ON A TERM OF TAXATION IN THE OLD
TIBETAN ROYAL ANNALS

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The term phyiṅ-ril(d) has seemed to be an enigmatic expression to those scholars who have hitherto dealt with it. In his French translation of the Royal Annals, Bacot rendered the expression žiṅ-gyi phyiṅ-ril as “la delimination de tous les champs”¹ and in a note he connected the word phyiṅ with the verb bhyiṅ-ba “immerger, inonder, enfoncer, d’où labourer” hence phyiṅ-ril “tour entier, bornage, délimination”. The same translation can be found at the years 686, 690. In the translation of the text concerning the year 687 the expression dgun Reaṅ ĕchen-gyi phyiṅ-ril bhub he wrote: “En hiver, il fit cadastrer le Reaṅ-ĕchen”.² This is essentially his translation in the texts concerning the years 691, 719 and 720. A different interpretation can be found at the year 718 where the phrase rje žiṅ gling-gyi phyiṅ-ril-dan sogs-ril brgyis is translated as “on fit la répartition des champs seigneuriaux des Trois Banniers et de la moisson”. In a note to this translation Bacot added: “Interprétation basée sur la coutume tibétaine, attestée au onzième siècle, de faire la moisson le même jour, pour tout un village, et de répartir ensuite la moisson au prorata de la superficie des champs. Le sens ici est donc déduit d’une coutume; on ne pourrait inférer de ce texte en faveur de la coutume”.³

The interpretation of phyiṅ-ril as “enceinte de feutre” is surely based on Thomas’ opinion, who in JRAS 1931 wrote: “The Tibetan Chronicle (read: Annals) uses the phrase phyiṅ-ril ‘felt circumference’, in connection with thertsis of certain ‘lord’s lands’: and it seems likely that a boundary palisade is meant, such as we are told that the Tibetans made of trees on the Chinese frontier at Liang-chou, posting guards along it”⁴. In TLT III Thomas added: “phyiṅ-ril: for rje-ziṅ see ref. p. 318: partitions made of

² DTH, p. 36.
³ DTH, pp. 44-45.
felt can still be seen in Tibet?" (p. 93). In the glossary he put, however, a question mark phyin-rl “felt fence?” (p. 156b)

Bogoslovskij, in a paper published in 1958 has clearly shown that the various interpretations of Bacot and Thomas are tentative and inaccurate. Quoting references of Kozlov and S. Ch. Das on the Tibetan taxation system of the 19th–20th centuries and examining the relevant passages of the Annals Bogoslovskij came to the conclusion that the term phyin-rl can be tentatively translated as “učastok”, i.e. “parcel”, being a unit of taxation. He added however, that the final solution has to be left to further investigations. One reason of his hesitation surely was the lack of any etymological background of his interpretation.

In his book published in 1962 Bogoslovskij mentioned that Roerich suggested to him to see in phyin-rl a paper roll wrapped in red felt. Departing from this meaning he translated the first word of the expression as “felt” while second one as “globular (kruglyj)” and suggested that it has to be connected with phyin-rl “red felt”. On the other hand he saw in the term phyin-theb the equivalent of sog-rl “paper scroll”. Thus phyin-rl would be a paper scroll wrapped in a felt for better preservation. According to Bogoslovskij the term phyin-rl has been used to denote the application of certain measures (“meroprijatie”) concerning the rje-žin fields which were fixed in the official acts equally called phyin-rl. Concluding his investigations Bogoslovskij suggested that the term phyin-rl denoted an official document in which the surface area of the parcels, their owners (“vladeljcy”) and the quantity of the taxes and duties were fixed.

Bogoslovskij’s interpretation has several weak points and the solution of the problem has an important bearing on the Old Tibetan taxation system and on the history of the Old Tibetan social and economic system.

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7 Evidently a misprint for dog-rl rectified however neither in the French text nor in its index.

8 Očerk, p. 76; Essai, p. 157, n. 4.

9 Očerk, p. 78; Essai, p. 89. G. Uray in his paper on The Four Horns of Tibet According the Royal Annals; Acta Orient. Hung. X (1960), pp. 31–57, left the term phyin-rl untranslated because he was already acquainted with my suggestion and did not want to anticipate it. Since 1960 I had no occasion to publish my results which I offer in the present paper.