⁵⁰ The term '*khör* also denotes ‘entourage’, ‘retinue’, ‘assembly’, ‘district’ and ‘circuit’; see Maurer and Schneider, *Wörterbuch*, 9, 147-8.

⁵¹ The epithet “the one with the discus in the hand” (*'khör lo'i phyag* or '*khör lo'i lag pa*), denotes, for example, the Indian god Viṣṇu; see Maurer and Schneider, *Wörterbuch*, 9, 153.

arrow, knife, and spear”.⁵²

Since *'khor gsum* occurs already in the *Gesar Epic* portion entitled *The Conquest of the Fort of Sumpa*, it might be considered as old linguistic material, dating back as far as the eleventh or twelfth centuries. There, they are understood as an arrow, bow, and sword, since they are attached to or worn on the body.⁵³ This matches Mipham's interpretation in his *Gto Rituals*, where he comments on the three wheels by explaining them as the “arrow, bow, and sword” which the ritual specialist attaches to an effigy.⁵⁴ From a decree in the *History of Bhutan*, we learn that the term was still in use in the eighteenth century. In his translation of a legal decree issued in 1729 referring to the duties of rulers and ministers in the *Sources for the History of Bhutan*, Aris interprets the three wheels more generally as “armour, helmet and weapons” (*go mtshon, go cha* and *dgra cha*).⁵⁵ His interpretation disagrees with that of Wylie in his translation of the *Geography of Tibet* written in 1830 by Jampel Chöki Tenzin Trinle (Jam dpal chos kyi bstan 'dzin 'phrin las, 1789-1838), where he denotes them as an “arrow, lance and sword”.⁵⁶

Since the origin of the Tibetan expression ‘three circles’ (*'khor gsum*) is unclear and its interpretation in the sources varies, a look in the polyglot dictionaries could bring clarity. There, it corresponds apparently with the Mongol equivalent *sayadaḡ qorumsaḡa* which refers to two items only: these are ‘quiver and bow case’. Herewith, we might conclude, that the Tibetan expression seems to denote equipment for the transport of weapons, i.e. the quiver, bow case, and the weapon-belt. The Mongolian equivalent lacks the weapon-belt as third

52 Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 58; Schmidt, *Wörterbuch*, 62: “das ganze Bogenrätze”.

53 Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 205, ll. 15-7: *stag shar pas 'khor gsum bcing le des* // (A young man who attaches the three types of weapons [to his body]). Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 143a ll. 4-5: *gnam lha khri bstan dang / a nag dom bu thogs dkar gnyis rdzong nang du yod par khong gnyis kyi khrab rmog 'khor gsum bskor [recte bskon] nas* // (When the two, Namlha Triten and Anak Dombu Tokar were in the fortress, they both donned their armour, helmet and the three weapons [i.e. an arrow, bow and sword]).

54 Lin, *Systematisierung von gTo-Ritualen*, 144: *'khor gsum (mda' gzhu ral gri bcas) / tshang bar btags* // (One should completely attach the three weapons (an arrow, bow and sword)).

55 Aris, *History of Bhutan*, 144, ll. 21-2: *'khor gsum mdo drug tshang ba'i dmag mi dmag gral du 'khod par* // (The soldiers, fully equipped with the three weapons, and the horses were arrayed in the battle line).

56 Wylie, *The Geography of Tibet*, 23, ll. 8-9: *'khor gsum gyi rjes yin zer ba sogs rdo'i ngos su gsal bar babs yod pa la* // . For Wylie's interpretation, see his footnote 340. A similar interpretation is presented by Ekvall in his *Fields of the Hoof*, 90, where he names sword, arrow, and spear as the threefold armament of the rider who guards the herds: in modern times a gun replaces the arrow.

item.⁵⁷ In this context, it might be worth pointing out that the Turkish term *qor* is similar in meaning to Tibetan '*khor* since *qor* means 'rib-and; edge; border; row; armour' and *qorci* 'the keeper of the armoury or wardrobe' who carries a belt equipped with a sword and a quiver.⁵⁸ That is to say, that it is not unlikely that Tibetan '*khor* is linked with *qor*.

The term '*khor gsum* is therefore a good example to exemplify not only the spread of terms but also potential variations in meaning. It is sure that the term designates a unity of three, whereby any of the interpretations given above is possible and can be correct in specific contexts.⁵⁹ Its identification as the weapons arrow, bow and sword emphasises the significance of these three types of weapon in the Tibetan cultural context.

3 Specific Terminology for Weapons

The following sections are dedicated to terms designating specific weapons. As the information on the weapons and armour's material, shape and use provided in these sources is inconsistent, it is difficult to draw general conclusions about their material characteristics and practical functions.

To begin with, I will discuss early weapons, such as the lasso, sling, and bow and arrow. These weapons were easily produced from natural materials, and none required necessarily the use of fire or iron-work skills. In fact, all of these tools, particularly the bow and arrow, were common hunting tools that were in widespread use all over the world. Another significant characteristic is their large operating range. On the basis of this quality, this section concludes – as far as the material collected in the *Wörterbuch der Tibetischen Schriftsprache* database is concerned and given the fact that this material comprises a majority of ancient and medieval literature – with rare references to firearms and canons.

The second set of weapons includes offensive weapons for close combat, which are either wholly or partly made of metal, such as pikes and swords. Their manufacture requires metal processing

57 For Mongol and other language synonyms, see the detailed analysis of the material, shape and terms of weaponry by Kóhalmi, "Abschnitt der Waffenbehälter", 196, she translates '*khor gsum* with "Kreis der Drei" (circle of three) that is "Köcher, Bogenföteral und Waffengürtel".

58 Spiess, "Türkisches Sprachgut", 336-7. Since the author refers to Turkish loanwords in Hindi whereby he also indicates their links with Ottoman and Persian, for example, he shows the spread of terms beyond their linguistic families. According to Lessing, *Mongolian-English*, 965, the Mongolian term *qor* denotes "the part of the quiver where the tips of the arrows are placed".

59 See also Kóhalmi, "Abschnitt der Waffenbehälter", 196 fn. 2.

skills and the ability to work with fire. By contrast with bows, arrows or lassos, these military weapons were primarily manufactured for use in warfare, armed conflicts, and single combat.

The final paragraph is dedicated to miscellaneous weapons, such as iron hooks, hammers, and axes. Warriors, be they foot soldiers or riders, could use these tools in close combat but also throw them across long distances. They were applied during military conflicts, and could, at the same time, be utilitarian tools of daily life, such as hammers for construction work and axes for chopping wood.

3.1 The Lasso (*zhags pa*)

The lasso (*zhags pa*), a looped rope that Tibetans commonly made of hemp (*sro ma nag po*)⁶⁰ or leather, is among the earliest and simplest weapons. In contrast to many other weapons, the lasso is relatively light, and moves swiftly and silently. Irrespective of its use, be it to catch animals, engage in combat or perform rituals, the skill of the thrower determines its accuracy. What information do the Tibetan written sources provide on the lasso in wars and other armed conflicts?⁶¹ They report how warriors defeated their enemies with a lasso: *The Prophecy of Li Country* (*Li yul lung bstan pa*, 983 CE) relates for instance how the Khotanese (Li) ruler caught the King of Kashgar in a lasso in order to kill him.⁶²

Successfully using a lasso requires enormous skill whereby a good throw can make it travel at enormous speed. If the combatant was greatly skilled, he could easily throw the rope while riding. A story in *The Conquest of the Fort of Sumpa* tells that a lasso, while still held in the warrior's arm, made a sound that indicates it was ready to be thrown. Here, the text compares the throw of a lasso with a lightning strike.⁶³ The *Gesar Epic*'s description of capturing animals, particularly horses, with the lasso, connects it with magical power. Other sources assign this characteristic to it as well:

60 Personal communication with Lobsang Yongdan, Bonn University.

61 For the lasso as a war tool in India, see Losch, "Abriß der Waffenkunde", 210-1.

62 Emmerick, *Khotan*, 44-5: *ga 'jag gi rgyal po yang li rjes zhags pas zin nas 'gum par bgyid pa las* // (The king of Khotan also caught the King of Kashgar with a lasso and [ordered] his death).

63 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 80b l. 6-81a l. 1: *bye ma lha'i cho 'phrul gyi phung bdud kyi gru'i khug gi zhags pa'i a long gi seng zer nas sgra zhiq gtong byung ba'i khos gri shub du bcug nas zhags pa de glog 'khyugs pa ltar 'phang byung ba'i* // (Through the magical power of Chemalha (Bye ma lha) the ring of the lasso in the arm bend of Phungdü (Phung bdud) resounded with the sound *seng*. Then, he sheathed his sword and threw the lasso like a shining lightning).

Catch the precious horse with the lasso [named] Tongshe, seduce all women with your miraculous power.⁶⁴

The Sixth Dalai Lama uses a similar image in his love songs. He tells of wild horses galloping across the mountain pastures whereby, like in the *Gesar Epic*, men catch them with snares and lassos. The Dalai Lama compares their potency with some kind of magical power that the lover can use to impress his beloved:

Wild horses galloping around in the mountains, you can catch them with snares and lassos.

The beloved turning her face away from me, you cannot impress her with your magical power.⁶⁵

The lasso's whirling flight through the air might have facilitated its connection with magical power, hereby making it a magical instrument in many literary contexts. The *Ziji* also assigns a magical power to this weapon of the warrior gods by referring to "the lasso that grabs [someone] by itself". This very passage lists a whole range of self-performing combat equipment, such as a self-stretching bow, self-shooting arrow, self-striking sword, a shield that surrounds (the warrior) by itself, and other examples.⁶⁶ In these cases, we might also assume that the author attributes specific skills to the bearer of these weapons who needs to control and use them at the right moment. Moreover, the text assigns a specific warrior god to the tool: "Excellent Light with a High Speed" (Dra ma glog gi myur mgyogs can) is the warrior god of the self-twirling lasso.⁶⁷ The Buddhist sources adapted this motive. The fourteenth century historiographical text, *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* attributes the lasso or snare to the "King of the Sky" (Nam mkha'i rgyal po), an embodiment of Tibet's tutelary deity Chenrezig (Spyan ras gzigs), better known as Avalokiteśvara. The other weapon he holds in his right hand is the bow, which symbolises also, without the arrow, both method and wisdom.⁶⁸

64 Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 278, ll. 39-40: *cang shes stong chen zhags pas zungs / dangs sman sna tshogs sprul pas bslus //*. Particularly in the *Gesar Epic*, weapons, armour, and parts of them such as a hilt, horses and harness such as the stirrups are personalised as they are provided with their own names; see *infra*.

65 Sørensen, *Divinity*, 188: *rta rgod ri la rgyab pa / rnyi dang zhags pas zin gyis / byams pa ngo log rgyab pa / mthu ngo zin pa mi 'dug //*.

66 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 65, l. 5-66, l. 1: *gzhu mo rang bdung 'di la 'khor / mda' mo rang 'phen 'di la 'khor / mdung mo rang debs 'di la 'khor / phub mo rang 'khyil 'di la 'khor / zhags pa rang sdog 'di la 'khor //*.

67 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 63, ll. 3-4: *zhags pa rang skyil sgra bla de / dra ma glog gi myur mgyogs can //*.

68 Sørensen, *Royal Genealogies*, 335.

3.2 The Bow (*gzhu*) and the Arrow (*mda'*)

All over the world, bows and arrows were among the earliest hunting weapons.⁶⁹ Usually, bows and arrows are made of wood or bamboo, and so are light and easy to carry, for example, in a quiver carried on the back.⁷⁰ Depending on the archer's skill, the bow and arrow can be used while standing, running, or riding.⁷¹ The two are suitable for launching a silent attack and for hitting the target accurately from quite a distance, i.e., nearly 200 meters.⁷² Therefore, they served as a perfect long-range weapon in warfare.

According to Jäschke, the Tibetan term *mda'* refers to "any straight and thin pole or piece of wood".⁷³ To highlight the difficulties regarding the nomenclature which arise when translating Tibetan texts, I wish to refer briefly to the German and English terms for Tibetan *mda'*, which is usually translated as English *arrow*, and German *Pfeil*, two designations with different etymologies and meanings. Both the *arrow* and *Pfeil* are long sticks with a pointed tip that move through the air, and both can be shot with a bow. However, the German term *Pfeil* also denotes a tool that can operate without a bow; a human arm can throw a *Pfeil* or a blowgun can set it in motion. For this kind of application, it is called a *dart* in English. From the Tibetan sources' use and definitions, we can assume that *mda'* denotes rather a *Pfeil* than specifically an *arrow* or *dart*. The term *mda' bo che*, literally 'the big arrow', points to a close relation with pikes. The compound translates also the Sanskrit *tomara*.⁷⁴

Numerous passages in the *Pelliot Tibétain* collection testify that bows, and particularly arrows, were common tools in early Tibet.

69 Hence, arrows are a common burial gift whereas a sword or lance together with a bow and arrows are uncommon. There is also no unanimous opinion on whether arrows and arrowheads in burial objects should be regarded as tools for warfare or indicator of hunting activities; see, for example Hanks, "Reconsidering Warfare", 26-7.

70 For photographs and further information, such as the material and shape of Tibetan arrows, bows and quivers; see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 187-96. For further descriptions and depictions of arrows, see La Rocca, "Recent Acquisitions... Part 2", 6-7.

71 Demonstrating skills in arrow shooting continued to be valued up until the twentieth century, as is shown by the fact that archery competitions were held in various places in Tibet during New Year ceremonies including the state ceremonies in Lhasa, in particular during the 'Gallop behind the fort' (*rdzong rgyab zhabs 'bel*), and the 'sky archery' (*gnam mda'*) contest, see Richardson, *Ceremonies*, 56-9.

72 See Boeheim, *Waffenkunde*, 389.

73 Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 272.

74 See Lokesh Chandra, *Tibetan-Sanskrit*, 1227. The term appears in a Vinaya text translated from Sanskrit, the *Pravrajyāvastu* or *Rab tu 'byung ba'i gzhi*. See Eimer, *Übersetzung des Pravrajyāvastu*, 8: *mda' bo che 'phen thabs*, "the throwing of a javelin". For *mda' bo che*, see Ishihama and Fukuda, *Mahāvvyutpatti*, 242, no. 4983. Losch, "Abriß der Waffenkunde", 213, interprets *tomara* as a lance with an arrow-shaped tip ("Lanze mit pfeilförmiger Spitze"). On the unit of bow and arrow and the various methods to shoot arrows, see Kóhalmi, "Der Pfeil bei den innerasiatischen Reiternomaden", 110-13.

These early sources provide some information about the weapons' various materials, condition, and function, applications, shapes and ornamentation. While sharpened wood or bamboo served as common materials for arrows (or pikes), specific kinds could be made of iron.⁷⁵ Arrows are relatively simple instruments with sharp heads but, to make them more powerful, hunting arrows, for example, were feathered. Through this addition, the flight of the arrow was stabilised,⁷⁶ and they were sufficiently strong to pierce a wild yak.⁷⁷

Several texts refer to a specific shape of arrow or its tip. The iron arrowhead's (*mdo lcags*)⁷⁸ shape can also resemble a hatchet or axe (*ste'u ka ma*), a shape that is preserved throughout the literature since documents from the *Pelliot Tibétain* collection, here PT 1287:

Sharp but inefficient are the iron arrowheads with an axe-blade-[shape].⁷⁹

All interpretations of the Tibetan term result in a tool with an axe-blade shape for *ste'u ka ma* or *ste'u kha* which is likely to be derived from *ste'u* for 'axe'.⁸⁰

If we imagine an arrow with an axe-blade head, a specific question arises: how would such an arrow fly when shot with a bow? Does the text really refer to an arrow or something else? In order to attempt to answer these questions, I investigated also the Sanskrit and Mongolian languages for their respective equivalents. The *Mahāvīyutpatti*

75 In Indian contexts, arrows can also be poisoned, a practice which was also followed in the Tibetan borderlands, particularly the frontier areas of Tibet, such as Nagaland. Personal communication with Jampa Panglung in Munich, February 2020.

76 On the feathers' purpose and qualities, and the birds' species they come from, see Kóhalmi, "Der Pfeil bei den innerasiatischen Reiternomaden", 123-7, 149.

77 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 565, ll. 241-2: *rgod kyis ni ma bsgron na / 'brong la ni re myi 'jen //* (If an arrow is not studded with [the feathers of] an eagle, it cannot pierce a wild yak). Tibetan sources provide information on the best time for collecting feathers from different types of birds. The waterfowl's feathers, for example, are best in summer and the eagle's in winter; see La Rocca, "Recent Acquisitions... Part 2", 6.

78 The translation follows Bialek, *Compounds and Compounding*, vol. 2, 133 and 201. She derives the term *mdo lcags* from a contraction of *mda'i lcags*, "the iron of the arrow" in the phrase of PT 1287: *mdo lcags ni ste'u ka ma*, see 199-201.

79 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 575, ll. 484-5: *rno ste ni myi mkhas pa mdo lcags ni ste'u ka ma //*. For an analysis of *ste'u ka ma*, see Bialek, *Compounds and Compounding*, vol. 2, 131-3.

80 The *Mirror of Royal Genealogies* refers to an 'arrow' with a hatchet that cleaves a buzzard or falcon; see Sørensen, *Royal Genealogies*, 349, footnote 1106, "saber-formed arrow head". Kuznetsov, *Gsal ba'i me long*, 160, l. 33: *mda' ste'u kha mas / bya khra rked par bcad //*. The expression *mda' ste'u kha ma* could be short for *mda' lcags ste'u kha ma* and therefore refer only to the arrowhead (*mda' lcags*) and its shape, and not to an arrow.

renders Sanskrit *bhalla* as *ste'u kam* or *ste'u ka ma*.⁸¹ Since the Sanskrit term *bhalla* denotes “a kind of arrow or missile with a point of a particular shape” or “a kind of crescent-shaped missile or arrow”, its actual meaning remains somewhat vague.⁸² Here, we also find three other terms that refer to arrowheads that are, in contrast, spelled *mde'u*: these are the arrow with a calf tooth head (*mde'u be'u so 'dra ba*, Sanskrit *vatsadantaka*),⁸³ the arrow with four-edged head (*mde'u zur bzhi pa*, Sanskrit *tilakocavakam*)⁸⁴ and the arrow with a bird's heart head (*mde'u bye'u* (or *byi'u*) *snying ma*, Sanskrit *mūrkhalikā* or *mudgalikā*).⁸⁵

Although the Mongolian translation apparently does not distinguish between *mde'u* und *ste'u*, the Tibetan terms are clearly distinct: *mde'u* is a diminutive of *mda'*,⁸⁶ the arrow; whereas *ste'u* comes from *sta* (or *sta re*), the axe. Judging from the Sanskrit terminology, only the terms with *mde'u* clearly denote shapes of arrowheads. The *Rāmāyaṇa* names various terms for arrowheads that describe mainly their shapes such as broad-headed (*nālika*), folded-palm-headed (*añ-jalika*), half-moon-headed (*ardhacandra*), to name a few. And, as the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of art shows, the shapes of arrowheads were also many in the Tibetan cultural context.⁸⁷ A historical text that probably originates from the eighteenth century describes the quality and shape of arrows and arrowheads similar to the Indian characteristics in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Here, we find, for example shapes like hawk beak (*khra mchu*), leaf (*ldeb*), flesh splitter (*sha 'brad*) or pig's tongue (*phag lce*).⁸⁸

81 Ishihama, Fukuda, *Mahāvvyutpatti*, 290, no. 6078.

82 Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English*, 748; see also Böhrtlingk, *Sanskrit*, 4, Teil, 253; and Apte, *Sanskrit-English*, 1187; see also Goldman, Goldman, van Nooten, *Rāmāyaṇa*, 1559. I would like to thank Roland Steiner, LMU Munich, for his suggestions and comments.

83 Goldman, Goldman, van Nooten, *Rāmāyaṇa*, 1559, translated “calf's-foot-headed”.

84 Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid*, 254. The etymology of the term is not clear. According to Edgerton, Tibetan matches the Japanese interpretation “an arrowhead with four edges or blades”, the Chinese equivalent refers apparently to an “arrowhead with four layers”.

85 Ishihama, Fukuda, *Mahāvvyutpatti*, 289-90, nos. 6076, 6077, and 6079.

86 Köhalmi, “Der Pfeil bei den innerasiatischen Reiternomaden”, states that the additional flask at the tip of the arrow where the fletcher fixes the arrowhead is called *mde rten*, short for *mde'u rten* “the holder of the arrowhead” (Pfeilspitzenhalter) or “the support of the arrowhead” (Pfeilspitzenstütze), 134.

87 For the material, size, weight, shape, and manufacture of arrowheads in greater area of Central Asia, see Köhalmi, “Der Pfeil bei den innerasiatischen Reiternomaden”, 127-33. The significance of the arrow is emphasised by the fact that in the nomadic regions of the greater Central Asia arrow making was a craft in its own right.

88 For depictions of various types of arrows and arrowheads, and a translation in parts of the historical Tibetan work which also refers to the quality of the arrow's material such as reed and feathers, see La Rocca, “Recent Acquisitions... Part 2”, 6-8.

The Tibetan *ste'u kam* or *ste'u ka ma* is the Mongolian *cabciyur* or *cabciyur sumu*. The term denotes some kind of chopping tool or, more specifically, a hatchet or cleaver, while *sumu* denotes a “missile, arrow, bullet, shot, ammunition”.⁸⁹ If we assume that the interpretation of *ste'u ka ma* is correct, then, is this ‘tool with a hatchet’ really an arrow shot with a bow? A hatchet on the tip of an arrow would cause such an imbalance in the tool that it would certainly not fly very far and would miss its target. We might therefore assume that these denominations point to some kind of categorising function rather than explicitly describe the shape. Since *ste'u* is derived from *sta* the term could also refer to a battle-axe.⁹⁰ Further reflection leads to another idea: very common medieval weapons were spears, pikes and javelins, a kind of thrusting pole weapons. Spears with axe-like heads are bearded axes or halberds. In particular, halberds with their pointed tips resemble a pike with an axe or hatchet. Another possibility would be the martel that occasionally has a pointed tip.⁹¹ Though I could, of course, be mistaken, the term *ste'u ka ma* could presumably also refer to thrusting pole weapon with a specific head rather than an arrow shot with a bow.

A document in PT 1287 describes a very precious arrow, furnished with a head of turquoise that the hunter, perhaps a king or high official, kept in a golden quiver (*dong ral*).⁹² The term *dong*, that occurs in Old Tibetan documents, is apparently original Tibetan and abbreviates *mda' dong* for a quiver. This compound stems from *dong po*, *dong pa* or *ldong po*, denoting a tube. In our database, these terms are attested in sources from the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁹³ Literature from the eighteenth century, such as the above-mentioned epistle from 1727 written by Pholhané to the Chinese Emper-

⁸⁹ Lessing, *Mongolian-English*, 154 and 737.

⁹⁰ I wish to thank Joanna Bialek and Donald La Rocca for discussing this topic with me. They both assume that these names for the arrow's iron tip should not necessarily be taken too literally. Personal communications in July 2020.

⁹¹ See, for example, Bennett et al., *Fighting Techniques*, 20; for the various types of halberds, see Boeheim, *Waffenkunde*, 330-42 and 364. For a definition of halberds, “a weapon consisting of a spear and a battleaxe combined”, see the OED. Halberds or similar weapons were also used, for example, in China. However, confirmation of this assumption would require further research since I am not aware of their use in Tibet.

⁹² Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 575, ll. 479-80: *gser gyi ni dong ral na g.yu'i ni //*. In the literature translated from Sanskrit, such as Haribhaṭṭa's *Jātakamāla*, the quiver (*dong ba*, for Sanskrit *śaradhi*) is where hunters kept their arrows; see Hahn, Klaus, *Mṛgajātaka*, 30, 52. The notches of the arrows could be lined with turquoise, which gave the arrow a magical power or denoted rank, see Kōhalmi, “Der Pfeil bei den innerasiatischen Reiternomaden”, 123.

⁹³ Kuznetsov, *Gsal ba'i me long*, 100, l. 3: *dong par mda' mang po chug bya ba yin //*. Sørensen, *Royal Genealogies*, 238: “Insert many arrows in the quiver”. The term *mda' dong* occurs also in the mid-seventeenth century biography of Drukpa Kunleg; see Kretschmar, *Brug pa Kun legs*, 57, l. 5.

or, uses *sag thag* to indicate a quiver.⁹⁴ This loanword originates in the Mongolian word *sayadaya*, a term with an ambiguously presented interpretation in the literature. The Mongolian language knows two terms for 'quiver', the other being *qorumsaya* which translates Tibetan *gzhu shubs*, that is the quiver or the case for the bow to protect its end. By contrast, *sayadaya* refers to the quiver for the arrow.⁹⁵ Based on Pholhané's epistle, we might assume that the Mongolian term had replaced the early Tibetan term *mda' dong*, short *dong*. Since the bilateral relations between the Mongols and Tibetans began in the thirteenth century, Mongolian terms gradually entered Tibetan language and also influenced Tibet's political and military culture. Tibet's territorial reorganisation with the development and reform of postal stations is well known,⁹⁶ and this also led to the adoption of Mongolian terms, whereas the investigation of Tibetan-Mongol military relations, particularly the transfer of material culture, remains a desideratum.⁹⁷

Let us examine the general information on arrows. The stories in the Old Tibetan documents reveal information regarding the functioning and usage of arrows. A statement in PT 1287, for example, assigns arrows great effectiveness since even a tiny arrow can kill a strong yak:

Even a tiny arrow shot at a big yak will kill [the animal].⁹⁸

Apart from emphasising the power of an arrow, this quote refers to an arrow that a hunter or warrior shot with a bow rather than to a pike or javelin. In the Tibetan cultural context, the arrow is closely associated with the bow as they form a sort of unit. Even if specific phrases refer to the arrow alone, they imply the use of a bow also.⁹⁹

Hunting animals such as wild yaks led apparently to unforeseeable accidents, despite the sparse human population.¹⁰⁰ Numerous

94 Schuh, *Siegelkunde*, 83-5, ll. 34-6, 99-102.

95 There may already be some imprecision in Lessing, *Mongolian-English*, 656, where *sayadaya* is translated as "quiver, arrow case" and *qorumsaya*, page 969, as "quiver". According to Heissig and Müller, *Die Mongolen, Katalogteil*, 140-3, *sayadaya* denotes the quiver for the bow, whereas the quiver for arrows is called *choromsogo* (phon.), i.e. *qorumsaya*. The term also translates German "Bogenschuh", a case to protect the bow's end. In her analysis of the material, shape and terms of the various quivers based on multilingual dictionaries of the Qing dynasty, Kóhalmi, "Abschnitt der Waffenbehälter", 196-9, comes to an opposite conclusion. Another synonym for *sag thag* or *mda' dong* is *stag ral*, see Maurer, Schneider, *Wörterbuch*, 27, 137.

96 See, for example, Maurer, "Tibetan Governmental Transport".

97 The first studies on Tibetan-Mongol military relations are presented by Federica Venturi and Hosung Shim in *Asian Influences on Tibetan Military History*.

98 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 576, l. 511: *g.yag ched po la mda' phra mos phangna* [recte 'phang sna] *sod krang //*.

99 Personal communication with Jampa Panglung, February 2020.

100 For details on hunting accidents, see Richardson, *High Peaks*, 149-66.

passages in the old manuscripts, such as PT 1071, report hunting with arrows, and particularly hunting accidents resulting in fatalities. Shooting a person with an arrow was considered a severe offence and, therefore, legally judged in the same vein as homicide.¹⁰¹ The frequency of casualties caused by hunting accidents is reflected in Tibetan legislation, as the authorities established legal rules requiring compensation (*myi stong*) for these cases. PT 1071 reports compensation for a death due to being shot by an arrow, as an anecdote reveals that a civilian killed a military person with a misdirected arrow that was intended to kill an animal, with the result that he had to pay compensation (*myi stong*) of 150 *srang*.¹⁰²

The numerous mentions in Old Tibetan documents, particularly of arrows, indicate that these were relatively common tools that people could manufacture by simple means.¹⁰³ As they were used for hunting, they were not assigned to a specific class of people, as in the case of, for example, swords. Particularly precious arrows with turquoise arrowheads kept in a golden quiver are likely to belong to a king. Titles and high military ranks such as *mda' dpon* and *mda' spyi* in the Tibetan army, translated as 'general' or 'commander' and 'General-in-Chief' emphasise the importance of this weapon.¹⁰⁴ But arrows were the weapons of commoners as well. Nevertheless, their use conflicted with Buddhist teaching, and therefore particularly monks were supposed to avoid engaging in shooting. In his chronicle, Nelpa Paṇḍita judged monks as mad (*smyo*) when they shot arrows. Following the murder of Ralpachen, King Langdarma (Glang dar ma) is said to have forced the Buddhist monks to arm themselves with bows and arrows and to violate the order of not killing sentient beings by hunting and

101 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 379, ll. 24-7: *mda's ni phogste / nga'i / mda' ma yin ces / mchi / snyon snyon ma tshangs dang / mda's phog pa gus [recte gum] yang rung / ma gum yang rung / thong / myi khriims bzhin du dgum //* (Someone was struck by an arrow. If [the accused] says 'This was not my arrow' but is not exonerated, he is - no matter if the person struck by an arrow was killed or not - to be killed according to the law for murder). Similarly, Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 379, ll. 13-15.

102 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 392, ll. 277-80: *rgyal 'bangs rgod do 'tshald / dang stong mnyam ba zhig la / g.yung ngo 'tshald dang / lho bal btson / yan cad kyis / ri dags la / stsog / pa la / mdas rngul phas phog pa dang / gum [...]* *myi stong du srang brgya' lnga bcu babste //* (For every military subject and someone equal who passed away after he was hit by an arrow shot at deer by a non-military subject or a *lho bal* prisoner, a compensation of 150 *srang* is to be paid).

103 Because of the ease of making bows and arrows, these weapons were probably the most common weapons among the Mongols as well, see Venturi, "Mongol and Tibetan Armies on the Trans-Himalayan Fronts", 34 fn. 15.

104 For reflections in the titles, see, for example, Travers, "Horse-Riding and Target-Shooting Contest", 3-4, and fn. 23.

killing animals.¹⁰⁵ According to a nineteenth century legal document (*bca' yig*) by the fourteenth Karmapa, the use of arrows in multiple ways was relatively common until modern times. This document forbids monks, as well as lay people, to kill animals and play around with arrows (*mda' rtsed*).¹⁰⁶

In Tibetan and Indian culture, archery is one of the skills that a warrior must acquire for warfare. Together with lances (*mda' chen*) and battle-axes (*dgra sta*), bows and arrows were used in military conflicts.¹⁰⁷ In the literature, arrows are assigned great power, which is why they also appear, together with bows, as magical weapons. The Bon source *Ziji* illustrates a bow that bends by itself and an arrow that shoots by itself.¹⁰⁸ Another Bon source, the *Zermig* (*Gzer mig*), describes the specific technique of using an iron arrow which the archer places “rotating in the bow”. The text assigns it such a strong power that it can pierce through nine iron shields.¹⁰⁹ I understand this technique as a sort of preparation to make the arrow rotate faster, probably referring to the fact that arrows rotate while flying toward their targets. The rotation of the arrow makes its flight stable and thereby more accurate, since its tip remains pointed in the right direction. Another factor, which might have been more important, is that rotation corrects the irregularities of the shaft. Without any rotation, these irregularities would change the arrow’s trajectory.¹¹⁰

In contrast to the arrow, information on the bow, its material, shape or decoration is rare. PT 1287 describes a bow as having white ends and being decorated with yak horn (*'brong gi ru*).¹¹¹ The *Gesar Epic* refers to a bow made of iron, *lcags gzhu*, a term that could also

105 Uebach, *Nelpa Paṇḍita*, 118-9, fol. 14b l. 2: *btsun pa kun rtags dang phral / rtags 'bor du ma btub pa kun la / mda' gzhu [...] gtad nas lings la bkod //*. See also 122-3, fol. 15a l. 6: *btsun pa khyi khrid / rnga bshang [recte gshang] rdung / mgo la bya sgro btugs / sham thabs sdzes [recte rdzes] nas ri dags la mda' 'phen pa g.yo dge 'byung gi[s] mthong nas //* (Yogechung (G.yo dge 'byung) saw monks who walked dogs, beat drums and rang a bell; those who attached feathers to their heads, rolled up their lower garment and shot arrows at the deer).

106 Schuh, *Dagyab, Urkunden, Erlasse und Sendschreiben*, 247, ll. 28-9: *dud 'gro srog gcod pa mda' rtsed rdo skor glu gling har rgyug skad 'gyang [recte rgyang] rtsid cho[s] sogs [...] byas mi {m}chog cing //*. For the German translation, see 244.

107 Zimmermann, *Subhāṣitaratna*, 226-7: *mda' dang mda' chen dgra sta dang / mtshon cha yis ni g.yul 'gyed cing //*

108 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 65, ll. 5-66, l. 1: *gzhu mo rang bdung 'di la 'khor / mda' mo rang 'phen//*

109 Tenzin Namdak, *Gzer mig*, 668, ll. 5-6: *lcags kyi mda' ni kril gyis bkang // lcags kyi mda' ni [...] lcags kyi phub dgu lcur phyung na //*

110 <http://www.bogensport.cc/traditionell-bogenschiessen/trad-bogen-schiessen/technisches/pfeilrotation/index.php>.

111 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 575, ll. 483-5: *drag ste ni myi mkhas pa mcho gar ni 'brong gi ru / rno ste ni myi mkhas pa mdo lcags ni ste'u ka //*. For an analysis of *mchog gar*, see Bialek, *Compounds and Compounding*, vol. 2, 40-3.

refer to a crossbow, another ancient weapon.¹¹² The biography of Padmasambhava provides the designation of the Bowman who is called *dpag chen*, literally ‘the large dimension, great measure’, an expression which is likely to stress the long range of the arrow.¹¹³

3.3 Slings (*'ur rdo*)

Another ancient weapon that is designed to hit a target at long distance is the sling (*'ur rdo*), which propels stones through the air. The sling is usually made of dark and light yak hair mixed with other wool, and throws a single stone as its projectile. A special category is the so-called ‘nine-eyed’ sling.¹¹⁴ The sling’s swing through the air before the stone is released resembles the action of a lasso. By contrast with the lasso, the fighter swings the sling with the stone at the side of his body and not above himself. In order to hurl the stone, the fighter releases one end of the rope. Tibetans used slings frequently in daily life since particularly nomads or other cattle breeders used them to herd their animals and also to hunt small animals. Their range is said to reach as far as 300 meters.¹¹⁵ Literary sources in our database are, however, rare. The *Gesar Epic* describes the sling as a very powerful weapon. If the fighter flings it through the air like sparks of lightning, the stone can even split rocks into small fragments.¹¹⁶ The epic also refers to its metaphorical use since it is, like other weapons, considered a seat of the warrior gods.¹¹⁷ Many

112 Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 196, ll. 18-19: *lcags gzhu rno mtshon ma dgos kyang* // For detailed descriptions and depictions of various crossbows all over Europe, see Boenheim, *Waffenkunde*, 401-30. For crossbows and related weapons in the medieval and early modern Indian sources, see Slaje, “Schleuder, Katapult, Armburst und Kanonen.”, 131-6.

113 For the reference in the biography of Padmasambhava, see O rgyan gling pa, *Gu ru pad ma 'byung gnas*, 66a ll. 5-6. The expression *dpag chen* occurs again in the term for the cannon, see § 3.4.

114 For a detailed description of a Tibetan sling, its manufacture and use in daily life, see Desrosiers, “Tibetischen Schleuder”, 177. The popularity of the ‘nine-eyed’ sling is reflected by a Tibetan street song which mentions how the Chinese Communist government managed to place its troops and officials in Lhasa without combat; see Goldstein, *Modern Tibet*, 170-1. For slings in India, see Slaje, “Schleuder, Katapult, Armburst und Kanonen.”, 111-26. Slings were widespread as weapons of war in Europe as well, see Boenheim, *Waffenkunde*, 385-8.

115 Chodag, Tibet, 257.

116 Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 266, ll. 30-31: *'ur rdo thog zil me stag tshubs se 'phangs byung bas brag dkar de rdul phran du gtor* // (When the sling was hurled like spraying sparks of lightning, [the stone] scattered the white rock into small particles).

117 Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 266, ll. 12-13: *ngas lag na bzung ba'i 'ur rdo 'di / dgra lha'i rten mkhar dang po yin* // (The sling I hold in my hands is the first residence of the warrior gods).

centuries later, the tool occurs as a requisite in *Gto* rituals to defeat demons and also in Tibetan religious dances.¹¹⁸ In military conflict, Tibetans used these weapons until the twentieth century.

3.4 Firearms (*me mda'*) and Cannons (*dpag chen me stobs*)

To round off the topic of long-range weapons, the following passage presents just a few references to firearms and cannons. These terms occur rarely in the database, since the material collected in the *Wörterbuch der Tibetischen Schriftsprache* is primarily drawn from ancient and medieval literature. Even a further search of the documents published by Dieter Schuh failed to bring forth any further quotes about firearms. Only the above-mentioned epistle that Miwang Pholhané wrote in 1727 to the Chinese Emperor mentions firearms (*me mda'*). Miwang's epistle points out that muskets (*me mda'*) and armour (*a khrab*) were among the equipment given to the Mongols who were subject to the Emperor's rule.¹¹⁹ Since we know these firearms spread gradually within Tibet from the sixteenth century onward,¹²⁰ the fact that there is no more than a single mention appears still surprising, but this is certainly due to the nature and time period of the selected sources in the Munich database. The only document that mentions a cannon dates from 1796 and concerns a grant of legal privileges and estates. A certain Tenzin Namgyal (Bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal) issued the deed (*she bam*) which refers to a cannon that was delivered to the Sikkimese palace Raptentsé (Rab brtan rtse) in the context of the Gorkha war in 1788.

When the Gorkha troops had been repelled, he sent five prisoners and 300 weapons together with a cannon to Raptentsé.¹²¹

The term for the cannon *dpag chen stobs me* clearly tries to express its function, that is to say its long range (*dpag chen*) and the use of fire power (*stobs me*). Since cannons are particularly difficult to trans-

118 Lin, *Systematisierung von gTo-Ritualen* 2005, 187: *rdo la sogs pa skud pa sngo dmar gyi 'ur thog gis dgra phyogs su 'phang bas dgra bgegs brlag par bsams la* // (By hurling the stones in the direction of the enemy with a sling made of blue and red strings, you imagine that the *dgra bgegs* are destroyed). See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Religious Dances*, 84.

119 Schuh, *Siegelkunde*, 83-5, ll. 34-6, 99-102.

120 La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 198.

121 Schuh, *Dagyab, Urkunden, Erlasse und Sendschreiben*, 20, ll. 13-14: *gor dmag phyir 'ded kyi btsong lnga mgo* [recte *go*] *lag sum brgya dpag chen me stobs g.lag cha* [recte *lag cha*] *bcas rab brtser rim btang dang* // For the German translation, see 18-19. The term that denotes weapons here is *go lag*.

port in high mountain areas, they must have been rare. Tibetan cultural areas however had numerous references to smaller firearms such as guns and pistols which were often kept in private households, at least in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Therefore, these two references, included here for the sake of comprehensiveness as far as weapon types are concerned, clearly do not enable us to form an opinion about the extent of their diffusion.

3.5 The Lance, Spear, or Pike (*mdung*, *mdung mo*)

This section deals with pole arms or pikes, a category which includes stabbing, thrusting, or cutting weapons and some kinds of missiles. Since antiquity, soldiers have used them in single combat as well as larger battles. Generally speaking, this type of weapon consists of two parts: a long shaft or pole, usually wooden, with an iron blade attached to it. Since they partially consist of metal, their manufacture required skill in ironworking, and was more laborious, time-consuming and costlier than the manufacture of lassos, slings, bows and arrows. The shape, length, and width of both the blade and the shaft vary broadly, and their nomenclature in English indicates whether they were used as a throwing weapon (spear, dart and pike) or stabbing weapon (lance). The length of Tibetan spears ranges from about 1.70 meter to 5 meters. It may therefore be difficult to distinguish the shorter ones from pikes or javelins, that is “a light spear thrown with the hand with or without the help of a thong; a dart”.¹²² The dart is “a pointed missile weapon thrown by the hand, a light spear or javelin; also applied to pointed missiles in general, including arrows”.¹²³ According to the analysis of European weapons, their use as a throwing weapon in cavalry required an extension of their shaft from 3.5 to 4 meters. The javelin thrown by foot soldiers is about 2 to 2.5 meters long. The term dart originates most likely from the Arabic term *djerd*.¹²⁴

In Tibetan, all these long, stabbing weapons are referred to as *mdung* or *mdung mo*, although, technically speaking, the spear, lance,

¹²² For a definition of ‘javelin’, see the OED.

¹²³ For spears and spearheads in seventeenth to nineteenth century Tibet, see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 174-84. For the definition of ‘spear’ and ‘dart’, see the OED.

¹²⁴ For a detailed analysis of the pole arms with their varieties and usage, see Boehm, *Waffenkunde*, 305-30. Translated and autochthonous Tibetan sources, such as *Viśeṣastava*, see for example Schneider, *Lobpreis der Vorzüglichkeit*, 232, ll. 5-6 and 11-2; the biography of Padmasambhava, see O rgyan gling pa, *Gu ru pad ma 'byung gnas*, 41b l. 5 and *The Mirror of the Royal Genealogies*, see Kuznetsov, *gSal ba'i me long*, 5, ll. 19-20 also refer to stakes (*gsal shing*). These wooden instruments, resembling a pike, were apparently used to punish and kill criminals, for example. There are no quotes related to their usage in warfare.

and javelin or dart are used differently. Tibetans call the short spear, lance, pike, or javelin *mdung thung* or *'thab mdung*.¹²⁵ The term *mdung thung* occurs already in the *Mahāvīyutpatti*'s section on weapons as a translation of Sanskrit *śakti*.¹²⁶

The oldest sources that provide information on metalwork, weapons, and armour are the *Ziji* and the *Gesar Epic* (considering their earlier oral transmission). In particular, Shenrap Miwo's biography, *Ziji*, with its *zhang zhung* vocabulary and descriptions of metalwork, points to the origin of smithery in the Tibetan Empire during the first millennium BC. Although the editors of the text probably revised and adjusted the information to suit more modern conditions, the preserved vocabulary alone, with its abundance of types of metal and richness of military equipment, such as the various weapons, helmets and insignia assigned to various social classes, suggests that the text preserves ancient knowledge on state and military organisation, arms production, and warfare.¹²⁷ Since the empire of Zhang zhung is assigned to the western Tibetan region, the findings of this Bon source could indicate an influence or even introduction of iron technology from the west of Tibet. According to the present state of research, Tibet had strong ties with Central Asia, the Sasanians, and Sogdians from whom they imported weapons, armour, and mail, as well as knowledge of how to manufacture them. By contrast, forging is said to have developed in China only from the sixth century AD,¹²⁸ a fact that could explain the emergence of smithery centres in the Derge area in eastern Tibet. As we shall see, these metal weapons and armour, in particular, served as status symbols for political leaders.

The first historical references to ironwork in the Tibetan Empire occur in documents from the *Pelliot Tibétain* collection, which describe the use of metal weapons with an indirect reference to smithery. The frequent references to metal weapons in PT suggest also that metalwork was already well established by the beginning of the Tibetan empire, thus reinforcing the assumption of its early introduction in ancient Tibet. Therefore, by the eighth century, smithery appears to have been a common handicraft, introduced from the areas to the west and northwest of Tibet.

125 Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 272. See also Schmidt, *Wörterbuch*, 268.

126 Ishihama, Fukuda, *Mahāvīyutpatti*, 289, no. 6067; for *mdung*, see 6059, Sanskrit *kunta*; for a lance with three tips called *mdung rtse gsum pa*, Sanskrit *triśūla*, see 6064.

127 See Bellezza, *Zhang Zhung*, 238-44. Hummel, "Schmied in Tibet", 264 also dates ironwork to the first millennium BC, and bronze work that dates back even earlier than this. These theories would have to be proven by archaeological findings.

128 Clarke, "History of Ironworking in Tibet", 21-3. Hummel, "Schmied in Tibet", 263, also pointed to the Middle East as the source region for metallurgy in India and Central Asia. I also would like to thank Jampa Panglung, Veronika Ronge and Lobsang Yongdan for discussing this issue with me.

The entries in the Munich database stemming from these three sources equally mention, like the other weapons discussed so far, *mdung* as a tool which possesses magical power. In PT 1287, for example, *mdung* functions as a divine (*lha'i dkor*) or magical instrument (*'phrul gyi dkor*). As it acts by itself, this self-thrusting lance (*mdung rang 'debs*) grants enormous power and strength to a warrior.¹²⁹ Another story in PT 1287 reports golden spearheads (*gser gyi mdung rtse*) which the ruler Longam (Lo ngam) used as magical instruments. He attached them to oxen horns in order to attack *btsan* demons.¹³⁰ They are also the requisites of ministers, and to keep them functioning well, they had to be sharpened.¹³¹

As we have already seen above, a similar motif occurs in the Bon source *Ziji*, where the word *mdung mo* implies the warrior gods' action of magically thrusting. The tool, be it a spear or lance, needs no agent but works by itself. With an evocation, the warrior gods are called on to gather around specific magical weapons, including a bow (*gzhu mo*), arrow (*mda' mo*), and spear (*mdung mo*).¹³²

The power and speed of this weapon are exemplified in *The Conquest of the Fort of Sumpa*, which compares *mdung* with a meteor that hits a person's body.¹³³ The image of a meteor flying through the air suggests that *mdung* denotes here a throwing spear or javelin.

Another passage in the same text probably uses *mdung* to denote a different weapon. The story tells about warriors who fought in competitive duels in the past. The winner was only decided after two or more combats with several weapons. First, warriors fought with a

129 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 557, ll. 10-12: *lha 'i dkor mdung rang 'debs dang* [...] *'phrul gyi dkor ched po mnga' ba' rnam bdag la stsal na phod* // (If you grant me divine tools such as the lance that throws itself, [and other] great magical tools that you possess, I will have the courage [to fight]).

130 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 557, ll. 16-17: *'ung nas lo ngam gyis glang po brgya' la / gser gyi mdung rtse nyis brgya' rwa la btags te / rgyab du thal ba bkal nas / glang nang 'thab ste / thal ba gthor nas / de 'i nang du lo ngam gyis brgal to* // (After this, Longam attached two hundred golden spearheads (*mdung rtse*) to the horns of two hundred oxen and loaded ashes on their backs. He fought amidst these oxen and dispersed the ashes. Then, Longam attacked [the ruler] among them). For *mdung rtse*, see also Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 558, l. 57. The term *mdung rtse* refers to the tip of a spear just like *mda' rtse* refers to the tip of an arrow.

131 See O rgyan gling pa, *Gu ru pad ma 'byung gnas*, 314b ll. 2-3: *blon po rnam kyi mda' rtse mdung rtse bdar* //.

132 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 65, l. 6-66, l. 1: *sgra bla gnyan po rten du bzugs* [...] *gzhu mo rang bdung 'di la 'khor / mda' mo rang 'phen 'di la 'khor / mdung mo rang 'debs 'di la 'khor* // (Mighty warrior gods, stay as support. Assemble around the bow which stretches by itself. Assemble around the arrow which shoots by itself. Assemble around the sword which cuts by itself).

133 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 45a ll. 5-6: *nyi 'bum gyi gdong bkag nas 'phrul mdung me lce hur de skar mda' ltar rgyab byung ba'i* // (To defend against Nyibum, his magical lance [called] 'Sudden fire tongue' hit him like a shooting star).

mdung, which might denote a lance here, since fighters used them at some physical distance from their opponent. Then, they continued the fight with a *gri kha*, a term that can denote a simple knife but here probably also refers to a larger instrument, such as a sword, a curved dagger or a large knife. The fight was over when the warriors put away the *gri kha* by inserting it into its sheath (*gri shub*).¹³⁴

The database provides also the Sanskrit term *ka na ya* for spear. Its adoption emphasises the idea of the migration of terms and weapons across borders. The Gélukpa master Tsongkapa's (*rje* Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, 1357-1419) introduces this term for a spear of half length or a short spear in his *Collected Works* (*Gsung 'bum*). Here, it is a tool applied in a ritual. This corresponds with Edgerton's explanation in his *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, where he points out that the Sanskrit term is rare, a remark that could indicate that the weapon originated elsewhere.¹³⁵ Tsongkhapa describes a peculiarity of this spear or javelin, which is the rope attached to it that allows the warrior to pull it back after usage, a device which prevents the warrior from losing the weapon if he fails to hit his enemy. Apparently, the roped spear was used in Tibet. In a specific competition that combined riding and shooting, the rider flings the spear at a target whereby the rope allows him to drag it back immediately.¹³⁶

Kanaya is half a spear, a short spear with a rope attached to it. One winds up the spear and throws it. With the rope, one can pull it back.¹³⁷

In contrast to this, the *Mahāvīyutpatti* uses the Sanskrit term *prāsa* as equivalent for *mdung ngam thag mdung*; that is, a "spear (or lance, pike) or spear with a rope".¹³⁸ The database, however, has no reference for *thag mdung*.

To close this section, I wish to introduce a passage from the *Geography of Tibet* where the lance is ascribed a positive connotation.

134 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 129a l. 6-129b l. 2: *de nas mdung 'dren* [recte '*gran*] *byas / mtha' ma gri kha 'dren* [recte '*gran*] *kyang dpa' kha mnyam pa lta bu'i ngang der g.yu lha'i gri shub[s] nang du bcug nas //* (Then, they competed with lances, and finally with swords but, since their heroic power was relatively equal, Yulha inserted his sword into its sheath).

135 See Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid*, 165. *ka na ya*, Sanskrit *kanaya* or *kaṇaya*.

136 For the use of spears with a rope, called *thag mdung*, see Norbu, Turnball, *Tibet*, 73.

137 For this reference of Tsongkhapa, see Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, vol. 11, 33, l. 2: *ka na ya ni mdung phyed pa ste* [...] *mdung thung la thag pa btags yod pa mdung gsor nas 'phangs te / thag pa nas chur* [recte *tshur*] *'then pa gcig yod pa //*. With the same technique, the Tibetan monk warriors (*ldab ldob*) used a key and a type of knife with a string or a long leather handle, see Goldstein, "LDAB LDOB", 128.

138 See Ishihama, Fukuda, *Mahāvīyutpatti*, 289, no. 6058.

The Nakartse monastery (Sna dkar rtse) displays a lance in its temple for protective deities (*mgon khang*) that is dedicated to the guardian deity of the Sakya School, called the “Protector of the tent” (Gur gyi mgon). The weapon is famous for having killed thirteen enemies of Buddhism.¹³⁹ Here, it is turned into an object of veneration and “is said to bestow blessings”. This example shows the ambiguous attitude towards weapons in Buddhist contexts since many weapons are preserved in temples for protective deities.¹⁴⁰

3.6 Terms for Swords

In Asia, the Middle East and Europe, the sword has been the primary cutting and thrusting weapon of war since ancient times, and its shapes are manifold. The weapon is generally made of metal, and consists of a hilt, cross-guard and blade, which can be either straight or curved. In Tibet, as in other regions, the blade may be single, double-edged or even blunt. The blade’s tip may be pointed, edged, oblique, or rounded. This type of *mêlée* weapon includes also the curved sword or sabre, short sword and dagger.¹⁴¹

So far, only a few Tibetan sources dealing with the classification of swords have been introduced in Tibetan studies.¹⁴² These texts deal with topics related to objects of material culture, that is the manufacture of religious objects such as sculptures, liturgical bells, etc., and secular objects, including the production of silk or porcelain, and, on occasion, even swords. The swords’ function and mode of production might have led to their absence in some of these texts. In Tibetan cultural areas, the manufacture of sculptures and bells was considered a religious service, providing merit to the artisan although the smith performed this work. Blacksmithing was ascribed a different value and the status of the blacksmith appears to be ambiguous. On the one hand, blacksmiths were socially stigmatised and seem to have belonged to a lower social class. Their work was considered

139 Wylie, *Geography of Tibet*, 19, ll. 13-14 and 74. Interestingly, the enemies of the doctrine were, here, followers of the Drikung School.

140 For a study of the *mgon khang* in Likir Monastery in Ladakh, for example, see Jamspal, “The Gonkhang, Temple of the Guardian Deities”.

141 For variations of sword, sabre and dagger, see Boeheim, *Waffenkunde*, 230-304; for a definition of a sword, see the OED. For descriptions and photographs of swords found in Tibet, see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 146-73; for a depiction of a copper alloy dagger found in a tomb in Western Tibet, see Bellezza, *Besting the Best*, 206. The author states in fn. 27 that, “iron implements appeared in Xinjiang in the 10th to the 9th centuries BCE and became much more common in some regions, particularly around Tian Shan from the 8th century BCE”.

142 For the sources, see La Rocca, “The Connoisseurship of Swords”.

'black work' (*las nag*) because it required a high degree of physical exertion but was, nevertheless, poorly paid. Moreover, some of their activities conflicted with Buddhist doctrine, since they could produce tools for killing sentient beings. They contaminated fire (*thab grib*), insulted the respective goddess, and polluted themselves. Since we know that the smiths' status in eastern Tibet was better than in areas close to Indian borders,¹⁴³ we may infer that Indian concepts such as the Indian class system or Buddhist theories led to a degradation of the profession's social standing. On the other hand, smithery was important in warfare and the forging of a good sword blade required a high level of metallurgy and forging skills. Therefore, the blacksmith, who forged weapons, probably had a higher standing. Be that as it may, the Buddhist theories of killing, in some way, might have contributed to the rarity of passages dealing with armoury in written compositions.¹⁴⁴

According to an early fifteenth century compendium on material culture, Tibetans apply their own distinct categorisation of swords, which focuses on the blade, since this is the part that determines the weapon's efficaciousness. Two further works adopted this classification, which distinguishes five sword types: *zhang ma*, *sog po*, *hu phed* (*hu bed*, *hu ved*, *hu bde*) *dgu zi* (*gu zi*), and *'ja' ral*, together with their further subcategories.¹⁴⁵ The interpretation of these terms remains unclear. Like other classifications, they might denote regions, peoples, clans, or material. The authors assign the origin of the sword to different time periods, either to the period of transition from myth to history, namely during the times of Drigung Tsenpo (Gri gum btsan po), or further back, in mythical times. The story that dates the invention of the sword to mythical times leads also to Central Asia, specifically Mongolia. A Mongol smith is said to have forged the first sword out of iron. He had discovered this substance, which was the remnant

143 Iron working skills were concentrated in the Derge area, see Clarke, "History of Ironworking in Tibet", 25.

144 For more details on the evaluation of handicraft, and particularly the smith (*mgar ba*) in traditional Tibetan society, see Ronge, *Handwerkertum*, 30-44. For the Bon and Buddhist myths related to the smith, their cultural functions, and social status, see Hummel, "Schmied in Tibet". Although the etymology of names is not always straightforward, I would like to recall here the famous minister, Gar Tongtsen (Mgar stong btsan), whose name could point to a family of smiths who apparently attained political power. He was Tibet's regent until the reign of Songtsen Gampo (Srong btsan sgam po), and his whole family played a crucial role in the consolidation of the first Tibetan empire; see, for example, Shakabpa, *Tibet*, 25-31. I wish to thank Veronika Ronge and Lobsang Yongdan for discussing this matter with me.

145 For the sources, their discussion and translation, see La Rocca, "The Connoisseurship of Swords", 2014 and for a terminological list of all of these sword types, see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 264.

of the fights between the demigods and demons.¹⁴⁶ Another clue indicating this region is the name of one of the principal sword types: ‘Mongol’ (*sog po*). A similar story appears in the *Ziji* – we might assume that these stories reflect historical truth – which also provides a sword classification following the sword’s usage and function, indicating a focus on the blade.

3.6.1 The Sword (*ral gyi* and *ral gri*)

In this paragraph, I present a selection of Tibetan sources that refer to this close-combat weapon’s shape, use and accessories, such as the scabbard. The generic and most common term for a sword is *ral gri*. According to Jäschke, *ral gri* refers also to a “rapier and other thrust blades”.¹⁴⁷ The ancient Tibetan sources show that the compound *ral gyi* is an early variant of *ral gri*,¹⁴⁸ whereas the monosyllabic term *gri* generally denotes a smaller cutting instrument: a knife or dagger. However, throughout the centuries, Tibetan literature uses also *gri* as an abbreviation for *ral gri*, occasionally also to designate a sword.

Both variants, *ral gyi* and *ral gri*, occur in the early texts. The old Dunhuang documents, such as PT 1287, refer to *ral gyi*. Here, the weapon is among the gifts that a ruler called Waeyitsap (Dba’s dbyi tshab) presents as “support for the body” (*sku rten*). Other gifts are armaments, such as lamellar armour (*khra b bse*) and a sheath, here called *mdor cod*, made of white copper (*dong prom*).¹⁴⁹ Like other weapons, a sword called *ral gyi* together with a lance occur in PT 1287 as divine instruments that are endowed with the magical powers required by warriors to go into battle.¹⁵⁰

The *Gesar Epic*’s section *Conquest of the Fort of Sumpa* uses broadly the monosyllable *gri* to indicate a sword. Through stories of armed battles and wars, the tool here called *gri* apparently denotes a larg-

146 La Rocca, “The Connoisseurship of Swords”, 92.

147 See Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 525. Geshe Chödrak, *Brda dag*, 499, gives *dpa’ dam* as synonym for *ral gri*.

148 For *ral gyi*, see Schmidt, *Wörterbuch*, 541. Another variant is *ral kyu*, see Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabsal, *Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 246.

149 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 566, ll. 262-3, *sku rten du khra b bse’ sna bcu dang / ldong prom gyi ral gyi mdor cod / gnyis gsol to //*. For the interpretation of *mdor cod*, see Bialek, *Compounds and Compounding*, vol. 2, 201-2.

150 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 557, ll. 10-12: *mdung rang ’debs dang / ral gyi rang gcod dang / khra b rang gyon dang / phub rang bzur la stsogs pa / ’phrul gyi dkor ched po mnga’ ba ’i rnams bdag la stsal na phod //* (If you grant me divine tools, such as the lance that throws by itself, the sword that cuts by itself, the armour that is donned by itself, the shield that protects by itself, that is to say, the great magical tools you possess, I will have the courage [to fight]).

er cutting instrument, like a sword to fight with (*gri brgyab*).¹⁵¹ rather than simply a utilitarian knife. The text also provides some information on the material. Here, we learn that the *gri* can be made of bronze (*li*), in which case it is called *li gri*. The black sword (*gri nag*), instead, is probably made of a different material.¹⁵² The text exemplifies the effectiveness and sharpness of swords when it states that their stroke will not only cause wounds and cut clothing, but also shreds armour (*khra*).¹⁵³ A single sword stroke (*gri g.yug*) to the enemy's head can be fatal whereas the use of the sword's blunt edge (*gri ltag*) prevents one from killing.¹⁵⁴

The material of the sword was an important issue which is also addressed in texts translated from Sanskrit. Haribhaṭṭa provides some information in his *Jātakamāla* on one of the Buddha's former lives where he uses a poetic name to refer to a sword:

A skilful craftsman manufactures 'Essence of Glory' (*dpal gyi snying po*) [Sanskrit *śrīgarbha*] [i.e. a sword]¹⁵⁵ in the colour of sapphire resembling the cloudless sky. However, it is not made of metal that is impure; only bells are made of this.¹⁵⁶

It is noticeable that the sword is made of a better material than bells used as religious symbols or religious objects. One might ask why this text uses a poetic name for weapons, which like a secret name conceals the tool, including its manufacturing process. Did the writer of this legendary story on the Buddha's previous birth consider it inappropriate to record the direct designation of a tool that was used for violent acts, and therefore conceal it under the designation 'Essence of Glory'?

151 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 79b ll. 4-5: *dung skyong gi nub phyogs nas gri brgyab nas sum dmag 'phru ser can drug cu tсам tshags [recte chags] nyil du gtang byung ba'i //* (Dungkyong fought in the west with his sword and slaughtered about 60 soldiers of the Sumpa, wearing helmets with yellow plumes).

152 For *li gri*, see Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 116a ll. 4-5; for *gri nag*, see 42a ll. 3-4.

153 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 99b ll. 2-4.

154 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 102a ll. 3-4: *khos gri g.yug them gcig la lha khri'i dbu la phog nas klad pa skya tha le byas ste //* (With a single sword stroke, he hit Lhatri on his head and his brain was turned shimmering grey [i.e. it came out of the skull]); vol. 2, 167b ll. 2-3: *mi chung skrag nas gri ltag zhig brgyab pa'i mdzo'i rna ltag la phog nas //* (Since Michung was frightened, he hit the *dzo* above the ears with the blunt edge of his sword).

155 Zhang, *Tshig mdzod*, 1628, defines *dpal gyi snying po* as a "(*mngon*) *ral gri*".

156 Hahn, Klaus, *Mṛgajātaka*, 61, ll. 5-8: *bzo bo mkhas pas kyang ni sprin bral nam mkha' dang ni in dra ni la'i mdog 'dra ba'i / dpal gyi snying po byed de dri mas rtsub pa'i driil bur bcas [recte byas] pa'i lcags kyis ma yin no //*. The text translates *lcags* for Sanskrit *ayas* that is 'brass'.

The naming of swords is a common characteristic of the *Gesar Epic*. A certain Phungdü (Phung bdud) launches an attack by pulling his sword, called ‘Throne-cutting blue turquoise’ (Khri chod g.yu sngon) out of its sheath.¹⁵⁷ Another passage in the *Gesar Epic* compares the hilt (*thu ru*) with the part of the scale where the beams are tied together.¹⁵⁸ The more common term for hilt is *gri mgo*; literally, ‘the head of the sword’. This term and its labelling with a personal name emphasise the significance of this sword part,¹⁵⁹ as, to be used effectively, the hilt should fit perfectly into the warrior’s hand.

The challenge of determining with certainty whether or not *gri* refers to a sword or knife arises also in a far later source: the early eighteenth century decree issued by the Bhutanese leader, Drukpa Rinpoche (‘Brug pa rin po che). Here, the leader specifies fines for various offenses, including for thieves, murder, and fights. In this context, he mentions “drawing a sword” or “drawing a knife” (*gri ’bal*) as a punishable offense. Drawing a blade was considered an offence as it implied the adoption of an aggressive stance. Such instances must have occurred relatively frequently as, otherwise, legislation would have been unnecessary.¹⁶⁰

Before examining the *ral gri* more closely, I would like to point out that in the *Vinayavastu* of the Buddhist canon, the *Kanjur* (*Bka’ ’gyur*), the sword (*ral gri*) is assigned to a group of three weapons (*mtshon*), i.e. *ral gri*, *spu gri*, and *chu gri*. The text explains these as follows:

‘Giving him weapons’ means: a sword (*ral gri*), a very sharp knife (*spu gri*) or a curved knife (*chu gri*).¹⁶¹

This, and other quotes in the Munich Dictionary’s database sources are unrelated to military conflicts. The two knives called *spu gri* and

¹⁵⁷ Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 42a ll. 3-4: *ci cha med par phung bdud gyi gri nag khri chod [g].yu sngon de blug nas* // (Unexpectedly, Phungdü ran directly towards them by pulling his black sword ‘Throne cutting blue turquoise’ out of its sheath). This motif is not unique in a Tibetan cultural context but occurs also elsewhere, such as King Arthur’s sword called Excalibur; see Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 163-4.

¹⁵⁸ Stein, *L’épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 340, ll. 12-3: *thu ru yag gi ’dra ma la / rgya thur spor ring gshibs ’dra yod* //.

¹⁵⁹ Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 74a ll. 6: *ral gri stong chod me ’bar de’i gri mgo ’phur [recte khur] nas* // (Holding the hilt of his sword [called] Tongchö Me-bar). For findings of Tibetan hilts in the tombs of the Yarlung or *Spu rgyal* Empire kings, see Heller, “Tibetan Inscriptions”, 260.

¹⁶⁰ Aris, *History of Bhutan*, 160, ll. 9-11: *gri ’bal la gri chad / ’thab na ’thab chad* // (For drawing a knife, ‘knife penalty’, for fighting ‘fight penalty’).

¹⁶¹ *Bhikṣuṇīvinayavhibanga* (*Dge slong ma’i ’dul ba rnam par ’byed pa*), *Sde dge*, vol. 5, ‘Dul ba, ta, 53b ll. 4-5: *de la mtshon byin nam zhes bya ba ni ral gri’am / spu gri’am / chu gri’o* //.

chu gri are weapons used in single combat whereas the real military weapon in this threesome is *ral gri*. The term *spu gri* denotes a very sharp cutting instrument. As its size is apparently fluid, this term can refer to a razor but also to a sword or sickle.¹⁶² A precise translation of *chu gri* is difficult as well. It is often understood as a curved knife with a pointed tip and might have an enlarged blade in its middle. Both sides of the blade can be sharp. Dungkar (Dung dkar), in his dictionary, explains it as a flexible, unbreakable knife made of three different types of metal.¹⁶³ Therefore, *chu gri* could also denote any curved knife or a dagger, as this weapon is occasionally curved.¹⁶⁴

Let us now examine the sword as one of the traditional weapons employed in warfare. The *Vinayavastu* of the *Kanjur* designates it as one of the five insignia of royalty (*rgyal po'i mtshan ma lnga po*).¹⁶⁵ Its translation into Tibetan might have been one of the ways in which this concept entered Tibetan thought, although possibly not the only one. The concept of the sword being among the insignia of the Tibetan leader, the Tsenpo (*btsan po*), is likely to have arisen with the formation of separate dominions in the Tibetan Empire. The Tsenpo with a sword is a well-known motif in Tibetan myths and literature, where we read how Drigum Tsenpo descended from heaven. By brandishing the sword above his head, he inadvertently cut off the cord that had allowed his body's vital force or 'soul' to re-ascend to heaven after his death. This incident forced the Tsenpo to remain on earth from then onwards. When Jonang Tāranātha (1575-1634) tells this story, he refers specifically to a sword of the *gu zi* type, a heavy weapon with a blade patterned "like the Milky Way", said to originate in the times of Drigum Tsenpo.¹⁶⁶ This might be one of the factors that turned the sword into the symbol of kingship, although this attribute of leadership is not reserved for kings, but served minis-

¹⁶² Personal communication with Jampa Panglung, February 2020.

¹⁶³ See Dung dkar, *Tshig mdzod*, 819. Lin, *Systematisierung von gTo-Ritualen*, 176, footnote 999, describes *chu gri* as a short-crooked knife with a rippled blade. According to Bellezza, *Besting the Best*, 160, *chu gri* denotes a "scimitar", whereas the *ral gri* is "point shaped like the top of a frog's head; i.e. spatulate", and the *spu gri* is "light and shaped like a feather".

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, the drawing of a Turkish dagger in Boenheim, *Waffenkunde*, 298. Another term for a dagger or curved knife is *gri gug*; see Maurer, *Geomantie*, 144, ll. 25-6: *mda' dar dbu rgyan gri gug //*.

¹⁶⁵ The five insignia of a king are the turban, parasol, sword, yak tail with a precious handle, and magnificent shoes. See *Vinayavastu* (*'Dul ba gzhi*) of the *Kanjur*; see *Sde dge*, vol. 1, 'Dul ba, nga 70b ll. 5-6: *rgyal po'i mtshan ma lnga po ze'u kha dang / gdugs dang / ral gri dang nor bu'i rnga yab dang / lham khra bo rnam //*.

¹⁶⁶ Lhag pa tshe ring, *Myang yul*, 92, ll. 10-11: *rang gi ral gri gu zi klad la bskor bas / lha'i smu thag dang rkyang thag bcad pa //*. On the sword as an attribute of the Tsenpo, see also Heller, "Armor and Weapons", 36. For the *gu zi* or *dgu zi* sword, see La Rocca, "The Connoisseurship of Swords", 91-2, and 100-1.

ters and other leaders also as status symbols until modern times.¹⁶⁷

Swords occur also in the context of executions. This may be found in *The Prophecy of the Li Country*, where it is narrated that an executioner used a sword (*ral gri*) in an attempt to enforce the death penalty and kill the son of King Vijaya Jaya, prince Dondrö ('Don 'dros), who had offered his life to rescue a Chinese minister. An execution suggests the use of a large tool in order to maintain a considerable distance between the convict and executor, since the use of a small weapon is evidently impractical.¹⁶⁸ Tāranātha reports a similar incident, where an executioner killed someone with a sword.¹⁶⁹

Apart from its use in warfare, the sword appears as a tool in other contexts, such as Buddhist teachings, rituals, and divination. Together with mirrors, jewels, and daggers, it serves, for example, as a ritual item in a *maṅḍala*.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Buddhist texts can give the sword a positive meaning, such as the 'sword of wisdom' that helps a person to cut off or free the self from the net of negative emotions and defilements.¹⁷¹

3.6.2 Specific Terms in Bon Sources

Tibetan autochthonous literature, particularly Bon literature, contains several terms denoting large cutting or stabbing instruments. Texts such as the ritual manual *Sigyel* and Shenrap Miwo's biography *Ziji*, for

167 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 74a ll. 5-6: *sum blon [...] ral gri stong chod me 'bar de'i gri mgo 'phur [recte khur] nas //* (The minister of Sum pa held the hilt of his sword, Tongchö Mebar). Gampo Tashi Andrugsang, the leader of the Tibetan Freedom Movement, appears in his book in traditional Khampa dress, wearing a sword on the front of his stomach; see Andrugsang, *Four Rivers*, 57.

168 Emmerick, *Khotan*, 40-1: *gshed mas rgyal bu la ral gris btap pa na bcad 'phro nas 'o ma byung ste / ma gum nas rgya rje la sogs pa ngo mtshar rmad du gyur te //* (When the executioner struck the prince with his sword, milk flowed from the wound. He did not die, and the Chinese king and others were greatly amazed).

169 Schiefner, *Tāranātha*, 23, ll. 18-19: *gshed mas ral gri brdeg par brtsams pa na //* (When the executioner wanted to slay him with the sword); and 24, l. 7: *der gshed ma des ral gri thogs ste rgyugs nas byung ba na //* (Then, by holding his sword, the executioner lunged at him).

170 *Bdud rtsi bum pa'i lung (Instruction of the Nectar Vase)*, of the Kanjur, *Sde dge*, Rnying rgyud, 216b ll. 6-7: *me long bzhi dang ratna bzhi / ral gri bzhi dang phur pa brgyad / dkyil 'khor 'khor bar bskor te gzhaq //* (Four mirrors, four jewels, four swords, and eight daggers shall be placed in the *maṅḍala* circle). In other sources, such as geomantic texts, the sword is generally assigned to men; see Maurer, *Tibetische Geomantie*, 131, and for the German translation, 221. The sword is also one of the major requisites of the Tibetan State Oracle, and other oracles, see, for example, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons*, 420, 434.

171 The *Golden Light Sūtra* refers to the "sword of wisdom" (*ye shes ral gri*), see Nobel, *Goldglanz-Sūtra*, 45, l. 6: *ye shes ral gris nyon mongs rgya mo grol //*.

example, use the term *tsa kra* for a spear or sword.¹⁷² The word's origin is unknown although, phonetically, it may remind the reader of the Sanskrit *cakra*, the wheel. The *Sigyel* reveals two of the tool's characteristics: it is powerful and decorated with an engraved mantra.¹⁷³ In a story of the *Ziji*, an army of warrior gods (*sgra bla'i dmag*) holding a horse race uses the tool called *tsa kra mdung*. Since it is interpreted as a compound of synonyms, it points quite clearly to spears.¹⁷⁴

Moreover, the *Ziji* classifies weapons (*mtshon*) into specific groups or categories, such as the weapons of the warrior gods called *Ye*¹⁷⁵ (*ye'i mtshon*). These deities use three types of weapons, called *ya tsa*,¹⁷⁶ *skya' gam*,¹⁷⁷ and *shang lang*.¹⁷⁸ Their functional description implies edged weapons, such as swords and daggers. By assessing their cutting quality, the source differentiates three types of each. The following quote presents the three types of *skya' gam*, a double edged-sword:

There are three types of *skya' gam* swords:
the *skya' gam* that hits without trace,
the *skya' gam* that cuts a bird's feather in the wind and
the erected *skya' gam* that defeats the enemy.¹⁷⁹

It is worth noting here that an early sixteenth century work refers to subtypes of the so-called '*ja' ral* sword, one of which is called *skya phra ba*, which could be related to *skya* in the above.¹⁸⁰

172 Martin, "Zhangzhung", 64, derives *gra* or *gri* denoting the knife from *tsa kra*.

173 *Srid rgyal*, 13a l. 3: *tsa kra ngar ldan byang bu sngags kyi brgyan //*. A common meaning of the term *ngar* is 'sharp'. The mantras inscribed on a sword increase its power. For a discussion of the term *ngar*, and its interpretation as 'strength' or 'power' see Karmay, *Arrow and Spindle*, 341, footnote 14.

174 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 64, l. 2: *tsa kra mdung 'debs ljibs se ljibs //* (The spear that throws itself). The expression *ljibs se ljibs* is onomatopoeic for the swinging of a spear.

175 The term *ye* denotes "a class of non-humans or gods that is beneficial, helpful, useful", see Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabsal, *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 235.

176 See Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabsal, *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 231, here labelled as *zhang zhung* term for sword (*ral gri*), and a lance or spear (*mdung*). According to Bellezza, *Besting the Best*, 160, the *ya tsa* sword has a "jewel-shaped point".

177 Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabsal, *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 15.

178 Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabsal, *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 260, here described as "a sword with a broad blade".

179 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 352, ll. 6-353, l. 3: *skya 'gam rigs la rnam pa gsum / skya 'gam btab pa rjes med dang / skya 'gam bya sgro rtung chod dang / skya 'gam phyar ba dgra 'dul gsum //*. Further studies of the *Ziji* might bring further insights into the weapon terminology.

180 See La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 264.

Occasionally, the *Ziji* connects a specific warrior god with a particular weapon. The warrior god of the razor-sharp sword, for example, is Drama Welgi Ngarsochen (Dra ma dbal gyi ngar so can) or “the one who has the energy of the experienced blade”.¹⁸¹

3.7 Battleaxes (*dgra sta*), Hammers (*the'u*) and Iron Hooks (*lcags kyu*)

Three further weapons for armed fights and military attacks are battle-axes, hammers and iron hooks, which occur rarely in the literature. Both battle-axes and hammers date back to prehistoric times and had stone heads, later replaced with iron. In Europe, they were originally the weapons of foot soldiers and, from the mid-fourteenth century onwards, they were used by cavalry.¹⁸² All over Central Asia, India and China, they were used as well but archaeological finds are apparently rare.¹⁸³ They resembled the tools of laymen and workers, i.e. carpenters and woodcutters utilised these tools in their daily life. At the same time, they were also ritual objects or attributes of the guardian deities.¹⁸⁴ During wartime, they served as weapons and were common medieval offensive weapons,¹⁸⁵ also known in Tibet.

Tibetans call the battleaxe *dgra sta*, literally the ‘axe against the enemy’ or simply ‘weapon’. The term entered already the *Mahāvvyutpatti* where the translators chose *dgra sta* to render the Sanskrit *paraśuḥ*.¹⁸⁶ Both, Dagya and Geshe Chödrak explain *dgra sta*¹⁸⁷ in their dictionaries as a tool resembling an axe.¹⁸⁸ In our database, the references for the term *dgra sta* occur mostly in Buddhist literature translated from Sanskrit. The only autochthonous source available here is

181 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 63, ll. 1-2: *ya tsa dbal gyi sgra bla de / dra ma dbal gyi ngar so can //*.

182 On the use of battleaxes in Europe and connection with halberds, see Boenheim, *Waffenkunde*, 363-79; for the definition of ‘battleax’, see the OED.

183 For the axes’ material, shape, size, manufacture, and an illustration, see La Rocca, “Recent Acquisitions... Part 2”, 1-2. Battleaxes were used in Central Asia and India, see Rubinson, “Tillya Tepe”, 51; for a depiction of a Scythian battleaxe; see the catalogue on the exhibition *Gold der Skythen*, 224. The *Rāmāyaṇa* mentions also axes (*paraśu*) and war hammers (*mudgara*), see Goldman, Goldman, van Nooten, *Rāmāyaṇa*, 1559-60; see also Losch, “Abriß der Waffenkunde”, 213.

184 See La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 185.

185 For a survey of martels and poleaxes, see Boenheim, *Waffenkunde*, 363-79.

186 Ishihama, Fukuda, *Mahāvvyutpatti*, 289, no. 6065.

187 Geshe Chödrak, *Brda dag*, 141: *sta re lta bu phyag mtshon zhig //*; Dagya, *Tshig mdzod*, 129: *sta gri lta bu'i phyag cha zhig //*.

188 Both terms, *sta re* and *sta gri*, denote an axe; Geshe Chödrak, *Brda dag*, 352, explains *sta gri* and *sta re* as *shing gcod byed sta re la'ang //*. Dagya, *Tshig mdzod*, 309, defines *sta gri* as *shing gcod byed* and declares *sta re* a synonym (*sta gri dang don 'dra*).

the Bon source *Zermig* that tells a mythical story of a fight. Shenrap Miwo, the founder of the Bon religion, supported the mythical King Kongtse (Kong tse 'phrul gyi rgyal),¹⁸⁹ who attempted to defeat a *sin-bu* demon. Shenrap manifested himself as four deities with eighteen arms, each of which occupied one of the four directions. In one of his arms, he held an axe.¹⁹⁰ Although this story is a myth, it points to the use of axes that were known in the milieu where the myth was created. In another single combat, Shenrap Miwo uses a bronze and an iron hammer (*the'u*) to defeat a person called Tobudo (Gto bu do), who had mustered soldiers (*dmag bsogs*) to attack and kill Shenrap.¹⁹¹

Another weapon or tool of warfare is the iron hook (*lcags kyu*). According to the sources, the weapon was used in early Tibet. In the Indian cultural context, the elephant rider uses this hook to goad or direct his animal.¹⁹² However, this might not apply to the Bon source *Ziji* which assigns the hook to the warrior gods who use it during warfare. By ascribing it the power to grasp a person by itself, it is, like other weapons, endowed with magical power. The warrior gods gather hooks and lassos to arrange them when they are preparing for war.¹⁹³

3.8 The Dagger and the Stake

The ritual weapon *per se* is a dagger called *phur ba* (or *pa*) or *phur bu*, a term that also denotes utensils such as pegs, pins, or nails and actual weapons or instruments of torture; for example, pikes and stakes. The shape and material of a dagger depend on its use. As a ritual instrument, it usually has a three-edged blade and is made of iron or wood. Tibetan texts provide some information on the dagger's material, commonly various kinds of wood such as burberry (*skyer phur*), walnut (*star ga'i phur pa*), or acacia (*seng phur*). Given the various

189 On Kongtse, see Lin, "Image of Confucius".

190 Tenzin Namdak, *Gzer mig*, 775, l. 6: *gcod pa'i dgra sta //*. Further weapons are the sword (*ral gri*) and various types of knife, such as *chu gri*, *spu gri*, *thu lu*, *ya lad*, and so on.

191 Tenzin Namdak, *Gzer mig*, 99, l. 4: *chu gri mkhar [recte 'khar] the'u dang lcags the'u //* (A curved dagger, a bronze hammer, and an iron hammer). The hammer recalls demons called *the'u* or *the'u rang*, an ancient class of evil demons but related to the Tibetan *tsempo*, since Nyatri Tsenpo (Nya 'khri btsan po), the "Neck throne King", is said to be "a descendant of one of the nine *the'u rang*"; see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons*, 283.

192 Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 302, refers to the Indian elephant goad as an iron hook, in Sanskrit called *anukṣa*.

193 In Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 63, l. 4, and 66, l. 1: *lcags kyu rang 'dzin 'di la 'khor //* (The iron hook which grasps by itself). And 64, ll. 1-2: *dgu khri dgu 'bum sgra bla'i dmag [...]* *lcags kyu zhags bsdog wangs se wang //* (The army of the 990,000 warrior gods arranges their iron hooks and lassos).

weapons that the ritual specialist uses, we might assume that the dagger is based on the prototype of a real weapon.¹⁹⁴ Since it is difficult to distinguish between daggers and short swords, their range of use is likely to have been similar.¹⁹⁵ Stakes appear not to have been used directly to defeat an enemy in military combat, but could be used as tools for the execution of an enemy. An incident of this kind is reported in the following passage from the *Religious History of Khotan*:

They fettered him with iron fetters, tied him to an iron pike, and burned him like one burns a sparrow in a fire.¹⁹⁶

Several autochthonous and translated texts, such as the *Mirror of Royal Genealogies*, the *Flower Garland*, and the *Biography of Padmasambhava*, report impalement as a royally decreed punishment. However, the most frequent mentions of *phur ba* occur during rituals where the ritual specialist imagines the destruction of evil forces. His action with the dagger is identical to its real use, here it is based on the mental imagination: as a stabbing instrument to subdue terrifying deities,¹⁹⁷ as a requisite attribute of a goddess, or during a *Gto* ritual.

4 Protective Gear

4.1 Armour and Shield

In the final section we shall examine the different kinds of protective gear, including armour, shields, and helmets. Tibetan culture knows a broad variety of armour which was made of metal, such as iron and bronze, leather or rawhide, and textiles, occasionally silk. In particular, armour made of lamellae (*byang bu*),¹⁹⁸ or lamellar armour, spread from East Asia across Europe. Less common, apparently, were coats of mail or mail shirts.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ For a study on daggers as ritual weapons, see Grimaud, Grimaud, *Les dagues rituelles*.

¹⁹⁵ For a depiction and description of a Central or West Asian dagger, see La Rocca, "Recent Acquisitions... Part 2", 2-3.

¹⁹⁶ Emmerick, *Khotan*, 89. ll. 94-95: *lcags thag gis bcings nas / lcags kyi phur pa la dkriste* [recte *dkris te*] / *ce sha btso ba bzhin du zhugs la bsregs nas* //.

¹⁹⁷ The passage occurs in *Bdud rtsi bum pa'i lung* (*Amṛtakalaśasiddhi*) of the *Kanjur*, *Sde dge*, Rnying rgyud, ga 216b l.1: *rang byung khro bo chen po bcus / phyogs mtshams phur pas btab nas ni / gnas dang sa gzhi dag par sbyang* //.

¹⁹⁸ At this stage, there is no reference for *byang bu* as a lamellar armour in the Munich's Dictionary database.

¹⁹⁹ For detailed descriptions and depictions, see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 51-66, 124-7, 144-5. Mongol armour is depicted in the catalogue on an exhibition

The terms for protective apparatus, such as armour, are numerous: *khrab ma*,²⁰⁰ *khrab bse*, *a khrab*, *go khrab*, *go cha*, and *dgra cha*. Jäschke translates *khrab* as a “shield, buckler, coat of mail, scales”. He points out that the term’s original meaning was the “scale(s) of a fish”, and secondly a “coat of mail”. The origin of the name appears clear as the lamellae of Tibetan armour, as a covering for the body, resemble the scales of a fish.²⁰¹ Tibetan military culture knows also single armoured pieces, such as protection for the arms, forearms, shoulders, knees, and trunk. Specific elements, such as ‘mirrors’ and belts, can complement the outfit. The ‘mirrors’ are worn above the coat of mail and provide additional protection for breast, back and flanks. This quadruple protection was also used in Persia and India, whereas the European gear focused predominantly on the protection of the chest.²⁰² Other military requisites are the shield (*phub* or *phub mo*), usually round and made of cane or leather with pieces of iron and brass,²⁰³ and the helmet to protect the head, called *rmog* and also by its honorific *dbu rmog*.

The compounds derived from *khrab* denote more specific types of armour, depending on its material or shape. The *Mahāvvyutpatti* gives Sanskrit *paṭṭikāsamāha* as a synonym for *khrab*.²⁰⁴ Tibetan dictionaries refer to some of these terms, together with the weapon’s material. Jäschke and Schmidt, for example, both refer to *go khrab* as a “coat of mail with a helmet, armour”.²⁰⁵ According to the dictionaries of Daggyab and Geshe Chödrak, armour (*go khrab*) was commonly made of metal, but could also be of other material.²⁰⁶ As we have already seen, their explanation of *go cha* is similar, but Daggyab mentions explicitly the helmet: armour, the helmet, and other

on Chinggis Khan, see Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Dschingis Khan und seine Erben*, 99-100. For the spread of various types of suits of armour, in Europe, see Boeheim, *Waffenkunde*, 120-68; for details of the mail shirts, see 148.

200 See Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 49. His information is apparently based on Schmidt, *Wörterbuch*, 54: “Harnisch, Panzer, Schild, Schuppen”.

201 La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 51-67. For lamellar armour on excavated coffin panels, see Heller, “Tibetan Inscriptions”, 260.

202 For depictions and descriptions, see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 126-43, and Boeheim, *Waffenkunde*, 104.

203 For depictions of shields, see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 92-5, and in this issue. For the great variety of shields in Europe made of various materials and of every shape, see Boeheim, *Waffenkunde*, 169-92.

204 Ishihama, Fukuda, *Mahāvvyutpatti*, 289, no. 6053. Sanskrit *paṭṭikā* denotes here a board, plate, or piece of cloth; see Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English*, under *paṭṭakā* 579.

205 See Schmidt, *Wörterbuch*, 71; Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 70-1.

206 Daggyab, *Tshig mdzod*, 101: *lus skyob pa'i lcags sogz kyi go khrab //*.

military equipment.²⁰⁷ Since the *Mahāvvyutpatti* refers to *khraḥ*, we might consider it as old linguistic material, i.e. language that existed in the eighth century.²⁰⁸ The impact of Buddhist thought becomes obvious when the source that was written during the initial spread of Buddhism in Tibet (*snga dar*) states that, those who wore armour (*go cha*) were held in low regard, and considered disqualified to receive the dharma teachings.²⁰⁹

The early sources of the *Pelliot Tibétain* collection (PT 1287) report the body's protection during fighting:

As support for the body, he bestowed ten different lamellar armours (*khraḥ bse*) and two sheaths of white copper.²¹⁰

The syllable *bse* in the compound *bse khraḥ* is often referred to as a 'rhinoceros'. As rhinoceroses are of course not endemic in Tibet, the designation assimilates the hardness of tanned, processed leather to the mythical toughness of a rhino's skin.²¹¹ In fact, Tibetan *bse*, short for the compound *bse ko*, denotes tanned leather. Therefore, I follow Jäschke's interpretation of *bse khraḥ* as "a coat of mail made of leather".²¹² Leather made from the skin of yak and sheep, for example, rather than rhinoceroses, was used in Tibet, particularly if it was needed in large amounts to produce shields for the infantry.

As in the case of weapons, PT 1287 denotes specific kinds of armour as divine tools. Through their supernatural actions, they protect the warrior's body by operating as if by magic: the armour (*khraḥ*)

207 Dagyab, *Tshig mdzod*, 102: *khraḥ rmog sogs g.yul gyi cha lugs*; Geshe Chödrak, *Brda dag*, 118, defines *go cha* and *go khraḥ* as "iron cloth to protect the body" (*lus skyob lcags gos lta bu*).

208 For *go cha*, see the explanations in this article under § 2.2. The dictionary quotes another term that I had not encountered in the literature previously, *ya lad*, commonly used to indicate armour but also a helmet (*ya lad ni go cha spyi dang skabs thob kyis rmog gi ming la 'jug pa'ang yod*). See also Ishihama, Fukuda, *Mahāvvyutpatti*, 288, no. 6049, here for Sanskrit *kavaca*, which is, according to Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English*, 262: "armour, cuirass, coat of mail".

209 Ishihama, Fukuda, *Mahāvvyutpatti*, 402, no. 8563: *go cha gyon pa la chos mi bshad* for Sanskrit *na saṃnaddhāya dharmam deśayisyāmaḥ*.

210 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 566, ll. 262-3: *sku rten du khraḥ bse' sna bcu dang / ldong prom gyi ral gyi mdor cod / gnyis gsol to //*.

211 See, for example, the glossary of La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 271. For a further analysis, see Bialek, *Compounds and Compounding*, vol. 2, 356-65.

212 For the interpretation of *bse* as leather, see also Kōhalmi, "Abschnitt der Waffenbehälter", 204. Also, see Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 593. For a depiction and description of leather lamellar armour made in Eastern Tibet, see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 124-5, and in this issue. The tanner's social standing was low since he dealt indirectly with the death of sentient beings and committed inauspicious deeds or sins, called *sdig las*; see Ronge, *Handwerkertum*, 35.

puts itself onto the body, and the shield (*phub*) parries by itself.²¹³ The lamellar quality of armour might have inspired the description found in the *Gesar Epic*, where it is said to be made of shells.²¹⁴

A Bon myth assigns a divine or celestial origin to protective armour. A passage in the *Ziji* relates the myth of how an egg originated from the celestial womb through the power of the Gods. This egg unfolded as a series of tools to protect warriors: the shell served as armour, the caul as a protective weapon, the egg white turned into a potion to strengthen the hero, and the yolk into a stronghold in which to hide.²¹⁵ The same source emphasises the significance of body protection, which could be acquired through either common means or magic. An invocation can summon the warrior gods to draw near to military equipment, that is a helmet (*zhog zhun ke ru*) – which will be discussed below –, a blue chain armour (*'bum dbyel*), and a shield (*phub mo*) that spontaneously attach themselves to the body.²¹⁶ Only the term for the shield is Tibetan, the origin of the two other terms is unknown. They could – due to the close relation of Bon with Zhangzhung – originate in *zhang zhung* language but also in other Central Asian languages. In a subsequent passage, the *Ziji* refers to another term for armour, which is not documented elsewhere: *yo ling*.²¹⁷

Armour does not, however, guarantee the physical integrity of the warrior's body. The *Conquest of the Fort of Sumpa* shows that a hard blow, such as a strike with a sword, could destroy the body's protection and thus wound the body.

213 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 557, ll. 11-12: *khrab rang gyon dang / phub rang bzur la stsogs pa / 'phrul gyi dkor ched po mnga' ba 'i rnam s bdag la stsal na phod* // (The armour that dons itself, the shield that protects by itself; that is to say, the great magical tools [...]). In this context, a phrase in the *Flower Garland* is noteworthy as it points to the mindset regarding weapons in the early Tibetan kingdom: “When Songtsen Gampo erected the first Buddhist temples to pacify the country under the guidance of his wife, Wengcheng, he constructed a temple resembling a man wearing armour consisting of five pieces (*skyes zhub sna lnga gyon pa 'dra*) in the north of the Yarlung Empire”. See Uebach, *Nelpa Paṇḍita*, 92-3, fol. 8b7.

214 Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar*, 220, l. 20: *dung khrab dkar mo lha bzang gcig* //.

215 Snellgrove, *Nine Ways of Bon*, 60, ll. 24-9: *sgong shun skyob pa'i go ru srid / bdar sha srung ba'i mtshon du srid / sgong chu dpa' ba'i ngar chur srid / sgong pri 'khra ba'i mkhar du srid* // The syllable *go* is understood as an abbreviation of *go cha*.

216 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 65, l. 5-66, l. 1: *go cha sna dgu rten du 'dzugs / sgra bla gnyan po rten du bzhugs / zhog zhun ke ru 'di la 'khor / 'bud* [recte *'bum*] *dbyel sngon mo 'di la 'khor* [...] *phub mo rang 'khyil 'di la 'khor* // (I set up nine types of armour as support. You mighty warrior gods, stay as support. Assemble here near the helmet, assemble here near the blue chain armour, assemble here near the shield that surrounds the body by itself) Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabсал, *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 174 gives *'bub dbyel* for “armour or coat of mail”.

217 Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 66, ll. 4-5: *dgra la rbad na yo ling thobs* [recte *thogs*] // (When I fight the enemy, be [literally hold] my armour). Could *yo ling* be related to Mongolian *jolisu*, see Lessing, *Mongolian-English*, 959: “fish skin, fish-skin clothes”?

The blow [with the sword] hit the left shoulder of Zhelkar, and tattered his armour and clothes completely. Inside, quite a big wound appeared.²¹⁸

Tibetan literature preserved the term *khrab* or its compounds until at least the eighteenth century. The above-mentioned decree by Pholhané from 1727 reports on the clothes worn during warfare: they are a type of quilted jacket (*ol sbog*) which was made of textiles, leather, and iron, and armour (*a khrab*).²¹⁹ Like other terms in this document, the term for the quilted jacket is borrowed from the Mongolian term *olbuy* that denotes a “quilted jacket worn under armor”.²²⁰

The value and desirability of armour and protective clothes is illustrated by the fact that we possess records which show that these objects were bestowed on soldiers and warriors as an honour for their outstanding merit. The *Sources of the History of Bhutan* report on a kind of robe of honour: a sash (*dpa' dar*) and gown (*rgyab bkab*) were given to military heroes, particularly those who had killed one or two enemies.²²¹

4.2 The Helmet

The armour for the head is the helmet, called *rmog* or the honorific *dbu rmog*. It is mainly made of metal, i.e. iron and copper alloy, partly brass, silver and gold, and single parts can be made of leather and textiles. The bowl can consist of a single piece, as four or eight plates, or be a multi-plate helmet with 31 to 64 lames. The great variety of styles reflects influences from all over Asia, including Central Asia, Mongolia, China, and Korea. Helmets can be simple, or decorated with scripts, Buddhist symbols, or other decorative motives, known from other pieces of Tibetan Art. Most common were helmets with a bowl consisting of a single piece or eight plates.²²² The writ-

218 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 99b ll. 2-4: *rdeb ma de zhal dkar gyi dpung g.yon pa'i steng du phog nas khrab gos rnam khrig ger'bcad nas nang du gri rmas che tsam byung ba'i //*.

219 Schuh, *Siegelkunde*, 84, ll. 34-6. For the German translation of the document, see 85 and 102. For Mongol textile armour, see the depiction in the catalogue by the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Dschingis Khan und seine Erben*, 100.

220 See Lessing, *Mongolian-English*, 608.

221 Aris, *History of Bhutan*, 144, ll. 29-146, l. 2: *mi gsad re gnyis mar dpa' dar rgyab bkab sogs gang 'os byed pa'i //* ([Soldiers] who have killed one or two persons should be treated according to their merits and given 'hero sashes' and gowns').

222 See La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 3-7, 68-91, and for helmets with lamellar armour, see 51-65.

ten sources in the database provide limited information about helmets' shapes or materials, but occasionally comment on their decoration. When discussing the helmet's material, the *Ziji* uses another term for helmet: the compound *zhog zhun* or *zhog zhun ke ru*.²²³ The term *zhun*, short for *zhun dkar*, might be understood as iron, and hereby indicates that metalwork was involved.²²⁴ In this context, the helmet forms part of the military equipment of particular warrior gods.²²⁵ The *Mirror of the Royal Genealogies* refers to a helmet decorated with precious stones, such as beryl and other gems.²²⁶

Nevertheless, the sources shed some light on the helmet's symbolism. In particular, ancient Tibetan sources, such as inscriptions on stone pillars and the documents of the *Pelliot Tibétain* collection, repeatedly refer to the "firm helmet" (*dbu rmog brtsan po* or *dbu rmog btsan po*), an expression related to kingship. The following quote from a stone pillar originating at the end of the eighth century in Chongye ('Phyong rgyas) emphasises the significance of the helmet by pointing out its splendour:

The gods, rulers, fathers, and forefathers came as the sovereigns of gods and people. By tradition, the laws and principles were good. Their mighty helmets were magnificent.²²⁷

Later, this stone pillar describes how the dominion developed under "the magnificence of the firm helmet"²²⁸ and how the countries unified under the firm helmet.²²⁹ Texts from the *Pelliot Tibétain* collec-

²²³ Tenzin, Namdak Nyima, Rabsal, *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*, 221, quotes *zhog zhun ke ru* and *zhog dkar ke ru* as "one kind of helmet".

²²⁴ For more details on the terms etymology and on the distinction of various helmets according to social rank, see Bellezza, *Zhang Zhung*, 240-1, also footnotes 112 and 114. The term *ke ru* or *ke ke ru* denotes a precious stone but also "the badge of a particular rank of military office".

²²⁵ Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, *Gzi brjid*, vol. 2, 62, ll. 6-63, l. 1: *zhog zhun ke ru'i sgra bla de / dra ma lcags kyi bya ru can //*. See also 65, l. 6.

²²⁶ Sørensen, *Royal Genealogies*, 202. Kuznetsov, *gSal ba'i me long*, 72, ll. 24-6: *rin po che bai dūrya'i rmog la / pad ma ra ga'i 'phra rgyab pa cig skur nas //*

²²⁷ Li, Coblin, *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*, Inscription V, 299, ll. 1-4: *lha btsan po yab myes lha dang myi'i rjer gshegs te / chos gtsug lag ni lugs kyi bzang / dbu rmog brtsan po ni byin du che'o' //*

²²⁸ Li, Coblin, *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*, Inscription V, 229, ll. 11-5: *chos rgyal chen pos phrin las su ci mdzad pa dang / dbu rmog brtsan po'i byin gyis / chab srid skyes pa la[s] stsogs pa'i gtam gyi yi ge / zhib mo gcig ni //* (A detailed account of the deeds performed by the dharma king and how the empire grew under the splendour of his firm helmets).

²²⁹ Li, Coblin, *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*, Inscription V, 229, ll. 16-22: *byin gyi sgam dkyel chen po dang / dbu rmog brtsan pos [...] chab 'og 'du ste //*. The passage refers to Trisong Detsen (Khri srong lde brtsan) and states that "due to the profound depths of his splendor and his firm helmet, [the people] united during his reign". Similarly, Inscription IV, ll. 7-8: *lha sras kyi chab srid 'dj ltar mtho / dbu rmog brtsand //* (The reign of the di-

tion, such as PT 16 and PT 1287, use phrases such as “the reign of the stable helmet”²³⁰ and “a helmet more stable than a mountain”.²³¹ This wording suggests that the helmet not only refers to a practical tool that protects the ruler’s head but also implies an abstract meaning. The helmet’s firmness on the king’s head becomes a symbol of kingship and authority. A quote from PT 1286 underpins the suggestion that the meaning *dbu rmog* extends beyond the concrete meaning of ‘helmet’:

If mighty kings and very prudent ministers who mutually fought each other were subdued, in the end, they did not withstand [the king] Öde Pugyel (‘O lde spu rgyal).²³²

The meaning of the verb *thub* is ‘to be able, to be possible’ and ‘to withstand’. Therefore, the wording *dbu rmog ma thub* emphasises the argument for an abstract meaning of *dbu rmog* which symbolised royal authority and leadership from the time of the Yarlung Empire onwards.²³³

Apart from being a symbol of kingship, the helmet, or more exactly, its plume on top, serves to identify the warriors involved in combat. The *Conquest of the Fort of Sumpa* refers to helmets with plumes (‘*phru*) of different colours: the helmet with a white plume,²³⁴ yellow,²³⁵

vine son was similarly noble and his helmet firm). See also Inscription 12, East, ll. 53-4: *dbu rmog brtsan / bka’ lung gnyan te* // (His helmet was firm and his advice was strict).

230 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 1, pl. 8, fol. 25b l. 4, *dbu rmog btsan pa’i chab srid* //.

231 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 583, ll. 188-9: *chab srid gnam bas mtho / dbu rmog ri bas brtsan te* // (A reign higher than the sky, a helmet more stable than a mountain).

232 Spanien, Imaeda, *Documents Tibétains*, vol. 2, pl. 555, ll. 26-9: *rgyal po btsan ba dang / blon po ‘dzangs pa dku’ bo che rnam kyis / gchig gis gchig brlag ste / ‘bangs su bkug na / mtha’ ma ‘o lde spu rgyal gyi dbu rmog ma thub ste* //.

233 For the symbolic meaning of *rmog* and *dbu rmog*, see also Tucci, “Kings of Ancient Tibet”, 199-200. This is one of the early names for Tibet since initially the kings of Yarlung unified the country. Another and earlier name is *Spu rgyal* Empire, a toponym derived from the Yarlung kings called *Spu lde gung rgyal* and ‘*Od lde spu rgyal*, see Sørensen, Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, 42 fn. 10.

234 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 74a ll. 4-5: *de nub phyogs nas rbab rgod ‘gril ‘gril byas nas dmag ‘phung dkar can brgya tsam bcom nas ‘ong skabs* // (From the west, he annihilated about 100 soldiers of the army wearing helmets with white plumes like an avalanche rolling down). The text does not mention the material of the helmet’s decoration. It might consist of feathers. For depictions of helmets with plumes, see Richardson, *Ceremonies*, 36-7.

235 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 80, 79b ll. 4-5: *dung skyong gi nub phyogs nas gri brgyab nas sum dmag ‘phru ser can drug cu tsam tshags [recte chags] nyil du gtang byung ba’i* // (Dungkyong (Dung skyong) fought in the west with his sword and slaughtered about 60 soldiers of the Sumpa, wearing helmets with yellow plumes).

or blue plume.²³⁶ Apparently, the colourful decoration on the helmet identifies the warriors as members of a particular community or might serve to identify the various armies. A Chinese source, for example, points out that, prior to an attack, the Huns arranged their horses in the four directions according to the colours of the horses' coats. Here, the order apparently follows the Chinese elements.²³⁷ The quotes in the *Conquest of the Fort of Sumpa* might imply similar concepts. The text even refers to the helmet with the head as some kind of trophy.²³⁸

Carry a sword and a bowl wherever you go because you never know if you'll meet a friend or a foe.²³⁹

5 Final Remarks

Tibetan literature, beginning from its earliest sources originating in the inscriptions from Central Tibet until the eighteenth century as well as the oral tradition, provides manifold information on weapons' terminology and usage in Tibet. The texts relate stories of material culture, and reveal directly or indirectly the human skills of processing wood, leather, metal, and other materials, such as feathers or hemp. The sources discussed here allow us to group the weapons used in the Tibetan cultural area into three types.

The first group comprises miscellaneous tools which resemble or are identical to the tools of everyday life, such as iron hooks, hammers, and axes. The rarity of written evidence makes further conclusion difficult. Since metal work was apparently common during the Yarlung Empire, we might, however, assume that these were in Tibet, as in Europe, the weapons of foot soldiers, those of the lower social stratum, or commoners. This, however, does not exclude the upper class from using them as well: particularly precious models of these common weapons and tools were also manufactured for and used by rulers, kings and others of the upper class.

The second group comprises the weapons that were primarily used for hunting, such as lassos, slings, bows, and arrows. The weapons' use required specific skills and physical strength in order to be ef-

236 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 92b l. 4-93a l. 1: *shar phyogs nas* [...] '*phru sngon can mang du* // (From the east many [soldiers] wearing helmets with blue plumes).

237 See Chen, "Chinese Symbolism", 63.

238 Kaschewsky, Tsering, *Burg von Sumpa*, vol. 2, 77a ll. 4-5: *mgo 'phru gong len byas nas* // (Having taken the head and the top ornament as trophy).

239 Lhamo Pemba, *Tibetan Proverbs*, 36: *gri dang phor pa gang 'gror 'khyer / dgra dang grogs la gang yong med* //.

fective, but their manufacture required comparably little effort and could be accomplished using natural materials, although iron was used for arrowheads. In ancient or traditional societies, they were the means for survival, helping to provide protection and food security. Since they were common hunting weapons, they might also be regarded as the weapons of the commoners. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the upper class also used bows and arrows, in particular those which were manufactured of special materials and decorated.

The third and final group includes weapons and equipment that were specifically produced for combat and warfare, such as swords, spears, and pikes as weapons, and suits of armour, shields, and helmets as protective gear. Their production required the human skill of metal processing. These were the weapons of warriors and leaders. In particular, swords and helmets were related to kingship, authority, reign, and dominion, both in Tibet and in other cultural contexts.

Last, the analysis of the various literary contexts in which the weapon terms are to be found has shown the broad range of the weapons' semantic use, not only as physical instruments in war, in religious or everyday life contexts but also as metaphorical, symbolic images. Moreover, the terms adopted from other languages such Sanskrit or Mongolian emphasise the transfer and spread of military knowledge including military equipment from neighbouring countries.

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