BIRD DIVINATION AMONG THE TIBETANS

(NOTES ON DOCUMENT PELLIOT NO. 3530, WITH A STUDY OF TIBETAN PHONOLOGY OF THE NINTH CENTURY).

BY

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Et ildud quidam etiam his notum, avium voces volutasque interrogare.

TACITUS, Germania X.

Among the Tibetan manuscripts discovered by M. Paul Pelliot there is a roll of strong paper (provisional number 3530 of the Bibliothèque Nationale) measuring $0.85 \times 0.31$ m and containing a table of divination. This document has recently been published and translated by M. J. Bacot.\(^1\) This gentleman has furnished proof of possessing a good knowledge of Tibetan in a former publication,\(^2\) in which he gives a most useful list of 710 abbreviations occurring in the cursive style of writing (dbu-med) of the Tibetans, from a manuscript obtained by him on his journeys in eastern Tibet. It is gratifying to note that the tradition gloriously inaugurated in France by Abel-Rémusat, Burnouf and Foucaux, and worthily continued by L. Feer and S. Lévi, reincarnates itself in a young and fresh representative of the Tibetan field, who has enough

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1) La table des présages signifiés par l'étoile. Texte tibétain, publié et traduit... (Journal asiatique, Mars-Avril, 1913, pp. 445–449, with one plate).

2) L'écriture cursive tibétaine (ibid., Janvier-Février, 1912, pp. 1–78). M. Bacot is also the author of a pamphlet L'art tibétain (Châlon-sur-Saône, 1911), and of two interesting books of travel Dans les marchés tibétaines (Paris, 1909) and Le Tibet révélé (Paris, 1912).
courage and initiative to attack original problems. It is likewise
matter of congratulation to us that the wonderful discoveries of
M. Pelliot will considerably enrich Tibetan research and reanimate
with new life this woefully neglected science. The volumes of the
ancient Kanjur edition discovered by him in the Cave of the Thou-
sand Buddhas (Ts'ien fu tung) of Kan-su and dating at the latest
from the tenth, and more probably even from the ninth century,
together with many Tibetan book-rolls from the same place,¹ are
materials bound to signal a new departure in the study of Tibetan
philology, hitherto depending exclusively on the recent prints of the
last centuries. We therefore feel justified in looking forward with
great expectations to the elaboration of these important sources.
The text published by M. Bacot is the first Tibetan document
of the Mission Pelliot made accessible to science, and there is every
reason to be grateful for this early publication and the pioneer
work conscientiously performed by M. Bacot. It is a document of
great interest, both from a philological and a religious point of view.
The merit of M. Bacot in the editing and rendering of this text
is considerable. First of all, he has honorably accomplished the
difficult task of transcribing the cursive form of the original into
the standard character (dbu-can), and, as far as can be judged by
one who has not had the opportunity of viewing the original,
generally in a convincing manner; he has recognized also some of
the archaic forms of spelling, and correctly identified them with
their modern equivalents; and above all, aside from minor details,
he has made a correct translation of the divination table proper.

There are, however, two points of prime importance on which
my opinion differs from the one expressed by M. Bacot. These
points are the interpretation of the meaning of the Table, and the

¹) Compare P. Pelliot, La mission Pelliot en Asie centrale, pp. 25, 26 (Annales de
la societé de géographie commerciale, Fasc. 4, Hanoi, 1909) and B. E F. E. O., Vol. VIII,
1908, p. 507.