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Elena De Rossi Filibeck

Manuscripts
of “Tibetan Marriage Songs”
from Ladakh

August Hermann Francke’s Legacy
in the Tucci Collection, Rome

with an essay by John Bray



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FRANCKE'S TIBETAN MARRIAGE SONGS

Himalaya and its history have always played a primary role in the Oriental studies in Italy. The deep bond of Giuseppe Tucci with this area is well-known, and his example has inspired generations of scholars. Among his pupils and scientific heirs, the significant achievements by Luciano Petech considerably improved our knowledge on early Tibet and its contacts with the western world. Petech, whose researches are still highly topical, was actively involved in the vibrant cultural climate that lead the activities of ISMEO and IsIAO. Working in continuity with these well-known institutions is a cornerstone of the new ISMEO, that I have the honour to lead; I am therefore particularly pleased to present this volume by Elena De Rossi Filibeck, one of Petech's students who was an outstanding member of both institutions and is now part of the board of our refounded ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies.

Her work represents a significant update for the Tibetan studies, by collecting mostly unpublished manuscript texts that report the centuries-old tradition of the Ladakhi wedding songs. The case of Ladakh, that lies in the intersection of a network of trading routes and suffered foreign occupations, is very significant because offers a relevant example of interrelations and inter-cultural contacts.

These texts were transcribed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries by August Hermann Francke, a Moravian missionary scholar actively engaged in field research in Ladakh. Francke, who was very interested in the local dialects, found in wedding songs a significant expression of the spoken language: his efforts have saved an important heritage that could have been forgotten, but his publication project was left incomplete. In 1932, after his death, the manuscripts were sent from the Director General of Archaeology in India to Giuseppe Tucci, hoping that he would be able to edit it. At that time, long journeys in Asia and teaching fellowships in Indian universities built and consolidated his image as scholar also in this part of the world: Tucci, who in those years was absorbed in founding ISMEO together with Giovanni Gentile, had become by that time a distinguished representative in the field of these ancient studies.

Francke's manuscripts remained unknown until recently. Their rediscovery and publication are most welcome, and make available to a wider public an inestimable oral heritage. Popular folklore is an integral part of local cultures; this collection, enriched by accurate discussions and comparisons, develops a bad-known matter and introduces several themes for further research.

Finally, I would like extend warm thanks by ISMEO to John Bray for his detailed essay on Hermann August Francke and his work, that has been a very significant starting point for the Ladakhi studies.

ADRIANO V. ROSSI
President, ISMEO

PREFACE

I received the manuscripts that represent the core of this volume in my former capacity as Scientific Director of the Tucci Tibetan Fund in the IsIAO library in Rome. The original material was collected by the Moravian missionary scholar A. H. Francke (1870-1930) and sent to Rome after his death. Prof. Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984) was very interested in these texts, according to Prof. Luciano Petech (1914-2010), his heir in Ladakhi studies. However, he was not able to complete their analysis and publication. After examining their contents, Prof. Petech encouraged me to publish them, even though not all the texts were completely unknown. I am honoured to take on this important project in order to preserve and make known one of the last historical expressions of the Himalayan cultural tradition.

I thought it appropriate that my transcription work should be accompanied by an essay on Francke, who made far-reaching contributions to the study of Ladakhi history and culture. Together with his Ladakhi colleagues, Francke enquired into every aspect of local tradition, and left a scholarly legacy that informs our researches to this day. Entrusting this task to John Bray was a natural choice. John supported me from the beginning, sharing his intimate knowledge of the Moravian scholar's life and work, both in Ladakh and at home in Germany. The volume is enriched by his essay introducing Francke as well as more recent research on Ladakhi and Tibetan wedding songs.

We also intend the volume to serve as a homage to Prof. Petech who in 1977 published a history of Ladakh for Serie Orientale Roma. This volume still serves as an essential reference point for historical research on the region.

ELENA DE ROSSI FILIBECK