

## MO-SO MAGICAL TEXTS

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FROM a remote spot in south-west China thousands of manuscripts have flowed into the world's libraries during the last fifty years, where they have been catalogued as Mo-so or Na-khi texts. This sudden influx is both curious and remarkable since there is no one who can read the pictographs that line their pages and few who know their contents (cf. Pls. I and II). Why were they collected and what can be done with this vast number of indecipherable writings? Some tentative answers to these problems will be suggested in this article, which traces the successive stages in our knowledge of the Mo-so and their books.

### I

It is only a hundred years since commercial, military and missionary interests fostered exploration of the hitherto unexplored areas on the borders of China, Tibet and Burma. It was the lure or threat of a "Northeast passage" to India that prompted many of these expeditions.<sup>1</sup> One of the first reports on the Mo-so (or Na-khi, as the people in Li-chiang call themselves) was by T. T. Cooper (1871), travelling on a commercial enterprise. Like many travellers' reports it is superficial and inaccurate, as was pointed out by Père Desgodins (1872) of the *Missions-Etrangères de Paris*. Desgodins had been for many years at the Bonga mission on the Tibetan-Chinese border and was the first to send home a copy of a Mo-so manuscript.<sup>2</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> It is not without interest to note that many of them, whatever their ostensible purpose might have been, were led by military, consular, or government-sponsored agencies' personnel. Map-making was an essential ingredient, of course. Cf. O. Lattimore, *Inner Asian frontiers of China* (New York, 1940), p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> Abbé Desgodins, *Mission du Thibet*, Paris, 1872. See also J. F. Rock, *A Na-khi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Rome, 1963), p. xxix.

was in 1867. About 1880 a Dutch missionary in Li-chiang, E. Scharren, sent fifteen manuscripts to the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, together with a short translation of one manuscript, but nothing was published. Captain Gill (1880) acquired a manuscript from the Li-chiang area also, but his travels do not give us much useful information on the people or their books.<sup>1</sup> It was not until 1885 that examples of Mo-so writing were published in an article by Terrien de Lacouperie. Six years previously Lacouperie had received eight of the eleven pages which Desgodins had copied; these he published, together with a plate of the manuscript Gill had placed with the British Museum. Lacouperie named these writings "Mosso" but gave neither their translation nor their content.<sup>2</sup>

Another traveller, Prince Henri d'Orleans (1898), mentions the "Mosso" and also published some texts of their manuscripts and a translation which, however, proved to be incorrect.<sup>3</sup> He presented five manuscripts to the École des Langues Orientales de Paris. The same year C. Bonin produced a translation but no original text was provided.

By the turn of the century a handful of manuscripts had reached Europe but little progress had been made with their translation. In 1908 H. Cordier summarized the state of knowledge on the Mo-so in an article that contains a mixture of fact and fantasy.<sup>4</sup> The same year R. F. Johnston also published a description of them in his travel book.<sup>5</sup> However, the first traveller to devote a whole book to the Mo-so was J. Bacot (1913), who not only produced some good translations but also presented more

<sup>1</sup> W. J. Gill, *The river of golden sand*, London, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> Terrien de Lacouperie, "Beginnings of writing in and around Tibet", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s. xvii (July, 1885) and also *Beginnings of writing in central and eastern Asia*, London, 1894.

<sup>3</sup> Prince Henri d'Orleans, *Du Tonkin aux Indes*, Paris, 1898.

<sup>4</sup> H. Cordier, *Les Mo-Sos*, Leide, 1908. The misinformation stems from J. Montpeyrat, "Notes sur les Mousseux de la province de Mong-sing", *Revue Indochinoise*, Hanoi, 1905. This latter work does not deal with the Mo-so but quite another tribe.

<sup>5</sup> R. F. Johnston, *From Peking to Mandalay, a journey from North China to Burma through Tibetan Ssuch'uan and Yunnan*, London, 1908. Some observations are interesting in showing the conditions that obtained at the turn of the century.

manuscripts to the École des Langues Orientales.<sup>1</sup> In 1916 B. Laufer wrote an article on a manuscript which had been acquired by F. H. Nichols in 1905 from north-west Yunnan ; in this he discoursed on Mo-so books but did not attempt a translation.<sup>2</sup> Two decades passed before there was any more scholarly work on the subject. Summing up the result of the studies hitherto, we may say that they were typical of the nineteenth-century interest in the origins of writing. The Mo-so "hieroglyphs", as they were called, were yet another item to add to the list of primitive writings that were to illuminate the rise of literacy among mankind. Despite Desgodins' assertion that the Mo-so script was a recent innovation, these manuscripts were sold at a high price as examples of an ancient script. There was as yet little factual knowledge of the worth of Mo-so books.

Although the study of Mo-so manuscripts had temporarily ceased, the collecting of them continued unabated. The botanist G. Forrest, who made frequent journeys to Tibet and China early this century, presented seventeen manuscripts to the Foreign Office in 1916. The same year forty-four others were acquired from him by the John Rylands Library, together with a so-called "key to the hieroglyphs". A little later the Rylands was able to obtain a further ninety manuscripts from Forrest plus two translations by E. Scharten. At this point, in 1922, the Rylands had the largest collection of Mo-so manuscripts in the world. In 1929 the British consul at Tengyueh, S. Wyatt-Smith, reported that many Mo-so manuscripts were for sale in the Li-chiang district. He was authorized by the Foreign Office and India Office to arrange for the purchase and translation of some of them. An American missionary acting on the consul's behalf collected some and employed a Na-khi and a Chinese to translate the texts into Chinese. The Chinese texts were then to be translated into English at the consulate. One ceremony of fifty-five manuscripts was translated into Chinese but only half

<sup>1</sup> J. Bacot, *Les Mo-so*, Leide, 1913. Typical of the era, more is given on the language than on the people. A history of the region together with a translation of the Mu chiefs' chronicles is appended.

<sup>2</sup> B. Laufer, "The Nichols Mo-so MS.", *Geographical Review* (1916). See also J. F. Rock, "The Nichols Mo-so MS. of the American Geographical Society", *Geographical Review*, vol. xxvii (1937).

of this was further translated into English, as the cost was allegedly too high. All translation work was stopped in 1931 and a hurried purchase of a hundred and thirty-five manuscripts was made, since a mild inflation of prices had set in as the result of the large purchases made by the American botanist J. F. Rock. The British collecting then ceased in face of this competition, as it was considered that sufficient information had been gathered; a dictionary of "hieroglyphs" had been compiled which would enable the manuscripts already collected to be translated, or so it was fondly hoped. In 1934 the whole of this collection was equally divided between the British Museum and the India Office, neatly splitting all sets of books and even the translation into two distinct and separate collections.

The first to appreciate the true nature of the Mo-so script was Rock, an explorer and botanical collector, who was travelling in north-west Yunnan as early as 1922.<sup>1</sup> By 1930 he had sent some 1,400 manuscripts to the Library of Congress before he began the task of systematically collecting and translating the manuscripts himself. His first translation appeared in 1935 and was quickly followed by others, in 1936, 1937, and 1939.<sup>2</sup> Forced to move by the war, many of his manuscripts and translations were lost, but he returned to Li-chiang in 1946 and stayed there until the communist take-over in 1949. He continued his translations (1952, 1955, 1963) until he died in 1962.<sup>3</sup> Rock's

<sup>1</sup> Rock's early contributions are somewhat slanted for the *National Geographic Society Magazine*, see vols. xlvi, no. 5 (1924); liv, no. 5 (1928); lviii, no. 8 (1930). Another botanical collector in the region who writes on the Mo-so is F. K. Ward, *From China to Hkamti Long*, London, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> These first translations deal only with single manuscripts: "The story of the flood in the literature of the Na-khi tribe", *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*, vol. 7 (1935); also in the same journal "The origin of the Tso-la books of divination of the Na-khi" and "Hä-la or the killing of the soul as practised by Na-khi sorcerers", vol. 8 (1936); "Studies in Na-khi literature": part i, "The birth and origin of Dto-mba Shi-lo"; part ii, "The Na-khi Hä zhi p' i", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. xxxvii (1937). Part i above also published in *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 7 (1937); "The Zher-khin tribe and their religious literature", *Monumenta Serica*, vol. iii (1938); "The romance of K'a-mä-gyu-mi-gkyi", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. xxxix (1939).

<sup>3</sup> This period contains Rock's major contributions to Na-khi studies. (Some works are still in the press now). "The Muan-bpö ceremony or the sacrifice to

collection of several thousand manuscripts was split up, some going to America and some to Marburg. The many translations, articles and comments by him provide the bulk of our knowledge about the Na-khi and their manuscripts.

Lin-ts'an Li (1944) was the first Chinese to interest himself in Mo-so texts and he has produced a number of translations (1953, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960).<sup>1</sup> His findings and translations do not always, however, agree with those of Rock. Another Chinese, Liu Ch'ao (1957), provides the latest description of the Na-khi in the appendix to his book on the songs of the Na-khi.<sup>2</sup>

heaven as practised by the Na-khi", *Monumenta Serica*, vol. xiii (1948). Reprinted in *Annali Lateranensi*, vol. xvi (1952); *The Na-khi Nāga Cult and related ceremonies*, *Serie Orientale Roma*, iv, parts i and ii (1952); "The Na-khi D'a Nv funeral ceremony with special reference to the origin of Na-khi weapons", *Anthropos*, vol. 50 (1955); *The Zhi mā funeral ceremony of the Na-khi of Southwest China*, *Studia Instituti Anthropos*, vol. ix (Vienna-Mödling, 1955); *The Amnye Ma-chhen Range and adjacent regions*, *Serie Orientale Roma*, xii (1956); "Contribution to the shamanism of the Tibetan-Chinese borderland", *Anthropos*, vol. 54 (1959); *A Na-khi English Encyclopedic Dictionary*, part i. *Serie Orientale Roma*, xxviii (1963); *The life and culture of the Na-khi tribe of the China-Tibet borderland*, *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*, Suppl. 2 (Wiesbaden, 1963). To appear this year are: *Na-khi culture as expressed in their literature: an encyclopedic Dictionary*, part ii. *Serie Orientale Roma*, and, together with K. L. Janert, (ed.), *Na-khi Manuscripts*, Teil i, ii. *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*, vol. vii (Wiesbaden).

<sup>1</sup> An early review of Li can be found in H. H. F. Jayme, "Notes on some books published in exile", *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, n.s. vol. 5, no. 1 (Summer, 1946). Li's works are in Chinese but there are some English summaries. Lin-ts'an Li, *A dictionary of Mo-so hieroglyphics*, *Memoirs*, Series B, no. 2. National Central Museum, Nanking, 1944; in the same series, no. 3 is *A glossary of Mo-so phonetic script*, 1945; *Six Mo-so classics*, Taiwan, 1950. There are several articles in *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*: "The great flood", no. 3 (Taiwan, 1957); "A preliminary report and study of the Mo-so manuscripts in the Library of Congress", no. 6 (1958); "The festival of the prolongation of life", no. 8 (1959); "The sacrifice to Heaven", no. 9 (1960). Li has been concerned to show that the phonetic script is a later development, but as yet the case remains unproven. His observations on the *dto-mbas* are much keener than Rock's, for, surprising as it may seem, Rock very rarely comments on the lives of the *dto-mbas*. The contrast between the only two Na-khi scholars is the more interesting because of their different cultural backgrounds. Fu Mao Chi, who studied the Mo-so dialect in Weihsi for the West China Union University (1940, 1941, 1943), has also made a study of one Mo-so manuscript (1948).

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the element of propaganda this short book provides some new information on the Na-khi. Since 1950 the whole area has been closed to

Finally, mention must be made of P. Goullart (1955), who lived and worked among the Na-khi for ten years and who provides a good picture of their life and customs,<sup>1</sup> and of A. M. Reshetov (1964), who presents an analysis of the Hli-khin, a tribe with strong affiliations to the Na-khi. The latter work is the first ethnographical analysis to be made in this area, although admittedly based on secondary and unspecified sources.<sup>2</sup> Reshetov's forthcoming work should contribute greatly to our knowledge of this still relatively unknown area in south-west China.

The last fifty years has seen a tremendous increase in the number of Mo-so manuscripts in our libraries (cf. Table I). On the whole the collections were made quite haphazardly by travellers and missionaries and even by those like Q. Roosevelt (1940), who went simply as collectors.<sup>3</sup> No one understood just what these manuscripts were or how they were to be read until Rock commenced his systematic investigations.

The Na-khi live in the north-west part of Yunnan province where it borders on Tibet, and their main town is Li-chiang, about sixty miles north of Ta-li. The strategic importance of the area lies in the fact that the caravan routes from Lhasa to Kun-ming and the south pass through Na-khi territory. Not unnaturally, the Chinese have been interested in controlling this borderland and, being historically-minded, have written about the tribes inhabiting the area. The Chinese call the Na-khi by the name of Mo-so, a name which has subsequently been used by missionaries and travellers to describe the people living near the loop of the Yangtse above Li-chiang. However, as the Na-khi are not true Han, they are, according to Chinese logic, simply barbarians. Consequently the official historians are somewhat foreigners except for accredited journalists like A. Winnington, whose book *The slaves of the cool mountain* (London, 1959) deals with the Lo-lo amongst others.

<sup>1</sup> P. Goullart, *Forgotten Kingdom*, London, 1955.

<sup>2</sup> A. M. Reshetov, *Matrilineal organization among the Na-khi (Mo-so)*, Moscow, 1964 (in Russian). This work is not really concerned with the Na-khi at Li-chiang at all, despite its title. The only true ethnographical field-work made in the region deals with the Min-chia, see C. P. Fitzgerald, *The tower of the five glories*, London, 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Q. Roosevelt, "In the land of the devil priests", *Natural History*, vol. 45 (1940). The plates are interesting.

off-hand in their descriptions and tend to group indiscriminately all manner of non-Han peoples together according to the well-known geographical distributions of barbarians. Thus the Na-khi are often lumped together with other tribes as *Hsi-nan-i*, the south-west barbarians. Occasionally the epithet *P'u* or *Man* is used synonymously, e.g. *Mo-so-man*. A common mistake made by the Chinese is to confuse the tribal name of the chief with that of his people, although it does not follow that the chief and the people belong to the same tribe. With these reservations in mind there are records of the Mo-so from the Later Han dynasty (A.D. 25) onwards in the Yung-pei, Yun-nan, Nan-chao, Yüan and Li-chiang records.<sup>1</sup> The local chronicles are more detailed than the national histories, but Li-chiang itself was not directly administered by the Chinese until the eighteenth century.

There is a history of Li-chiang and its rulers to be found in the genealogical chronicles of the Mu family, the once-hereditary chiefs of the Na-khi. There are two chronicles, one dating from A.D. 1516 and the other, an illustrated one, from A.D. 1545. Both are written in Chinese in the style of the local provincial records. The first traces the genealogy of the Mu family back to a legendary past while the other only goes back to A.D. 1101. Though not in absolute agreement, both records are fairly complete up to A.D. 1723, when the Chinese finally annexed the region and demoted the Mu family. Only the second chronicle continues the genealogy after this, and in the barest possible terms. The chronicles are devoted mainly to the deeds of the Mu chiefs in suppressing barbarians on behalf of the Chinese emperor, in line with the classical Chinese expression for their frontier policy — *i i chih i*, to use barbarians to control barbarians. Things are naturally displayed in their best light and the account is probably fairly reliable from the time of the Ming conquest of Yun-nan in A.D. 1382, when the Mu family received its name from the emperor.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rock combed the historical sources for his book *The Ancient Na-khi kingdom of Southwest China*, 2 vols., Harvard, 1947. This work is a tribute to Rock's great erudition.

<sup>2</sup> The story of the rise and fall of the Mu chiefs is given in detail in Rock's history (1947) and also partly in Bacot (1913).

But the Na-khi manuscripts which have been collected and translated are not historical at all; they are ceremonial books. It should be stressed that the Na-khi had no method of writing other than these ritual books, thus differing from the Lo-lo, whose phonetic script was also used for writing letters. Na-khi official letters were written in Chinese. There is a misconception still current that the Na-khi have a written language<sup>1</sup>; that this is not so will be shown later, but it is this false premise that led astray the compilers of "the key to the hieroglyphs" and rendered impossible a straightforward translation of the manuscripts.

Na-khi manuscripts are written on coarse hand-made paper which is oblong in shape (approximately 9 cm. × 28 cm.). The sheets are usually sewn together on the left-hand edge to form a book; this has somewhat thicker outer sheets of paper forming a stiff cover. The pages are ruled horizontally, providing three or five sections for the script, which is stylus-written from left to right. The title of the book, indicating to which ceremony it belongs, is placed in the middle of the front cover and boxed in and decorated with ornate flourishings. On each edge of the cover is often pasted a strip of coloured paper for decoration which, like standard editions, shows to which series the book belongs (Pl. Ia). On the back cover is given the sequence number of the book, for the books comprising a ceremony must be chanted in a fixed order (Pl. Ib). The format and structure have closer resemblances to Tibetan than to Chinese books.<sup>2</sup> Some are even illuminated with fine miniatures on the recto of the first page (Pl. IIa).

There are two different scripts used in these manuscripts and this has tended to confuse would-be translators. The commoner of the two is pictographic, known to the Na-khi as "wood record, stone record", no doubt because it is employed for transcribing ceremonies which employ many wooden and stone ritual objects.

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, D. Diringer, *Writing*, London, 1962, and I. J. Gelb, *A study of writing*, Chicago, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the make-up of Na-khi books see M. Harders-Steinhäuser and G. Jayme, *Untersuchung des Papiers acht verschiedener alter Na-khi-Handschriften auf Rohstoff und Herstellungsweise*, in *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*, Suppl. 2, Wiesbaden, 1963.



The other script is syllabic or phonetic and is called *Ggo baw* after *Di ds ggo baw*, the disciples of *dto-mba* Shi-lo, the founder of Na-khi shamanism.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, the phonetic script is not used to transcribe sentences but only now meaningless sounds, magical formulae, which must be still pronounced faultlessly. The two scripts may be used together in one book but no development of one script from the other seems proven (*pace* Li, 1944). The existence of two scripts appears to be better explained functionally than ontogenetically, since pictographs, if used phonetically, are not as reliable as phonetic script when the sound element is all-important. This is illustrated by the fact that there are whole books full of phonetic script devoted solely to transcribing magical formulae (Pl. IIb,c) whereas there is none employing pictographs for this purpose. Since the phonetic script is smaller, the five-space division of a book is commonly used (Pl. IIb). Occasionally Tibetan upper and lower vowel signs are added to the phonetic script (Pl. IIc); these make it look more complicated, even different, but they are purely decorative and have no other significance.

The sole writers and users of Na-khi manuscripts were shamans (*dto-mbas*), who conducted their ceremonies with their aid. The *dto-mbas* were ritual specialists who otherwise were not distinguishable from the rest of the farming population. They did not form any hierarchy or special social class but practised like individual craftsmen, performing on demand. They had a monopoly of the ceremonial life depending on the possession of the knowledge contained in these books. This, in part, explains their zealous care not to write out the complete texts, for the manuscripts contain only a few signs to aid the memory. It is this fact that makes translation an impossibility without the aid of a *dto-mba*. The mnemonic text

<sup>1</sup> *Ggo-baw* literally means "to rise to dance and extol", which resembles the meaning of the Lo-lo shaman's name *pe-mu*, "the master of the dance". The word *dto-mba* is equivalent to the title *bpö-mbö* which is also used for the Na-khi shamans, the latter meaning "to chant and divide—the people from the demons". Both terms may be cognate with the Mongol word for shaman, *bö*. The name *Shi-lo* may be a title meaning "a proficient master", like the Chinese name for shaman, *Fang shih*, "master of magic", or the Bön founder *gShen rab*, "excellent shaman". It is obvious that there is plenty of scope for a wider discussion here.

was defended by the *dto-mbas*, who argued that should laymen be able to read the manuscripts they would have no need to employ a specialist. As it is, each *dto-mba* trained his son to memorize the texts and rituals of the different ceremonies—no easy task, since there are a hundred or more ceremonies, some requiring a hundred books, each fifty pages long. Naturally no one *dto-mba* either possessed or knew the two thousand odd books comprising Na-khi ceremonial ; he might know a couple of hundred texts, but for larger ceremonies *dto-mbas* often joined forces to help each other with the books and the chanting. When it is considered that an omission might render a ceremony invalid, it will be appreciated why it was necessary to have some prop to memory to ensure that the contents were not forgotten. There were two such props—script and rhyme.

The ceremonies were chanted with rhyming sentences consisting of a standard metre of five or seven syllables. When the texts were written down in pictographs, only the key words were depicted while the end of the metre was indicated by a vertical line dividing the horizontal sections into rhymed compartments. No special order was necessary in writing pictographs since they are only mnemonics ; thus, repetitions made for the sake of the rhyme or metre need only be written once. Obviously dialects caused changes in the end-rhymes and *dto-mbas* used different pictographs for the same object. But these difficulties are not insuperable, because only about a sixth of the text is written out, which leaves a little latitude for expression ; moreover, when they chanted from another's book the *dto-mbas* more often relied on their memory than on what they could read. The Na-khi language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family group of languages and is closely allied to the Lo-lo language. It is basically monosyllabic but has a number of polysyllabic words. It has also four tones. The difficulties of phonetic transcription are increased by the use of archaic language which, in conjunction with the dialects, sets a limit to the use of syllabic script. A case in point is the employment of the phonetic script for the magic formulae which are reputedly transcriptions from Sanskrit, via Tibetan, to Na-khi. Today they lack any meaning they may once have had, but this does not prohibit their use, since it is the

sound that is supposed to be the efficacious element. The only books completely written in phonetics are, in fact, those containing magical formulae.

The pictographic script was not standardized and the *dto-mbas* were free to use their own systems. But despite the different styles there is considerable uniformity when it comes to depicting common items from the environment or ritual objects. However, the pictographs can reach a height of complexity when several symbols are combined into a rebus. When reading, the *dto-mba* added the verbs and particles from memory. Other *dto-mbas* could work out a rebus from a general knowledge of the context ; should it be too complicated, phonetics could be added to explain the construction. This explanatory technique using phonetics was often employed when abstract ideas had to be represented for which there were often no simple pictographs. The phonetics used in these cases were either the phonetic script or pictographs used phonetically. Similarly, in order to overcome tonal difficulties both scripts might be used. It will be remembered that there are four tones, any one of which could theoretically be used with each of the 276 basic sound complexes of the Na-khi tongue. Thus, ideally there would have to be at least 1,100 symbols to cover all these sounds phonetically. In actual fact, even though a pictograph stands for some recognizable object, it is often pressed into service as a phonetic symbol although it might be in the wrong tone. As in many tonal languages the tonal quality of a word in Na-khi is not fixed but may be changed for the sake of euphonious speech ; this means that the context determines the tone and hence the symbol ; in other words, it is also possible that many pictographs may stand for essentially one thing. If, finally, the archaic utterance is preserved then the pictographs used will tend to lose their meaning and become just ideographs which must be learnt by heart as regards both sound and sense.

The various dialects have often been influenced by the presence of Tibetan and Chinese neighbours and the loan words which have been adopted are often pronounced in a specially modulated tone. The reason for the many loan words arises from the mutual unintelligibility of the different dialects, so that

recourse has been made to Tibetan or Chinese simply as a *lingua franca*. In Na-khi grammar the verb root is unconjugated; tenses are formed by the addition of suffixes, nouns are undeclined, final particles are added as in Chinese, while adjectives follow the noun they qualify.<sup>1</sup> Much of the grammar is omitted in the texts and was added by the *dto-mba* himself from memory.

By now it should be clear why the several "keys to the hieroglyphs" failed or are bound to fail and, further, why even the most comprehensive dictionary will be unsatisfactory for translating these texts. The elementary error made by the hieroglyph school was to confuse the phonetic and pictographic scripts. This is understandable when pictographs can be used phonetically in some texts. The problems that face a would-be translator are that those texts which exclusively use phonetic script are essentially meaningless and that the pictographic texts are cryptic, may contain archaic terms, be composed of complicated rebuses, or may use pictographs phonetically—in which case a knowledge of the dialect is important. The difficulties are such that no-one other than a skilled *dto-mba* can read the books and today there is none left. Before returning to the question of what conclusions can be drawn from the manuscripts which have been collected we must examine the other facts we know about the books and ceremonies.

It is possible to classify the manuscripts in two ways: descriptively (according to format, number of pages, etc.) or functionally (according to the ceremony to which the book belongs, its purpose, etc.). This classification is independent of the actual contents (i.e. the translation problem) and the fact that it is possible to make a classification at all demonstrates that we have at our disposal one tool for handling the manuscripts. Neither of the two ways suggested is sufficient in itself, but together they can enable us to sift the various collections and more readily assess what we have got. It should be stated that the majority of manuscripts are duplicates.

How does a descriptive classification help us? Firstly, we can distinguish several types of books. There are the standard

<sup>1</sup> Rock gives an account of the Na-khi language and scripts in the introduction to his dictionary (1963).

ceremonial books, already described, which fall into two main categories: phonetically written magical formulae and pictographically written ritual texts. Similar in format to these, but sewn along one of the longer edges, are the index books; these contain not only a list of the books to be chanted at a ceremony but also drawings of the ritual objects to be used (Pl. Id). Finally, but from the *dto-mbas'* point of view the most important, there are those sets of books concerned with divination. These have no special format but are generally smaller than the standard size (Pl. IId). They contain lists of items which enable the *dto-mba* to determine which ceremony to perform and also help him to cast horoscopes; they are, in fact, his bread-and-butter books and are on that account seldom parted with. Secondly, a careful description can help us to find out which particular *dto-mba* wrote a manuscript, for not only have *dto-mbas* stylistic traits in writing, they also have characteristic ways of setting out the texts. Besides the colour combination that might be employed on the cover, the first page is often decorated in some way—inset illustrations, the wave motif or illuminated pictographs (Pl. IIa,b,c). Occasionally a *dto-mba* might add a colophon to a manuscript or a dedication, perhaps a letter (in Tibetan or Chinese), but most often his name and the date at the end of the book (Pl. Ic). If the Na-khi script is used for signing the manuscript, then either type may be employed. Although dating might appear to be conclusive, it is unfortunately merely relative, since the typical date only refers to the sixty-year cycle. Nevertheless, it can be useful if we know who has written a manuscript. The earliest dated book that can be given a western dating appears to be of A.D. 1703.<sup>1</sup>

The classification of manuscripts by ceremonies is made easier by the fact that the title generally informs us of both the text and the ceremony concerned. As there are only just over a hundred ceremonies recorded and as we have the index books to guide us, the problem of categorizing the manuscripts is not a particularly serious one. It is here that the descriptive element is of value,

<sup>1</sup> In his article on dating Na-khi manuscripts, Li (1958) argues that the earliest manuscript can be dated A.D. 1668 (p. 162), but if the year is in the ox-earth category it must be dated A.D. 1709.

since the colour and style plus the order number on the back cover help in arranging the manuscripts more quickly. In the surviving collections are examples of all classes of ceremonies, even if they have been somewhat haphazardly brought together and include many incomplete sets (cf. Tables). The reason for the large number of duplicates is that books concerned with obsolete ceremonies were disposed of by indigent *dto-mbas* while popular ceremonies were widely copied and could be purchased for a few coppers.<sup>1</sup> Despite the preponderance of duplicates, it seems probable that known collections contain about a thousand original manuscripts, of which only a hundred have been translated and published.<sup>2</sup>

## II

Up to this point we have been considering Mo-so manuscripts from a bibliographical angle, but now we must examine them in their ceremonial aspect. From this point of view and in order to emphasize the difference in approach we shall now refer to the manuscripts as "Na-khi ritual texts". This nomenclature specifies more closely their nature, since they are almost exclusively written by Na-khi people and by *dto-mbas* in particular. However, the Na-khi are not alone in having shaman-priests, for there exist others among related tribes: the *nda-pa* of the Hli-khin and the *to-mba* of the Zher-khin. All believe that Shi-lo was the founder of their rituals. As already mentioned, these three peoples are collectively called Mo-so, but with the exception of a handful of Zher-khin manuscripts (the Hli-khin have none)<sup>3</sup> all the manuscripts in known collections are from the Na-khi. For this reason the term Na-khi is preferable to that of Mo-so when talking of the manuscripts even if the three peoples all share common beliefs and ceremonies.

<sup>1</sup> See Li (1958) and Rock (1955, *The Zhi mä funeral ceremony*) for the reasons why manuscripts were sold. In the 1920s they could literally be bought for a penny plain and twopence coloured.

<sup>2</sup> Rock estimates (1963, *Life and culture . . .*) that there could be 2,000 different books all told. The translated manuscripts are those by Rock (1937, 1939, 1948, 1952, 1955) and Li (1950, 1957, 1959, 1960). See also Table V.

<sup>3</sup> The *nda-pa* use no manuscripts ordinarily, but Rock claims to have collected one or two—which escaped the attention of the lamas?

As the *dto-mbas* were responsible for writing the texts we are considering, it is necessary to refer briefly to shamanism. In its strictest sense the word should be reserved for a certain type of religious phenomenon existing in Siberia and Central Asia, but like other concepts it has been extended and applied elsewhere. Without entering into further discussion of the various meanings attributed to it, we will adopt Eliade's definition of it as a "technique of ecstasy".<sup>1</sup> The Na-khi word *dto-mba* means shaman but also, possibly, teacher (Tibetan: *ston-pa*); the applicability of the terms will be made clear later. Some form of shamanism is a common element among all the border tribes from Kukur in the north<sup>2</sup> to Yun-nan in the south.<sup>3</sup> Even in the organized religions shamans exist; for example, the *wu* of Taoist belief in China,<sup>4</sup> the priests of the Bön sect in Tibet<sup>5</sup> and several specialists in the other two sects of Lamaism.<sup>6</sup> The struggles between the different Tibetan sects for dominance are reflected in their missionary activities on the borderlands. It is likely that Bön missionaries were active at an early date in the Li-chiang area since they were expelled from Tibet in the eighth century.<sup>7</sup> The Tibetan-Chinese marches have long been a stronghold of Bön, from the Hor states in the north to the So military districts adjoining Li-chiang to the east. The first

<sup>1</sup> Eliade (*Shamanism*, London, 1964), p. 4. See also pp. 444-7 for Eliade's interpretation of Rocks' material on *dto-mba* Shi-lo. While it has the great merit of placing Na-khi shamanism in perspective, the interpretation is Eliade's own.

<sup>2</sup> See L. M. J. Schram, "The Mongours of the Kansu-Tibetan frontier, part II", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s. 47, pt. 1 (1957); F. W. Thomas, "Nam", *Publications of the Philological Society*, vol. xiv (1948).

<sup>3</sup> See Cheng and Ling, "Introduction to the peoples of S.W. China", *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*, vol. xvi, Series A (Chengtu, 1945); C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, "Ethnohistory of South China", *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*, no. 13 (Taiwan, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> J. Needham, *Science and civilisation in China*, ii. (Cambridge, 1956), 132 ff.

<sup>5</sup> H. Hoffmann, *Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Bön-Religion*, *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur*, Mainz, 1950; R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, "Die tibetische Bön-Religion", *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, 1947, and *Oracles and demons of Tibet*, Hague, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> H. Hoffmann, *The religions of Tibet*, London, 1961; R. A. Stein, *La civilisation tibétaine*, Paris, 1962.

<sup>7</sup> See Hoffmann, *op. cit.* p. 96. and Hoffmann (1950), pp. 223 f. Also R. A. Stein, *Les tribus anciennes des marches sino-tibétaines* (Paris, 1961), p. 56.

monasteries to be built in the Li-chiang district were those of the Karma-pa sect (Red hats), who were welcomed there early in the seventeenth century. The Gelug-pa sect (Yellow hats) never succeeded in entering Li-chiang but converted the Hli-khin to the north in the eighteenth century. Thus, representatives of the three Lamaist sects were present near the Na-khi when some of their first dated manuscripts were written. However, the Na-khi were never converted to any form of organized religion; the Red sect were tolerant and did not seek to dominate the people or suppress the *dto-mbas*. By contrast the Yellow sect succeeded in restricting the activities of the Hli-khin *nda-pa*, presumably by burning their books. Although the Na-khi do not follow the teachings of the Chinese Taoists or the native-born lamas and priests, they respect them for their spiritual knowledge, a respect which is not extended to the *dto-mbas*. As might be expected, there has been a certain amount of borrowing from Buddhist and Taoist beliefs, but it is difficult to show that Na-khi shamanism is purely Bön inspired.<sup>1</sup> While it may be that the Na-khi founder, Shi-lo, is identical with gShen-rab mi bo, the legendary founder of Bön, it must be remembered that the latter is really a title meaning "the most excellent of shamans".<sup>2</sup>

Like the *pe-mu* of the Lo-lo,<sup>3</sup> the *dto-mba* was a ritual specialist who used books to help him perform his ceremonies. As mentioned above, apart from this speciality he was an ordinary peasant who married and tilled his land, the only signs of his profession being the ritual books and the tools of his trade hung up inside the house. Both the rituals and the ritual objects were handed down from father to son, the objects being invested in the son's possession at a special ceremony, while the learning of the ceremonial texts from the father began at an early age. Sometimes several sons became *dto-mbas*, but if there were no son the father trained some near relative who proved apt. No

<sup>1</sup> Rock (1952, *Nāga cult*), p. 1. Hoffmann remarks cautiously that the Na-khi texts show a dependence on systematized Bön (1950, p. 234; 1961, p. 96), which may be true of some texts but not all. This is a far cry from claiming the texts as pure Bön.

<sup>2</sup> Hoffmann (1961), p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> Yueh-Hua Lin, *The Lo-lo of Liang Shan*, New Haven, 1961.



initiation ceremony appears to have taken place which was of a demanding nature, although certain qualities were required if a ritual included, for example, washing in boiling oil. However, this could be avoided by employing another specialist, the *llu-bu*. He was a professional diviner, expert in feats required for driving out demons, such as licking hot ploughshares or setting fire to his hands. Being a *llu-bu* was not an hereditary occupation, as might be inferred from the nature of the performances. Rather was he recruited by virtue of his peculiar qualities.<sup>1</sup> Occasionally some *dto-mbas* were also *llu-bu* and then the two offices were ceremonially distinguished by means of dress, the crown and black gown of the *dto-mba* being exchanged for the red turban, blue gown and belt with flags in it of the *llu-bu*. It is interesting to note that this occurrence of two specialists, one hereditary, the other not, is common. Among the Mongours we have the *bö* and *kurtain*,<sup>2</sup> and among the Lo-lo the *pe-mu* and *su-nien*,<sup>3</sup> the latter being possibly cognate with the Na-khi *ssan-nyi*, a derogatory term for the *llu-bu*.

Most villages had one or more *dto-mbas*, the family of the chief often having a private *dto-mba*. Although local *dto-mbas* would combine forces for a large ceremony, there was no organized hierarchy; the oldest of them generally acted as leader. The *llu-bu*, on the other hand, were not tied to any particular district since theirs was a more individual and competitive occupation; renowned *llu-bu* would often be summoned from long distances. Neither the *dto-mba* nor the *llu-bu* were held in high regard and were more feared than welcomed, being an unpleasant necessity for the exorcism of unwanted spirits. The services of the *dto-mba* were paid for in money and kind, the amount depending on the nature and elaborateness of the ceremony, but since poorer people could not afford much, simpler versions were performed for them. The ceremonies as such were essentially family affairs, either for the household or lineage, but seldom for the

<sup>1</sup> Rock (1963, *Life and Culture*), pp. 41 f. *Dto-mbas* were qualified to become *llu-bu* after making a certain pilgrimage. *Llu-bu* were in any case initiated into their profession by a ceremony performed by *dto-mbas* at the Temple of Sado, the patron deity of the *llu-bu*.

<sup>2</sup> See Schram, op. cit. pp. 76 ff.

<sup>3</sup> See Lin, op. cit. p. 127.

community. The different festivals organized by the lamaseries were attended by those interested. Similarly the Chinese-inspired festivals at New Year and Mid-Autumn were celebrated individually and cannot be reckoned as Na-khi ceremonies. By the 1940s there were only some three dozen *dto-mbas* left in the Li-chiang area and only six *nda-pa* in Yung-ning. By then the whole process of shamanism was in decay. Few in Li-chiang employed *dto-mbas* and *dto-mbas*' sons denied their fathers' calling, while those who practised knew only a small number of the many texts. When the communists took over the area in 1949 the *dto-mbas* were proscribed and the books burned; a few *dto-mbas* escaped but by now there can be practically none left who can remember the texts.

Before describing the ceremonies it may be as well to review some of the general beliefs which the Na-khi held. All space was regarded as being inhabited by spirits and deities, some beneficent, others not. Every mountain, hill, forest and spring had its guardian spirit, the most important being the *Ssu* serpent spirits who had many subordinate spirits and animals under them. The *Ssu* were easily offended and if annoyed might steal one of a man's souls, whereupon he would fall ill. Besides semi-benevolent spirits there were myriads of demons which sprang into existence as a result of man's misdeeds and caused accidents, epidemics, fires, quarrels, etc. Although a relation existed between man and the spirits it was the *dto-mba* who could act as intermediary and pacify or drive out annoying spirits. Local deities might be propitiated, but major ones were generally too remote from human affairs, for it was only after death that one would meet them, in the land of one's ancestors. In order to join one's ancestors certain observances had to be performed by relatives of the deceased. For example, should a person die without having the traditional grains of rice placed under his tongue, then he would become a wind demon. In the case of suicide, which was extremely common, there was no such fate, but instead a life of perpetual bliss in a world forever young. Death did not lead to an eternal hell. The way to the ancestors, however, must be known and it was for this reason that the *dto-mbas* were required to perform the ceremonies. The

eschatology appears to be of mixed origin and contains Tibetan, Chinese and Burmese beliefs added to the original framework. There were no uniform sets of beliefs characterizing formal doctrines; spirits and deities varied from district to district and the *dto-mbas* did not attempt any systematization, although certain spirits occur in many texts. This explains in part the large number of deities and spirits recorded, for certain *dto-mbas* seem to have added many of these for one reason or another, as a large number of named beings are only to be found in a few books. Finally, there are common beliefs in lucky days, horoscopes, divination and geomancy.

We may regard the ceremonies themselves either from the point of view of their occurrence in the annual production-cycle of the agricultural year or as they occur in the individual life-cycle (Tables IV and V). In this way we may note which ceremonies were performed regularly and which were contingent. The agricultural year may conveniently be regarded as beginning at the same time as the solar year since the main harvest feast (*Müan bpö*) was celebrated in the first few days of the New Year.<sup>1</sup> As time was reckoned on a lunar basis the calendar had to be adjusted periodically to allow for the discrepancy with the solar year, thus introducing a slight irregularity into the production cycle. Thanksgiving ceremonies took place at different fixed times during the calendar year, as did increase ceremonies and those for one's ancestors. Rain-controlling ceremonies varied in date, depending, as they do, upon local needs and requirements. A characteristic feature of production-cycle ceremonies was that they took place in the open away from the villages and did not necessitate the presence of a *dto-mba*, even though it might be customary to employ one. The life-cycle ceremonies were contingent on birth, marriage, illness, misfortune and death. They were therefore of irregular occurrence although they, too, were dependable eventualities. These ceremonies were characterized by being more complicated and diversified than the production-cycle ceremonies; they were performed at the request of the individual families and took place partly within and partly outside the house.

<sup>1</sup> Rock (1948), translation.

Before any particular life-cycle ceremony took place recourse was always had to divination to ensure that it was the correct one and that the time was propitious. Horoscopes were cast for every undertaking of importance ; for instance, a wedding could not be celebrated until the stars of the betrothed couple were in harmony. Besides the individual stars governing one's actions there were stars governing the different days of the week, and both had to be taken into account for the undertaking to succeed. While the stars governed the timing of the ceremony, it was still necessary in cases of misfortune or illness to find out which spirit was responsible in order to propitiate it. To this end the chief methods of divination were scapulimancy, casting dice, knotting strings and using a divination chart. The results were not in themselves sufficient to determine which ceremony should be performed. They had to be interpreted with the aid of the so-called divination books, which were in a sense the key books of the *dto-mbas*. Occasionally *llu-bu* were summoned, as they were professional diviners and mediums ; in such cases the *llu-bu* either recommended a specific course of action or suggested that a ceremony be performed by the *dto-mba*. In the latter case, knowing the agent responsible, the *dto-mba* could consult his books to discover the one most fitting.

No matter which ceremony was to be performed, the initial task of the *dto-mba* was to carry out a ritual cleansing. There were several of these rites, the complexity depending on the ensuing main ceremony.<sup>1</sup> The purpose was to drive away *ch'ou* (impurity caused by man), as this polluted the place of ritual. The actions that produced *ch'ou* are so many and varied that no one can escape from the charge of pollution. This does not mean that *ch'ou* was a regulative concept carrying with it a prohibitive undertone, for as a code of behaviour it would entail a complete paralysis of action. One aspect of *ch'ou* is that it acts like a creeping contagion ; not only the instigator is infected but his family, his house, his land and even the spirits and Nature itself. In other words, nothing can be assumed to be ritually pure and so the *dto-mba* could rest assured that he had to perform the initial purification rites. *Ch'ou* was thus a self-sealing device to

<sup>1</sup> Rock (1952, *Nāga cult*), translation.

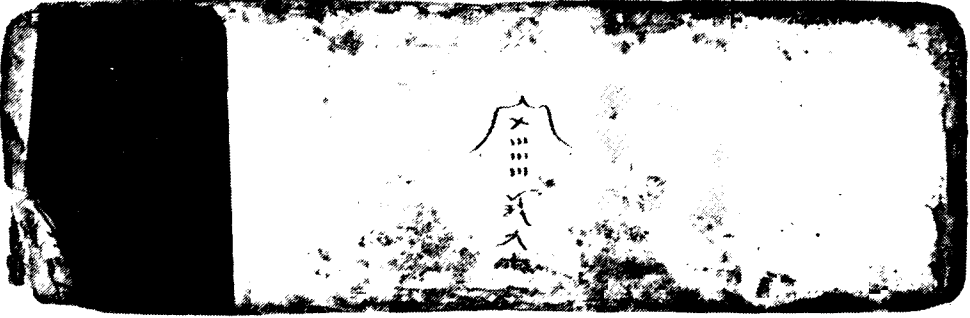


PLATE I

- (a) MS. 129, front cover : Title.
- (b) MS. 129, back cover : Number of book.
- (c) MS. 37, last page : Date.
- (d) MS. 129, fol. 2r. : Ritual objects.

From the Rylands' Na-khi collection.

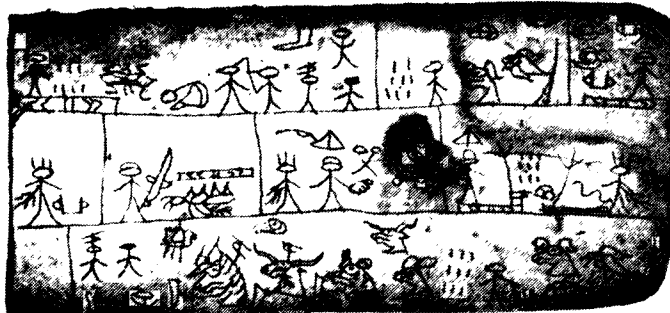
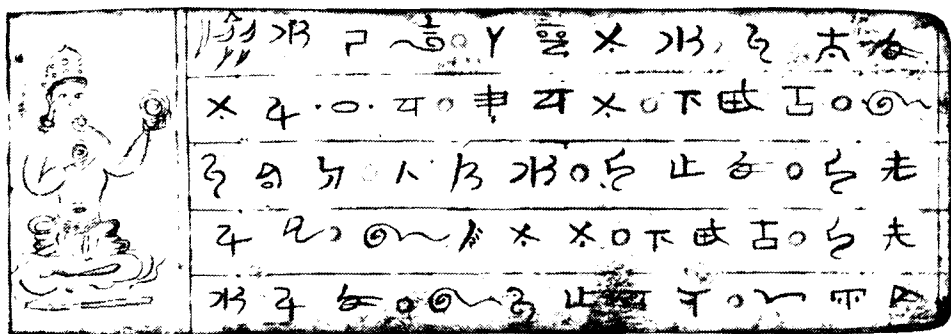
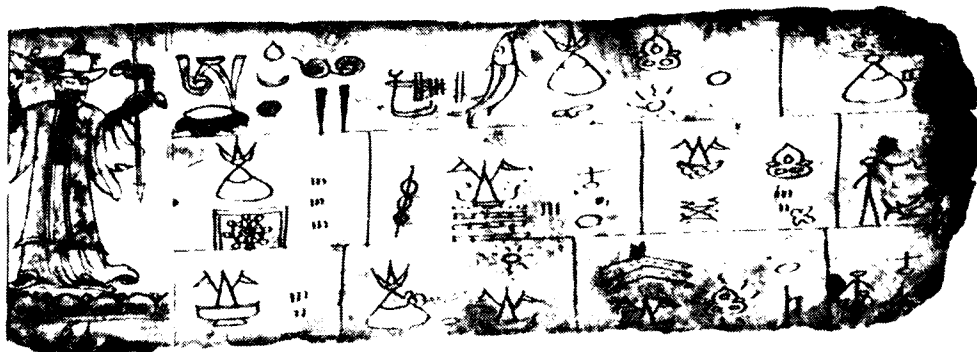


PLATE II

- (a) MS. 18, fol. 1r. : Pictographs.
- (b) MS. 10, fol. 1r. : Phonetics.
- (c) MS. 12, fol. 1r. : Phonetics plus Tibetan vowel signs.
- (d) MS. 44, fol. 3r. : Book of divination.

From the Rylands' Na-khi collection.

ensure the performance of certain rites and these could be more expensive than the main ceremony.<sup>1</sup> The cleansing rites were necessary because, should *ch'ou* be present, the *dto-mba's* aiding spirits and deities could not come to the place of the ceremony and help him drive out the annoying spirits. Hence the other aspect of *ch'ou*, as a self-sealing device, to be used as an explanation of possible failure.<sup>2</sup>

For long and complicated ceremonies the *dto-mba* relied on the index book to guide him, while for shorter ceremonies there were a few notes at the end of his manuscript. The index book gives not only the titles and order of books to be chanted but also sketches of the ritual objects to be used and their disposition at the place of the ceremony. When spirits were to be invited, their profiles were drawn on special wooden slats which were stuck into the ground. The index book contains sketches of all these spirits (Pl. Id). An examination of the index books helps us to gauge the extent of the various ceremonies since they give the number of books chanted (Table V). A comparison of production- and life-cycle ceremonies shows that the latter are by far the more complicated, and the highly significant fact emerges that ten life-cycle ceremonies are responsible for over two-thirds of the books listed in the index books. *This means that about 90 per cent of Na-khi ceremonies only require an average of three books each.* Even allowing for the facts that books vary in length, that this is an average figure, and that it is based on only those manuscripts in known collections, nevertheless it cannot be far removed from the truth considering the extent of these collections. Thus, the majority of ceremonies recorded are comparatively simple, a view which stands in sharp contrast to the impression derived from the ceremonies that have been published.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rock (1952, *Nāga cult*), translation. The *ch'ou* ceremony demanded the sacrifice of a goat and a chicken while the longer *Ssu* ceremony required only the liberation of a chicken. The sacrifice was not always carried out.

<sup>2</sup> All magico-religious rites have some such inbuilt safeguard against failure, to explain the possible cause of non-success. The best analysis of the closed nature of such beliefs is E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and magic among the Azande*, Oxford, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> See Table V for the comparative lengths of the different ceremonies.

With the exception of the Mùan bpö ceremony, where a *dto-mba* was not absolutely necessary, little participation was demanded of the family for whom the ceremony was being performed, apart from their presence. Thus the *dto-mbas* had complete charge of the ritual and acted solely on their clients' behalf. Ceremonies could last from a few hours up to several days, depending on how elaborate a ritual was demanded, and could employ up to a dozen *dto-mbas*. The food, wine and sacrificial animals supplied by the family became the perquisites of the *dto-mbas*.

Ceremonies usually began with the burning of incense after the ritual objects had been laid out. With the aid of his books the *dto-mba* began to chant in a voice pitched to suit the particular ceremony or book. When certain dances were performed he brandished his sword and to the tinkling of his small bell executed a slow monotonous step, but when exorcising demons *dto-mbas* were paired and fought sham battles at an increased tempo. The most enlivened spectacle was provided by the *llu-bu* drumming and the feats of the *llu-bu* himself.<sup>1</sup> The ceremonies usually ended with a brief plea for fertility and long life, whereupon the ritual objects were disposed of. Most ceremonies were performed in daylight but a few were held exclusively at night, like those performed by *llu-bu* alone. In such cases the books are written in white ink on a blackened paper to make for easier reading (Pl. IIc). Although there were dramatic moments the ritual was marked more by monotony than spectacle.

There is not space here to enter into details of the ritual paraphernalia but it may be mentioned that there was a preponderate use of wood and stone objects ; it will be recalled that the pictographic script is called " wood record, stone record ". Besides these the offerings usually consisted of food and imitation bullion ; for sacrifice the chicken was the commonest animal killed, followed by the pig and goat. Larger animals were rarely sacrificed.

<sup>1</sup> The ritual purpose of such activities as holding red-hot stones or washing in boiling oil is to help drive away demons. The *llu-bu* often went into a trance when performing, unlike the *dto-mba*.



As regards the location of ceremonies, they were mainly performed out-of-doors for there were no temples or ritual centres within the villages. Ritual is both a symbolic and an expressive action, hence it is not surprising that the place where the ceremonies were enacted also partook of the ritual symbolism. We may denote this concentration of attention upon a specific place by the term ritual focus. There were several ritual foci in Na-khi ceremonial but the central one, to which all the others were linked, was the hearth. One can imagine the various ritual foci as so many concentric circles around a common centre, the three hearth-stones. These concentric spaces contained the different spheres of ritual action which the ceremonies enacted and which were symbolically linked to the hearth, the centre of family life, about which daily life revolves.

The production-cycle ceremonies, which aimed at fertility and protection, were relatively simple and straightforward whereas the life-cycle ceremonies were more varied. In order to examine the ceremonies more closely those belonging to the life-cycle may be broken down into categories, viz. those dealing with illness, misfortune, suicide and death. The number of books devoted to these categories is shown in Table II, column 4, while a percentage comparison is given in the same column in Table III. Since these figures are based on the *dto-mbas'* index books they represent the best estimate we have of the relative proportions of manuscripts devoted to different categories of ceremonies. We may note in passing that the manuscripts in known collections falling into the same categories (Table III, column 10) bears a striking resemblance to the estimate based on the index books. However, this agreement is no proof that the estimate is correct, since the collections are not random samples as far as we know. Nevertheless, there seems to be an apparent consistency between the different collections that tends to support the estimate.

The main ceremony for serious illness was the propitiation of the *Ssu* serpent spirits; this was always preceded by a long cleansing ritual.<sup>1</sup> No medicine was given to the sick person but instead symbolic medicine was sprinkled on the *Ssu* so that they

<sup>1</sup> Rock, *op. cit.*

would return the soul they had stolen, the loss of which indirectly caused the illness. Practically all contingent misfortunes—sudden illness, sterility, leprosy, epidemics, floods, grain diseases, fires, quarrels, possession—were attributed to demons. There were numerous ceremonies for exorcising demons but they were comparatively simple, short and inexpensive since they had only a single end in view. Suicide was a common occurrence among the Na-khi and no little blame for this may be laid at the *dtombas*' door, as the beliefs they encouraged did not inhibit people from taking their own lives; rather the contrary.<sup>1</sup> The funeral ceremonies were graded according to status and included further rites for the survivors after the funeral besides a funerary ceremony to be held a few years later.<sup>2</sup> The main production-cycle ceremony was held outside the village in a sacred sacrificial pit.<sup>3</sup> It is not possible here to enter into the details of the various ceremonies outlined above as this would take us too far from the subject of this article. It is hoped to deal with this aspect in another article.

### III

Returning to the initial problem of what conclusions may be drawn from an examination of the manuscripts brought together in various collections, it will be helpful to consider the data assembled in Table II. It will be seen from this that all told there are extant about six times as many manuscripts as there are items in the lists recorded in the index books (cf. columns 4 and 10). This means that we can expect nearly 85 per cent of these manuscripts to be copies. The proportion of duplicates for each type of ceremony may also be obtained from the table. As regards these—and there is plenty of evidence that many manuscripts are direct copies of older texts—it is obvious that the ratios are only applicable to the ceremonies taken as a whole. Although there are some complete sets of ceremonies among the extant manuscripts, a large proportion of the duplicates are copies of

<sup>1</sup> Rock (1939), Li (1958) and Goullart (1955), pp. 151 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Rock (1955, *Zhi mā funeral ceremony*).

<sup>3</sup> Rock (1948) also has photographs of the altar. These are missing in the reprint of 1952.

only the more popular parts of ceremonies. The reason for this is that the *dto-mbas* did not have all the books necessary for the larger ceremonies; they possessed only the basic books and borrowed the others. It was mentioned above that simpler versions of ceremonies (requiring only the basic books) were performed for poorer people, while the more elaborate versions demanded several *dto-mbas*, some of whom would possess the rarer manuscripts.

It is not surprising that there are duplicates when one considers the limited number of ceremonies (Table V). The reason why we have so many manuscripts now is simply because the whole process of Na-khi shamanism was decaying. Surplus books could be and were changed into cash in the nineteen-twenties. The suicide ceremonies had been banned in 1912 by the government in an attempt to curb the suicide rate. The funeral texts were scarcely used at that time, the number of demons requiring exorcism was vast, the *Ssu* ceremonies were popular—such reasons explain the duplication of collected texts. Another factor to be taken into account is that the manuscripts collected represent the product of several hundred years of writing, although many of them are themselves barely a hundred years old.

That some of the books are old is obvious; the paper is yellowed, worn and dirty, the edges well-thumbed and rounded with use. In time the sewing wears and the book disintegrates, but since they were not sacred old copies were replaced by new ones. We cannot expect the manuscripts to be very ancient and in fact the earliest reliably dated manuscripts stem from A.D. 1703. Rock suggests that a certain *dto-mba* wrote his books as early as A.D. 1573, but unfortunately the evidence<sup>1</sup> does not serve to fix the date absolutely; they could have been written in any of the sexagenary cycles before or after 1573. However, if we assume

<sup>1</sup> Rock (1963, *Life and culture*), p. 44. The difficulty arises over the seventh cycle. Which is it? It cannot be the Chinese. If it were the Tibetan cycle the date would be A.D. 1393. The only possible contentent is the Mongol cycle that began in A.D. 1210, but since this was hopelessly wrong by 1302 it seems unlikely that it would still be in use two centuries later. If we admit that this was an isolated place that carried on the Mongol system, unaware that it had been abandoned, one can equally well postulate some other home-made cycle. Unfortunately there is no proof as yet. See also Rock (1952, *Müan bpö*), p. 75.

Rock's dating to be correct, it is interesting to note another manuscript by the same *dto-mba* in which he names thirteen of his immediate ancestors, all *dto-mbas*. If we allow thirty years per generation this would take us back to the time of the Na-khi chief Mou-pao A-tsung, the legendary inventor of the pictographic script, whose son it was who welcomed Kublai Khan's armies. The earliest circumstantial evidence we have is in the Mu chronicles, which were written in A.D. 1516. It seems that some Na-khi text was used for the construction of the genealogy it contains.<sup>1</sup> Although this text could be oral tradition and not a *dto-mba* book, it nevertheless suggests that there was a long tradition in existence. Not surprisingly the same text occurs in a production-cycle ceremony which is typically short and simple. Seen from a typological point of view those manuscripts that appear oldest are simple in style and generally quite short; but there are as yet no corroborative dates. Although a number of manuscripts are dated, the dates are in the sexagenary system, which is insufficient for precision. Li found in his examination of the manuscripts at the Library of Congress some sixty that could be dated absolutely.<sup>2</sup> The majority came from the nineteenth century and continued up to 1938, which confirms his statement, based on a knowledge of some ten thousand manuscripts from the Li-chiang area, that the majority of dated manuscripts was written after 1875. It should be remembered, however, that dating was an uncommon practice and no certain conclusions can be drawn from the datings we have.

We have surveyed such evidence as can be obtained from manuscripts in known collections and may now enquire in what manner the study of Na-khi ritual books should proceed. There are several possible approaches depending on the end in view; these will be briefly touched upon.

Beginning with the fact that there are a limited number of ceremonies, we could attempt to determine in which libraries these are located and at the same time note duplicates. A card-index could be compiled of titles that we know already, arranged under ceremonies. This task is made easier by the fact that

<sup>1</sup> Rock (1947), pp. 76 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Li (1958), Pl. Ic.

many manuscripts have distinctive covers for different ceremonies, together with a title and an order number. A problem arises with manuscripts which are without covers or with those which have an incorrect cover or title. To deal with these we must make use of stylistic traits—decoration, method of representing commonly recurring items, dating, or signature—as well as of the contents, which can be compared with known texts. What is suggested as a first approach is a catalogue of manuscripts belonging to certain known *dto-mbas*. There are a good half-dozen of these, who between them are responsible for hundreds of manuscripts. As they were not all contemporaries there was some copying one from another, as can be seen by a comparison of their texts.

One reason for investigating the manuscripts belonging to certain *dto-mbas* is that it might enable us to construct a relative chronology of production, and finally an absolute chronology. As mentioned above, some manuscripts have an identifiable date, others a relative one.<sup>1</sup> A careful comparison may enable us to trace the development of Na-khi manuscripts both in time and complexity.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps of greater interest is the problem of untranslated manuscripts. As already indicated, there is little chance of ever completely translating a Na-khi text since it was never fully written out. But this does not mean that we cannot discover its contents. What must first be done is to compile a pictographic dictionary arranged on the lines of a Chinese dictionary. This

<sup>1</sup> Li (*ibid.*) gives many examples. From the Rylands' collection may be mentioned MS. No. 81 which bears the date 1839 (in western reckoning) written on the cover in Tibetan. See also Pl. Ic for a relative dating in Na-khi.

<sup>2</sup> There seem to be indications that both the suicide and funeral ceremonies were considerably added to after the Chinese take-over in A.D. 1723. This could be explained partly by the fact that the chiefs who supported the Red sect were demoted, thus allowing the *dto-mbas* greater freedom to practise in Li-chiang. A further possibility is that, despite adaptation to the Chinese-style marriage and burial customs, there simply was not enough trade. It is quite likely, as the Chinese judged later, that the suicide ceremonies (and the many demon-eviction ceremonies) were deliberately invented by the *dto-mbas* for gain. This does not explain, however, why the ceremonies were accepted by the Na-khi. There is not space to enter into a discussion of this problem here, but it is hoped to take up the point again elsewhere.

would entail giving a meaning, not simply to each and every pictograph, but rather to a group of pictographs, as the texts are often built up from stereotyped phrases. With the help of texts already translated it should then be possible to reconstruct enough of an untranslated text to give a good idea of its contents. As may be imagined the task will not be easy.

Once the above-mentioned work has been carried out, at least in part, then, as progress is made in Tibetan studies, it may be possible to see more clearly the relationship between Na-khi and Tibetan texts. But apart from the value of such a comparison, Na-khi manuscripts have given and can continue to give much information on the ritual beliefs of a little investigated area of the world, information that can illuminate the beliefs of other tribes of S.E. Asia. Although sometimes called "Mo-so magical texts", a better name for these manuscripts would simply be "Na-khi ritual notes". There is a world of difference.

TABLE I

(a) *Collections of Na- $\dot{h}$ i Manuscripts*

1. U.S.A.	Year Acquired	Collector	Total MSS.
Library of Congress	1924	J. F. Rock	78
	1927	J. F. Rock	598
	1930	J. F. Rock	716
	1935	V. Harrison (acquired from J. F. Rock?)	573
	1945	Q. Roosevelt	1,073
			3,038
Harvard-Yenching Institute	?	J. F. Rock	510
	1945	Q. Roosevelt	88
Former Rock Collection, Heronmere, Conn.—V. Harrison	1934	J. F. Rock	3,500?
Private collections or unknown	?	J. F. Rock	25?
	1945	Q. Roosevelt	700?
2. EUROPE		U.S.A.	7,861
Staatsbibliothek, Marburg/Lahn	1961	J. F. Rock	1,118 (copies 913)
John Rylands Library, Manchester	1916-22	G. Forrest	135
India Office Library, London	1916	G. Forrest	17
	1929-31	S. Wyatt-Smith	91
British Museum	1929-31	S. Wyatt-Smith	91
L'École des Langues Orientales, Paris	1890?	Prince Henri	} 25?
	1900?	J. Bacot	
Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden	1880	E. Schar ten	15
3. ASIA		EUROPE	1,492
National Central Museum, Taiwan	1944-	Lin-ts'an Li	1,221
		Recorded Total	10,574

(b) *Collectors of Na- $\dot{h}$ i Manuscripts*

J. F. Rock	7,118?	1922-49
Q. Roosevelt	1,861?	1944
Lin-ts'an Li	1,221	1944-5
S. Wyatt-Smith	182	1929-31
G. Forrest	152	1910-20
E. Scharfen	15	1880
Others	25	
	10,574	

*Note* : This is the minimum number of recorded manuscripts. The question marks denote that the real figure is uncertain but is probably greater. The dates refer to the year(s) in which the manuscripts were collected in the field.

TABLE II

*Categories of Ceremonial Manuscripts in Certain Libraries*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Type of ceremony	Rock's category	No. of ceremonies	No. of books chanted	Library of Congress	Marburg	Harvard, Heronmere	India Office, British Museum	Total of col. 6 & 7	Total of col. 5, 6, 7, 8
Illness	VI, VII	3	102	440	199	140	18	339	797
Misfortune	XII	31	211	756x	302	191	75	493	1,324
Suicide	XIII	16x	131	365	161	146	2	307	674
Death	VIII, X	20x	344	1,091	460	323	66	783	1,940
Production-cycle	I-V, IX	35	52	262	137	86	6	223	491
Total	12	105	840	2,914	1,259	886	167	2,145	5,226

*Notes on columns :*

1. Analysis based on Li's article (1958).
2. For Rock's categories see Rock (1952).
3. The number of ceremonies is based on Rock (1952), those marked with x can be made by combination.
4. The number is derived from the *dto-mbas'* index books, cf. Rock (1965).
5. The total 756x is made by combining items 4 and 6 of Li (1958).
6. Both manuscripts and copies are reckoned here, but not those falling in column 7.
7. Both the former Rock collection at Heronmere and at Harvard.
8. Both the India Office and British Museum collection together.
9. The totals of columns 6 and 7 represent Rock's personal collection before its dispersal. Rock's contribution to the Library of Congress was not made with the same discrimination.
10. This total gives the complete breakdown of manuscripts according to known categories of ceremonies.  
A comparison of column 4 with columns 5, 6, and 7 indicates the size of the duplicates in the collections.



TABLE III

*Percentage of Categorized Manuscripts in Certain Libraries*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Illness	VI, VII		12	15	16	16	11	16	14
Misfortune	XII		25	26	24	22	45	23	26
Suicide	XIII		16	13	13	16	1	14	13
Death	VIII, X		41	37	36	36	40	37	37
Production-cycle	I-V, IX		6	9	11	10	3	10	10

*Note* : The same columns are used here as in Table II. The proportion of books used (col. 4) is closely similar to the proportions of collected manuscripts.

TABLE IV

*Production- and Life-Cycle Ceremonies**(a) Production-Cycle*

Time			Ceremony	Performed for
Season	Date	Moon		
Winter solstice	20 Dec.	7th day, 11th moon	Khi nv	those that have died in the last three years. the wine preparation for the New Year (Mùan bpö). the local earth-owners (mountain spirits). the <i>Ssu</i> serpent spirits to give long life. the propitiation of Heaven, Earth and Juniper at the New Year —main ceremony.
	26 Jan.	14th day, 12th moon,	Mùan bpö	
		1st day, 1st moon 1st moon	Gkaw-ds dshu Ssu gv	
		3rd, 7th or 9th day, 1st moon	Mùan bpö	
Spring equinox	21 March	28th day, 2nd moon	—	fertility, a fair and festival. protection and increase of domestic animals. Heaven (grain ripening).
	5 April	13th-15th 3rd moon ? day, 3rd moon 4th moon	Non bpö Mùan bpö	
		3rd day, 5th moon 4th day, 6th moon ?	T'a bpö —	
Summer solstice	21 June	3rd day, 5th moon 4th day, 6th moon ?	T'a bpö —	ancestors. Festivals : Buddhist All Souls—Houpachoi, jump- ing through the fire. Earth, second largest ceremony.
Rains	Aug.	7th moon	Mùan bpö	
Autumn equinox	23 Sept.	8th day, 8th moon 8th moon 25th day, 8th moon	Non bpö Ts'u bpö	protection of animals. ancestors.
	Nov.	10th moon	Mùan bpö	the Emperor (rice ripens).

*Note* : The western dates are only approximate since the lunar year must constantly be readjusted to the solar year by adding intercalary months. This adjustment is not regular and may be made at any time other than towards the end of the year or at the beginning.

*(b) Life-Cycle*

Occasion	Ceremony	Remarks
Purification	Ch'ou na gv	Generally performed before most life-cycle ceremonies.
Birth	Ngaw bpö	For the protection of the child.
Marriage	Ssu dsu	Not often performed in recent years.
Illness Misfortune Suicide	Ssu ddu gv various Har-la-llü k'ö	For serious illness. Determined by divination. Performed by the families concerned, the actual ceremony depending on the method of death.
Death	Zhi mä & others	Main general ceremony depending on status of deceased.
Funerary	Szi chung bpö Khi nv	For survivors. Performed collectively for all who have died in the village in the last three years since the previous Khi nv.

TABLE V

*Comparison of the Number of Manuscripts Chanted in the Production- and Life-Cycle Ceremonies*

Production-Cycle			Life-Cycle		
Ceremony	for	No.	Ceremony	for	No.
<i>Müan bpö</i>	Propitiation of Heaven	16x	<i>Ch'ou na gv</i>	Purification	45x
Non bpö	Protection of flocks	1	Ngaw bpö	Birth	1
Gkaw ds dshu	Local earth owners	3	Ssu dsu	Marriage	10
T'a bpö	Ancestors	1	<i>Ssu ddü gv</i>	Illness	56x
Ts'u bpö	Ancestors	1	O p'er o na bpö	Quarrels	25x
Khü mä } Khü dtv }	Rain	1	Dto na k'ö	Scape-goat	93x
		1	Har-la-llu k'ö	Suicide	113x
Minor Ceremonies (20)	Propitiation	1 av.	<i>Zhi mä</i>	Funeral	45x
Total		44	Shi-lo nv	Dto-mba's funeral	77x
			Shi-k'u dter bpö	Successive deaths	27x
			Szi chung bpö	Survivors	72x
			Khi nv	Funerary	61x
			Minor Ceremonies (13)	Funerals	6 av.
			(47)	Propitiation of demons	2 av.
			Total		797

*Note* : If a separate index book is available the ceremony is marked x. For minor ceremonies the names are omitted and the average (av.) number of manuscripts per ceremony is given.

The ten largest ceremonies in the Life-Cycle column account for 614 manuscripts of the total of 840 different ceremonial manuscripts given, i.e. over two-thirds. Thus the remaining ninety-five ceremonies share the 226 manuscripts left, an *average of three manuscripts per ceremony*. The published ceremonies are given in italics.