

Fall 2022 Arts of Asia Lecture Series  
Forging New Connections: Asia in the First Millennium of the Common Era  
Sponsored by the *Society for Asian Art*

## **The Tibetan Empire and Its Aftermath in Central Asia**

Brandon Dotson

Associate Professor and Thomas P. McKenna, C'63 Family Endowed Chair in Buddhist Studies,  
Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Georgetown University  
November 11, 2022

### CHRONOLOGY

#### Center

- Tibetan Empire (c.608–866)
- Period of Fragments (c.866–1264)
- Mongol/Sakya Rule (1264–1350)

#### East

- Sui Dynasty (581–618)
- Tang Dynasty (618–907)
- Guiyijun (848–1036)  
Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period (907-960)
- Song Dynasty (960-1279)

#### North

- Uighur Khaganate (744-840)

#### South

- Nanzhao (738–902)
- Pala Dynasty (750–1174)

#### West

- Umayyad caliphate (680–750)
- Abbasid caliphate (750–1258)

### KEY TIBETAN EMPERORS

- Tri Songtsen (alias Songtsen Gampo) c.605–649. The founding figure of the Tibetan Empire, now remembered as a Buddhist culture hero.
- Tri Düsöng, 676–704. The emperor who, as a teenager, fought a civil war against the Gar clan in the 690s. After their defeat the Gar clan fled to the China to serve the Tang.
- Tri Détsuktzen, 704–754. Father of Songtsen Gampo, he was assassinated in a coup.
- Tri Songdetsen (alias “Trisong Detsen”), 742–c.800. Presides over apogee of Tibet’s power, as well as its embrace of Buddhism. Establishes first Tibetan monastery with Tibetan monks.
- Tri Tsukdetsen (alias Relpachen), reigned 815–841. Extended Tibetan embrace of Buddhism, translation of texts from Sanskrit. Oversaw Tibet’s decline.

### OBJECTS OF TRADE, TRIBUTE, AND GIFTS

Armor; metalwork (vessels, plates); musk; horses; yak tails; wool; felt

## TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGIES

Literacy; paper and ink; bell casting; epigraphy; Buddhism (moral cosmology, ritual); divination; law; letter writing; royal hunting

## KEY PRIMARY SOURCES

*Old Tibetan Annals*. A terse bureaucratic record of brief yearly entries from 650 to 764.

*Old Tibetan Chronicle*. A chronicle epic that dramatizes the relationships between emperors and councilors, and which includes songs. Includes myth of the first Tibetan Emperor, a royal genealogy that goes up to 841, and chapters that cover a period from about 600 to 800.

## READINGS (\* indicates those most relevant to the lecture)

- Beckwith, Christopher I. *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Beckwith, Christopher I. 1991. "The Impact of the Horse and Silk Trade on the Economies of T'ang China and the Uighur Empire." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 34.3: 183–98.
- Boulnois, Luce. 2004. *The Silk Road: Monks, warriors & merchants on the Silk Road*, trans. Helen Loveday. Hong Kong: Odyssey Books & Guides.
- Burnett, Charles and Anna Akasoy, eds. 2011. *Islam and Tibet – Interactions along the Musk Routes*. London: Ashgate.
- Dotson, Brandon. 2009. *The Old Tibetan Annals: an Annotated Translation of Tibet's First History*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.
- Dotson, Brandon. 2013. "The Princess and the Yak: the Hunt as Narrative Trope and Historical Reality," in *Scribes, Texts, and Rituals in Early Tibet and Dunhuang*, ed. Brandon Dotson, et al. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 61–85.
- Dotson, Brandon. 2015. "Introducing Early Tibetan Law: Codes and Cases," in *Secular Law and Order in the Tibetan Highland*, ed. Dieter Schuh Andiaast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 267–314.
- Dotson, Brandon. 2017. "Tri Songdétsen," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-201>.
- \* Dotson, Brandon. 2019. "The Emanated Emperor and his Cosmopolitan Contradictions," in *Faith and Empire: the Art of Politics in Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Karl Debreczeny. New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 69–81.
- Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang. 2011. *A History of the Tibetan Empire: Drawn from the Dunhuang Manuscripts*, trans. Meghan Howard. Dehradun: Songtsen Library.
- Kapstein, Matthew T. 2000. *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- \* Schaeffer, Kurtis, Matthew T. Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, eds. 2013. *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stein, Rolf. 2010. *Rolf Stein's Tibetica Antiqua, with Additional Materials*, trans. Arthur McKeown. Leiden: Brill.