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Peer reviewed
ḥdug as a testimonial marker in Classical and Old Tibetan

Nathan W. Hill
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ABSTRACT
DeLancey (1992) and Hongladarom (1994) suppose that ḥdug means 'sit' in Old and Classical Tibetan, and that these languages entirely lack the evidential use of this morpheme well known in 'Lhasa' Tibetan. In contrast, Denwood (1999) sees the Classical Tibetan use of ḥdug as broadly in keeping with its function in 'Lhasa' Tibetan. An examination of examples from Old and Classical Tibetan suggests that evidential uses of ḥdug emerged late in the Old Tibetan period and that the meaning 'sit' is idiosyncratic to the Mdzaṅs blun.

KEYWORDS
Old Tibetan, Classical Tibetan, evidentiality, mirativity, testimonial, copula
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1 Introduction

The morpheme ḡdug and its role in the inflection of the “Lhasa”2 Tibetan verbal system has received considerable attention (cf. Hill 2012 and citations therein). Following Tournadre (1996: 224-226, 2008: 295) the term ‘testimonial’ serves here to designate the meanings of ḡdug to indicate sensory evidence as information source. The use of ḡdug in literary sources has received less attention. Noting that the apparent cognate of ḡdug in Balti dialect means ‘sit’, Scott DeLancey writes that the “implied conclusion that ḡdug was a lexical verb ‘sit’ until well after the differentiation of Proto-Tibetan is also supported by philological evidence. Classical Tibetan ḡdug retains in earlier texts the sense of ‘sit, dwell, reside, stay’” (1992: 52). DeLancey however neither provides this philological evidence nor cites these early texts. Krisadawan Hongladarom in agreement with DeLancey’s view writes that the “original meaning is ‘sit, stay, remain,’” (1994: 673) and concludes that “upon examining documents in OT [Old Tibetan], we see that ḡdug (and other verbs) do not develop evidential meaning until much later” (1994: 682). In contrast to DeLancey and Hongladarom, Philip Denwood remarks that in Classical Tibetan ḡdug “usually has strongly the sense of discovery that it retains in Lhasa Tibetan” (1999: 246). The disagreement between DeLancey and Hongladarom on the one hand, and Denwood on the other hand indicates the inadequacy of the five passages so far discussed to decide whether the testimonial meaning that ḡdug bears in Lhasa dialect is also present in Old and Classical Tibetan.

2 The place of ḡdug in the “Lhasa” Tibetan verbal system

Before turning to the function of ḡdug in Classical Tibetan a reprise on the function of ḡdug in the “Lhasa” Tibetan verbal system has its place. The analysis presented follows that proposed by Tournadre in a number of publications (e.g. Tournadre 1996, 2008, Tournarde and Dorje 2009). However, what is here called ‘personal’ Tournadre refers to as ‘egophoric’ and what is treated here as the perfect testimonial Tournadre classifies as a separate information source, namely ‘inferential’ (Tournadre and Dorje 2009: 140-144, 413). DeLancey (1992) inappropriately describes the “Lhasa”

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1 I would like to thank the British Academy for support during the course of this research.
2 Ideally one should draw a distinction among the language of the city of Lhasa itself, other dialects of Central Tibet, and the lingua franca of the Tibetan diaspora (Miller 1955, Róna-Tás 1985: 160-161). However, the literature does not maintain this distinction.

“Lhasa” Tibetan exhibits a three-way paradigmatic evidential contrast within the forms of the verb ‘to be’ (cf. Table 1) and across affixes encoding tense categories; the three evidential categories are ‘personal’, ‘factual’, and ‘testimonial’ (cf. Table 2). In non-finite clauses the difference among these three is often neutralized in favour of the personal (cf. Chang and Chang 1984: 607-608; DeLancey 1990: 298).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existential copula</th>
<th>Equational copula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>yod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual</td>
<td>yod-pa-red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonial</td>
<td>ḫug</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The “Lhasa” Tibetan copula system

The three existential copulas can all also function as equational copulas in circumstances that are poorly understood (Garrett 2001: 70, 91; Chonjore 2003: 207; Tournadre and Dorje 2009: 100-102). As an equational copula ḫug is restricted to use with adjectival predicates (Garrett 2001: 68). For the topic at hand, it merits mention that the interrogative form of red-bzag is red-ḥug, and it is negated as red-mi-ḥug (cf. Tournadre and Dorje 2009: 411).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Perfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>V-gi-yin</td>
<td>V-gi-yod</td>
<td>V-pa-yin / byun⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual</td>
<td>V-gi-red</td>
<td>V-gi-yod-pa-red</td>
<td>V-pa-red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonial</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>V-gi-ḥug</td>
<td>V-soñ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: “Lhasa” Tibetan verbal conjugation

The summary in Table 2 fails to capture the details that V-ḥug is an alternative form of the perfect testimonial, and that V-bzag itself is negated as V-mi-ḥug (Tournadre and Dorje 2009: 140). Thus, all told the morpheme ḥug paradigmatically contrasts with yod and yod-pa-red in four

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3 Aikhenvald (2004: 69 following DeLancey 1986) regards these affixes as auxiliary verbs. Since the entire verbal syntagma is treated phonetically as a single word, and these affixes occur in an obligatory and suppletive paradigm, they behave much more like the -bat in Latin portābat ‘he was carrying’ or the -bit in portābit ‘he will carry’ than they do like English auxiliaries such as ‘do’, and ‘have’. The origin of these Latin affixes is *bhu H ‘be, become’ used as an auxiliary (Fortson 2010: 279), but researchers of Latin have had the wisdom to not confuse diachronic origin with synchronic explanation. More recent work of DeLancey’s avoids this pitfall, using the term ‘endings’ (DeLancey 1992: 44).

4 The form V-pa-yin is used in volitional sentences whereas the form V-byun is used in non-volitional sentences (cf. Tournadre 1996: 231-235).
constructions: the equational copula, the existential copula, the present auxiliary, and the perfect (for examples cf. Hill 2012: 391–395). In all of its uses ḡdug is a marker of the testimonial, but it is not the only such marker since -son and -bzung also mark this category in the past and perfect respectively.

The testimonial encodes the fact that the speaker’s information source is the experience of his own five senses. Most typically the source of information is visual, but the information source marked with ḡdug may be any of the five senses (Hill 2012: 406–407) or an ‘internal sense’ (‘endopathic’, cf. Hill 2012: 404).

Personal

(1) ńar  ḡdir  ḡdug
     me-OBL  book  that  exist-PER

‘I have that book’ (DeLancey 2001: 374).

Factual

(2) bson-khain  ḡdir  ḡdug
     shop  this  book  good  exist-FAC

‘This shop has good books.’ (Speaker A says to speaker B, when neither can see the book before entering). (Yukawa 1966: 78)

Testimonial

(3) a.  ḡdir  ḡdug
     here-OBL  book  exist-TES

‘Here is a good book.’ (Speaker A says after they have entered the shop while looking at the book). (Yukawa 1966: 78)

b. ńar  ḡdug
     me-OBL  book  that  exist-TES

‘I have that book.’ (DeLancey 2001: 374, example 8)

Example (1) may be said “in answer to someone asking me whether I own a particular book” (DeLancey 2001: 374), whereas example (3b) is more appropriate if, believing I did not own the book, “I returned home and found it on my shelf” (DeLancey 2001: 374). The distinction is between whether the knowledge of the information conveyed by the sentence came to the speaker through personal involvement (personal) or through direct visual perception (testimonial).

5 For ease of presentation I have paraphrased Yukawa’s translation of this and the following example. In fact he writes “A氏がB氏を案内して「この店にはいい本がある」という場合（その本はまだ見えていない。）”
6 Yukawa writes “その店にはいてその本を見ながら、「ここにいい本がある」という時”.

3 Testimonial use of ḡdag in Classical Tibetan

As a term “Classical Tibetan” is used to refer to any writing in the Tibetan language from canonical Buddhist texts translated into Tibetan during the period of the Tibetan empire (7th -9th centuries) up until the annexation of Tibet to China in 1959. A thousand years of linguistic usage is never homogenous. The current state of research precludes the presentation of a summary of the syntactic constructions that involve ḡdag over this entire period. Schwieger (2006: 70-141) provides the most complete available discussion of the Classical Tibetan verbal system. (An appendix to this article classifies the examples cited here into broad syntactic categories).

Without a full investigation of the copula and auxiliary constructions in Classical Tibetan it is not possible to say whether or in what period Classical Tibetan exhibits evidentiality as a formal category of its verbal system. Instead, here it suffices to provide evidence that (contra Delancey 1992) in Classical Tibetan ḡdag frequently indicates that the information source for an utterance is sensory evidence and that ḡdag does not always mean ‘sit’, i.e. that DeLancey’s proposal of a sudden transition from a full verb ḡdag ‘sit’ in Classical Tibetan to a testimonial marker in “Lhasa” Tibetan is not accurate.

In narratives direct quotation is the only context in which the speaker and the witness of sensory evidence are the same person; direct quotations consequently provide the clearest evidence of ḡdag as a marker of information source and the investigation in this section is restricted to examples of ḡdag found in direct quotation.

The meaning of ḡdag to indicate visual evidence is present in renditions of the Gña-ḥ-khrī btsan-po myth spanning the 12th to the 16th century. This nuance I suggest by adding in parentheses a form of the verb ‘behold’. In most versions the Tibetans appoint the foreigner as emperor immediately after meeting him and realizing (or misunderstanding) that he comes from the sky.

(4) «ḥdi ni gnam-las byon-pahi btsan-po ṅo-mtshar-can žig ḡdag-pas/
this top sky-ABL come-N-gen emperor miracle-have a ḡdag-N-AGN /
ho- rnam-kyi jo-bo byaho » zer-te/
we PLR-GEN lord do-FIN » say-CNV /
‘Because (we behold that) he is a miraculous emperor descended from the heavens we shall make him our lord.’ (Ñaṅ-ral chos-hbyun, late 1100s, Ñaṅ ral 1988: 159)

(5) «ho-na phyag-sor-daṅ icle ṅo-mtshar
oh finger-ass tongue marvel
che-ba gcig ḡdag-pas/
big-N one ḡdag-N-AGN /
khyod-la nus-mthu hdra-ba ci yod? » byas-pas/
you power like what exist? » do-N-AGN /
kho na-re « nus-mthu-daṅ rdzu-hpbrul che
he said « power-ass magic big

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\[ \text{drags-pos } \text{bṣugs-pa } \text{yin } \text{z} \text{er} / \]
\[ \text{strong-AGN exile-N be say } / \]
\[ \text{« ho } \text{ñed-kyi } \text{rje } \text{bcol-lo } \text{» } \text{byas-nas} / \]
\[ \text{« Oh we-gen lord appoint-FIN do-CNV } / \]

‘Oh, (we behold that) you are one with amazingly big fingers and tongue. What sort of power do you have?’ He said, ‘My powers are so strong that I was exiled’, ‘Oh, we will appoint you our lord.’ (Mkhas-pa Ldeḥu chos-hbyun, post 1261, Mkhas-pa-lde 1987: 226-227)

(6) \[ \text{« } \text{ḥdi } \text{ni } \text{namkhā-nas } \text{hoṅ-pahi } \text{lha-sras } \text{yin-par } \text{ḥdug-pas } / \]
\[ \text{this top sky-ELA go-N-GEN god-son be-N-TRM ḡdug-N-AGN } \]
\[ \text{ho-cag } \text{rnams-kyi } \text{rje } \text{ḥchol-lo } \text{zer-te } / \]
\[ \text{we PLR-GEN lord appoint-FIN » say-CNV } / \]

‘Because (we behold that) he is a divine son come from the sky we shall appoint him our lord.’ (Rgyal-rabs gsal-bahi me-loṅ, 1368, Kutzenov 1966: 46)

(7) \[ \text{« } \text{ḥdi } \text{ḥlha } \text{yul-nas } \text{hoṅ-pa } \text{ḥdug } / \]
\[ \text{this god-GEN place-ELA come-N ḡdug } \]
\[ \text{ńe-raṅ-gi } \text{rje } \text{bya ho } \text{žes } / \]
\[ \text{we lord do-FIN say } / \]

‘(We behold that) he comes from the land of the gods; we shall make him our lord.’ (Bśad-mdzod yid-bźin nor-bu, 1400s, Haarh 1969: 409)

(8) \[ \text{« } \text{lha-yul } \text{gnam-nas } \text{hoṅ-pahi } \text{btsan-por } \text{ḥdug } / \]
\[ \text{god-land sky-ELA come-N-GEN emperor-TRM ḡdug } / \]
\[ \text{ḥdi-la } \text{bdag-cag } \text{rje-bo } \text{zu } \text{dges } \text{zer } / \]
\[ \text{this-ALL we lord request need » say } / \]

‘Because (we behold that) he is an emperor come from the sky, the land of the gods, we should invite him to be our lord. (Mkhas-paḥi dgah-ston, 1545, Haarh 1969: 175).’

The biography of Mi-la-ras-pa (Mi-la-ras-pahi rnam-thar) by Gtsaṅ smyon He-ru-ka Rus-pahi Rgyan-can (1452-1507) also provides examples of ḡdag as a testimonial marker.7 On his deathbed Mi-la’s father tells those around him that he does not expect to recover.

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7 The Mi-la-ras-pahi rnam-thar by Gtsaṅ smyon He-ru-ka Rus-pahi Rgyan-can (1452-1507) is probably the best known work of literature in the Tibetan language. One should note (contra Tournadre 2010: 112 note 59), that de Jong’s critical edition (1959) lacks a translation whether into English or another language. To the translations listed in Hill (2007: 227 note 2) one may now add Gtsaṅ smyon He-ru-ka Rus-pahi Rgyan-can (2010).
(9) don-bsbu-la ṅag-tu
meaning-collect-all word-trm
ṅa da lan-gyi nad ḭdis mi gton-ba ḧďug-ciṅ
I now time-gen illness this-agn not send-n ḧďug-cvb

‘In sum, (I see that) this current disease will not release me.’ (Mi-la-ras-pahi rnam-thar 1488, de Jong 1959: 31, cf. Zadoks 2004)

Because the Mi-la-ras-pahi rnam-thar is written as a first person narrative, for this text possible objection to the inclusion of examples of ḧďug in the frame narrative are not applicable. The narrator, Mi-la, frequently employs ḧďug to mark the visual source of his information.

(10) a-ma yug-cig brgyal-nas ḡgyel ḧďug-pahi tshī/
mother moment fall-ela faint ḧďug-n-gen when

‘My mother fainted in an instant, and when (I beheld that) she had fallen ...’ (Mi-la-ras-pahi rnam-thar, 1488, de Jong 1959: 36, cf. Zadoks 2004)

(11) naṅ-du phyin-pas dam-chos Dkon-mchog-brtsegs-pa de
inside-trm went-n-agn religion Ratnakūṭa that
thigs-pa-daṅ sa phuṅ-gis brduṅs/
droplets-ass earth clump-agn batter /
bya-daṅ byi-bahi brun-daṅ tshaṅ-gdan byas ḧďug-ste/
bird-ass rodent-agn dung-ass nest do ḧďug-cvb /

‘When I went into [my childhood home, now abandoned], (I beheld that) the Ratnakūṭa scripture was battered with water droplets and mud clots, birds and rodents had made their nests and left their droppings [in it].’ (Mi-la-ras-pahi rnam-thar, 1488, de Jong 1959: 111, cf. Zadoks 2004)

(12) daṅ-po klog slob-pahi slob-dpon-gyi sar phyin-pas/
first read study-n-gen teacher-gen place-trm went-n-agn
slob-dpon raṅ ni groṅs ḧďug/
teacher self top die ḧďug /

‘I went to the house of the teacher who had first taught me to read; (I beheld that) the teacher himself had died.’ (Mi-la-ras-pahi rnam-thar 1488, de Jong 1959: 113, cf. Zadoks 2004)

In the preceding nine examples ḡdug appears to exhibit a testimonial meaning, but perhaps this is fortuity. Another selection of examples of ḡdug might show the word in contexts incompatible with a testimonial meaning. In order to persuasively suggest that the testimonial is a structural category of Classical Tibetan grammar it is necessary to show contexts where ḡdug is used contrastingly with a verb such as yin or yod and it is clear that ḡdug indicates a testimonial value. Abel Zadoks draws attention to just such an example; unfortunately, his citation is not complete enough to allow for easy verification. The text is the Padma bkah-thaṅ by O-rgyan gliṅ-pa (1323–??).

These ten examples of ḡdug in quotation or in first person narrative sufficiently show that ḡdug does bear a testimonial meaning in Classical Tibetan from the 12th through 16th centuries.

4 The use of ḡdug in the Mdzaṅs blun

In addition to the testimonial uses of ḡdug discussed in the preceding section, Schwieger (2006: 73, 110-114) assembles many more examples of ḡdug serving as a testimonial, which it would be cumbersome to discuss here; the evidence for a testimonial function of ḡdug in Classical Tibetan is overwhelming. Consequently, it is necessary to re-consider the evidence Hongladarom presents to show that ḡdug lacks a testimonial meaning in Classical Tibetan.

Hongladarom discusses two examples from the 'story of the householder Dbyug-pa-can' (khyim-bdag Dbyug-pa-can) in the Mdzaṅs blun, the first (14) to show that ḡdug does not have a testimonial meaning in Classical Tibetan, and the second (15) to show that ḡdug means 'sit'.
These two examples are not compatible with a testimonial reading. Although they may suffice to show that the testimonial use of ḡdug is lacking in the Mdzaṅs blun, they do not prove the absence of such a use in Classical Tibetan altogether.

As to Hongladarom’s claim that ḡdug means ‘sit’, although example (15) does not preclude that the petitioners remained standing, textual parallels such as (16), which employs a different verb for ‘sit’ in a similar syntactic context, weigh in favor of understanding ḡdug as ‘sit’ in example (15) also.

Other examples of ḡdug in the ‘story of the householder Dbyug-pa-can’ unambiguous mean ‘sit’ (cf. 17 and 18).
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\( \text{khyehu de srog-daň bral-bar gyur-to} \)
\begin{align*}
\text{boy} & \quad \text{that life-ass be.bereft-N-TRM become-FIN} \\
\end{align*}

‘Then he was tired, went into a public house and ordered beer. The barmaid had born a child and laid it to rest wrapped in cloth. Dbyug-pa-can sat on top of it and that mortal was bereft of life.’ (Mdzañs-blun, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 271a = Schmidt 1843: 273, ll. 5-7)

\( (18) \quad \text{gnaš gžan žig-na śiṅ Ša-ko-ta-la bya-rog cig ḡdag-pa} \)
\begin{align*}
\text{place other a-LOC tree Ša-ko-ta-la bird a ḡdag-N} \\
\end{align*}

‘At another place there was a crow sitting in a Šakotaka tree.’ (Mdzañs-blun, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 272a = Schmidt 1843: 273, l. 9-10)

Equally clear uses of ḡdag used to mean ‘sit’ (such as 19) occur elsewhere in the Mdzañs-blun,

\( (19) \quad \text{Bram-ze de stan btiṅ-ba-la ḡdag-nas} \)
\begin{align*}
\text{Brahmin that cushion spread-ALL ḡdag-CVB} \\
\end{align*}

‘The Brahmin sat on the spread cushion’ (Mdzañs-blun, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 131a = Schmidt 1843: 4, II. 7-8)

That ḡdag can mean ‘sit’ in the Mdzañs-blun is not in doubt, but it is unclear whether this usage also occurs in other documents. In his dictionary Jäschke (1880: 277) gives ‘sit’ as the first of four definitions of ḡdag; all of his examples of this meaning are taken from the Mdzañs-blun.\(^8\) Thus, both Jäschke and Hongladarom’s evidence that ḡdag means ‘sit’ hails exclusively from this one text.

The Mdzañs-blun is a problematic text as an exemplar of Classical Tibetan; it is a collection of tales found in the Tibetan Buddhist canon (bkaḥ gyur), translated from Chinese into Tibetan by Chos grub 法成 in the ninth century.\(^9\) This text was written during the Old Tibetan period and a copy exists among the Dunhuang texts (Terjék 1969). Either the early date of the text, or its non-native composition could account for idiosyncrasies in its grammar.

## 5 The use of ḡdag in Old Tibetan

Hongladarom cites two examples from the Old Tibetan Chronicle (PT 1287, Imaeda 2007: 200-229) to demonstrate that ḡdag did not have a testimonial meaning in the Old Tibetan period.

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\(^8\) In contrast, his sources for the second, third, and fourth definitions (‘to be’ as an existential, copula, and auxiliary respectively), come from several texts. The second definition uses a Rgyal-rabs (presumably the Rgyal-rabs gsal-bahi me-loṅ), the Mdzañs-blun, indigenous grammatical literature, and the Mi la mgur ḡbum. The third definition also uses the Mi la mgur ḡbum and Rgyal rabs, but also cites the Bstan 'gyur. The fourth definition cites only the Mi la mgur ḡbum and the Rgyal-rabs.

The first example is taken from the legend of Dri-gum-bstan-po. The child ṇar-la-skyes has sought to recover the body of the deceased emperor from a Nāginī of the name Ḥo-de-bed-de-riṅ-mo, and asks under what conditions she will return it.

(20) «gzan ji yaṅ myī ḥdod/ 
other what still not want
myi-ḥi myig bya myīl tlar ḥdug-pa hog-nas
man-GEN eye bird eye like ḥdug-NA under-ELA
ḥgebs-pa gcbig ḥdod» ces zer-nas //
close-N one want quote say-cvb

“I want nothing else; I want one who has the eyes of men like the eyes of birds, closing from below.” She said.’ (PT 1287, ll. 37-38, Imaeda et al. 2007: 201, cf. Hongladarom 1994: 674)

Although example (20) is a direct quotation, neither the female serpent spirit nor the boy ṇar-la-skyes to whom she speaks has seen the ornithomorphic child in question, so this occurrence of ḥdug cannot be understood as testimonial.

In Hongladarom’s second example from the Old Tibetan Chronicle the founder of Tibet’s imperial lineage, Stag-bu sña gzung, ascents to a conspiracy which two disgruntled vassals of Ziṅ-po rje present to him.

(21) btsan-po-ḥi žal-nas/
emperor-GEN mouth-ELA
«na-ḥi sriṅ-mo žig kyaṅ/ 
me-GEN sister a even
Ziṅ-po rje-ḥi ga-na ḥdug mod-kyi //
Ziṅ-po lord-GEN where-LOC ḥdug indeed-cvb
khyed zer-ba bźin bya-ho »
you say-N like do-FIN
žes bkah stsal-nas //
quote word give-cvb


Whether Stag-bu-sña-gzung knows that his sister is with Ziṅ-po rje because he saw her there is impossible to answer. However, the emphatic auxiliary mod suggests that Stag-bu sña gzung uses ḥdug emphatically, evoking a connotation of ḥdug that lead Chang and Chang (1984) to see it as a marker of certainty in “Lhasa” Tibetan, what Ai khenvald (2004) would call an ‘epistemic extension of an evidential’. Thus, there is no obstacle to understanding example (21) as a testimonial use of ḥdug, and it is unclear why Hongladarom sees it as evidence against the testimonial in Old Tibetan.
The *Old Tibetan Chronicle* offers two further occurrences of *ḥdug*. Neither exhibits a testimonial meaning of *ḥdug*.

(22) *ḥdug*-pa // لقب

south direction-gen lower-loc
*ḥdug*-pa // لقب

Hjañ branch « Mywa white » quote do-n-gen

In the lower part of the southern region is a not inconsiderable kingdom of a branch of the Hjañ people called the White Mywa (Old Tibetan Chronicle, PT 1287, ll. 343-344, Imaeda et al. 2007: 214)

(23) *ḥdug*-pa // لقب

lake big-gen inside-loc

‘When a water demon is within a great lake, a meteor falling from heaven kills the water demon within the waters.’ (Old Tibetan Chronicle, PT 1287, ll. 517-518, Imaeda et al. 2007: 228)

In sum, the evidence of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* is ambiguous. Three examples do not appear compatible with a testimonial interpretation of *ḥdug*, but one occurrence is consistent with such an interpretation.

Implicitly disagreeing with DeLancey and Hongladarom, Denwood (1999: 246) cites a sentence from the Sba bźed to demonstrate that *ḥdug* has a testimonial meaning in Old Tibetan. Although it is clear that some version of this text does date back to the Old Tibetan period (van Schaik and Iwao 2009), because most of the witnesses are post 14th century and the textual transmission is not understood, it is best to avoid the Sba bźed when looking for strong evidence of linguistic phenomena in Old Tibetan.

The earliest records in the Tibetan language are the imperial stone inscriptions. Among these inscriptions the verb *ḥdug* also occurs four times: three in the inscription at the tomb of Khri lde sroṅ brtsan and one in the Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription of 821-822. In all four cases the verb is used as an existential copula, with no evidentional overtones, to describe the physical location of one of Tibet’s neighboring lands.
(24) śar phyogs // rgyal-po chen-por Rgya ḡdag-pa-daṅ //  
   east direction king big-trm China ḡdag-N-Ass  

   ‘As great king [in] the east is China.’ (Inscription at the tomb of Khri lde sroṅ brtseṅ, 815-817, a23-24, Iwao et al. 2009: 28)  

(25) lho phyogs-kyi rgyal-por Rgya-gar ḡdag-pa yan //  
   south direction-gen king-trm India ḡdag-N also  

   ‘As king of the south is India.’ (Inscription at the tomb of Khri lde sroṅ brtseṅ, 815-817, a29-30, Iwao et al. 2009: 28)  

(26) … phyogs … Dru-gu ḡdag  
   direction Turk ḡdag  

   ‘… cardinal direction … is Türk.’ (Inscription at the tomb of Khri lde sroṅ brtseṅ, 815-817, a39, Iwao et al. 2009: 28)  

(27) śar phyogs-na ḡdag-pa //  
   east direction-loc China ḡdag-N  

   ‘In the east is China.’ (Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription of 821-822, East side, l. 18, Iwao et al. 2009: 36) 

Such examples from the inscriptions are similar to example (22) from the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. This evidence from the inscriptions supports DeLancey and Hongladarom’s view that the testimonial is missing from early written monuments. The evidence of Old Tibetan however does not confirm a lexical meaning of ‘sit’, but instead shows ḡdag as an existential copula. 

6 Conclusion  

The Old Tibetan inscriptions entirely lack a testimonial function for ḡdag. The *Old Tibetan Chronicle* presents one example out of four which is consistent with a testimonial reading. In Classical Tibetan (12th-16th centuries) the testimonial use of ḡdag is common. This distribution tentatively suggests that the meaning of ḡdag as a testimonial emerged during the Old Tibetan period. DeLancey’s perspective that “ḡdag was a lexical verb ‘sit’ until well after the differentiation of Proto-Tibetan” (1992: 52) must be refined in two respects. First, although the earliest Tibetan documents and some Tibetan dialects do not exhibit a testimonial use of ḡdag, the emergence of the testimonial use of ḡdag took place significantly before when DeLancey posits. Second, the use of ḡdag to mean ‘sit’ is as far as the evidence presented here can determine an idiosyncrasy of the *Mdzaṅs blun.*
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ABBREVIATIONS

| ABL | ablative                  | LOC | locative                  |
| AGN | agentive                  | N   | the nominalizer pa        |
| ALL | allative                  | PER | personal                  |
| ASS | associative               | PLR | plural                    |
| CNV | convert                   | TES | testimonial               |
| ELA | elative                   | TOP | the topic marker ni       |
| FIN | clitic -o that marks finite verbs | TRM | terminative               |
| GEN | genitive                  |     |                           |

Any noun phrase not specified for case should be construed as absolutive.

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Appendix: syntactic classification of examples

This is not the place for a thorough syntactic analysis of the Classical Tibetan verbal system. Nonetheless, because the divide among main verb, equational copula, and auxiliary verbs is easy to draw, the examples given throughout are here presented according to this division. The absence of ḡdag in auxiliary constructions in the inscriptions, the Old Tibetan Chronicle, and the Mdzaṅs blun, together with the presence of ḡdag in auxiliaries in Classical Tibetan, suggests that the grammaticalization of ḡdag began after the Old Tibetan period. However, this collection of examples is not representative and is complete only for the inscriptions and the Old Tibetan Chronicle; it is of anecdotal value only.

Classical Tibetan
   Equational copula: 4, 5, 8, 13
   Auxiliary verb: 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13

Mdzaṅs blun
   Main verb: 14, 15, 17, 18, 19

Old Tibetan Chronicle
   Main verb: 20, 21, 22, 23

Old Tibetan Inscriptions
   Main verb: 24, 25, 26, 27