

Report of BuddhistRoad Guest Lecture

11 November 2021 David Pritzker (Chicago)

CAVE MURALS OF WESTERN TIBET

invited lecture at the BuddhistRoad project, CERES, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

The BuddhistRoad team invited David Pritzker, Director of the Pritzker Art Collaborative, Chicago, to give an online BuddhistRoad Guest Lecture on art, patronage, and practice in Western Tibet from the 10th to 13th century. He first outlined some general periodisation—from the collapse of the Tibetan Empire (Tib. Bod chen po, ca. 7th c. to 842) in the mid-9th century to the beginnings of the so-called second diffusion of Buddhism (Tib. *phyi dar*) between the 11th and 13th century. In doing so, Dr. Pritzker highlighted the importance of the *period in between*, often referred to in Tibetan historiography as the ‘Dark Period’ due to the chaos ensued by imperial collapse. In his presentation, however, he instead opted for the more generous Tibetan periodisation of the ‘Rekindling of the Flame of Buddhism’ (Tib. *bstan me ro bslangs*). Dr. Pritzker then went on to discuss this period in relation to the transfer of power from Central Tibet to West Tibet based on a little-known royal chronicle (Tib. *rgyal rabs*) which was the main focus of his PhD thesis. In particular he discussed the exodus of Kyidé Nyima Göñ (d. ca. 930, Tib. sKyid de Nyi ma mgon), aka. Métri Kyilding (Tib. Mes khri sKyil lding [sic]) and the process of establishing kingship in West Tibet with the support and invitation of a number of important clans from both Central as well as West Tibet. He also pointed out the importance of key Tibetan terms, titles, and the importance of the rhetoric in the royal chronicle in shedding light on the transfer and transformation of kingship in West Tibet.

Following on this historical overview David Pritzker shifted focus to geography in order to establish the position and importance of Western Tibet or Tö Ngari (Tib. sTod mNga’ ris) within the trade routes of the Silk Road, and specifically as part of the dense braided trade routes that span from Kashmir and the Wakhan Corridor in the west through the plains of the Jangtang (Tib. Byang thang) and up to Khotan, even going as far as the Hexi Corridor (Chin. Hexi zoulang 河西走廊) in the east. This was further elaborated upon by bringing up the sacral and environmental importance of the major rivers of Asia that have their source in Western Tibet. Showing that there was likely more nuance in the royal migration from



Central Tibet to Western Tibet which included connections to Dunhuang (敦煌) and the southern routes of the Tarim Basin.

Dr. Pritzker went on to look at how the customs of kingship and the traditions of the Buddhist Road worked together in the rekindling of Buddhism in Western Tibet. In particular he focused on the tradition of patronage of cave murals by important clans in the area. Using this as a central idea David Pritzker spent the remaining time of the lecture to discuss the transmission of Buddhism and Buddhist art from Kashmir to Western Tibet through the life and activities of the Great Translator Rinchen Zangpo (958–1055, Tib. *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po). He showed images of Rinchen Zangpo's paternal village, the cave murals of Nyak, along with a number of other important cave sites which span from the late 11th through 16th century. David ended his presentation with a quick glimpse at the beautiful and lively cave murals of Dungkar (Tib. *Dung dkar*) in order to discuss once again the importance of royal commission and practice of Buddhism in Western Tibet.

