

The Social and the Religious in Early Post-imperial Tibet

The Case of 10th-11th-century Western Tibet and its Antecedents

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1. Introduction¹

Various studies of different societies recently arrived at the conclusion that the realities of social life are set within a greater universe comprising the so-called ‘supernatural’ and that “the human social world is intrinsically part of a wider world in which boundaries between society and cosmos are non-existent” (Howell 2012: 139). Similarly, other works have emphasised the intrinsic interrelationships between what is called ‘religion’ (nameless and named) and the political sphere, recently for example Graeber and Sahlin (2017) and Strathern (2019). In a similar vein can be seen the proposition formulated by the social anthropologist Maurice Bloch of the “unity between the living and the dead and between what is often called the ‘religious’ and the ‘social’” (Bloch 2008: 2057), which is also grounded on the perception that the notion of the ‘supernatural’, like that of ‘religion’, is not present in emic categorisations of many societies where, for example, ‘supernatural spirits’, etc. are classified as ‘people’ and terminologically not differentiated. The use of etic concepts like the ‘religious’ and the ‘social’ necessarily follows analytical purposes that help to answer the question of the relationship between these two analytical categories in specific historical contexts. The essential framework in this study of the 10th-11th century West Tibetan kingdom of early post-imperial Tibet and its antecedents is constituted by Bloch’s assertion that the ‘religious’ cannot be separated from the ‘social’ and a line of thought presented by him in various papers (Bloch 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016) and outlined as a comprehensive concept in a dense short article (Bloch 2008).

2. The religious and the social in Maurice Bloch’s concept

In Bloch’s view the religious is not to be equated with religion because what is usually termed religion is the historical “product of an inessential and superficial modification” of a greater whole: the “transcendental social” which, as he argues, is the very foundation of the sociality of modern human society” (Bloch 2008: 2056, 2058). Accordingly, Bloch is not proposing a general theory of ‘religion’ but something “more straightforward, more modest, more materialist, and anchored in evolutionary theory” (Bloch 2015 [2007]: 297). This is about the social, the source of which “is to be found in the cognitive capacities of humans” (*ibid.*). This type of social depends on the development of imagination which, he suggests, took place at about the time of the Upper Palaeolithic ‘revolution’.

¹ I wish to thank Guntram Hazod for his useful comments on an earlier draft of this article and Claudia C. Aufschnaiter for improving the English.

Bloch's core proposition in his theory of the social is the differentiation between the transactional social and the transcendental social. In the Preface to his book *In and Out of Each Other's Bodies*, he defines the distinction between the two types of social thus:

"On the one hand, there is the social understood as the flow of interaction between people; I call this the transactional [...]. On the other hand, the transactional social is contrasted with conscious, explicit representations of the social; these I call the transcendental social. I argue that the transcendental social consists of second-order phenomena created and maintained by rituals. The transactional social is governed by norms and ways of doing things that are largely subconscious. The human transactional social differs only in degree from the social that we find in our close primate relatives such as chimpanzees; indeed, it is present in all social species in differing forms. [...] The transactional is fluid. It changes from instant to instant as social relations adapt to ever-transforming situations. However, human society is in part regulated by imaginary long-lasting entities. These include social roles such as queens, professors, or uncles that are apparently free of the moment. A defiance of time is also found in transcendental groups such as nations, clans, or castes, the imagination of which can last for very long periods of time, ignoring the fact of their ever-changing personnel and the mutability of their members' lives." (Bloch 2013: vii-viii).

In the case of the transactional social, roles and groups are the product of continual manipulation, assertions and defeats. In contrast to this, the transcendental social is defined as consisting of "essentialized roles and groups". Of these he says:

"Essentialized roles exist separately from the individual who holds them. Rights and duties apply to the role and not to the individual. [...] Essentialized groups exist in the sense that a descent group or a nation exists. These groups have phenomenal existence not because the members of the descent group or the nation are doing certain kinds of thing together at particular moments, or because they have been together doing certain kind of things at particular moments in the sufficiently recent past so that it is reasonable to assume that they retain the capacity to behave now in similar ways. One can be a member of an essentialized transcendental group, or a nation, even though one never comes in contact with the other members of the descent group or the nation. One can accept that others are members of such groups irrespective of the kind of relationship one has had with them or that one can suppose one is likely to have with them. Such groups are, to use Benedict Andersen's phrase, 'imagined communities' (Andersen 1983)." (Bloch 2008: 2056).

Thus, in Bloch's theory a double character of the human social is proposed: "It has its transactional elements *and* transcendental element." (*ibid.*: 2056). Of the relationship between the two he says:

"There is plenty of transactional social in human sociality that occurs side by side or in combination with the transcendental social. [...] The transactional social exists irrespective of the role-like essentialized statuses and the essentialized groups of the transcendental

social, though it may use the existence of the transcendental social as one of the many counters used in the transactional game.” (*ibid.*: 2056).

He illustrates this by the example of a village elder who, being physically weak and a little bit senile, as a transactional player has become insignificant but “whenever there is a ritual to be performed, he has to be put in charge so that he can bless the participants.” On such occasions, “he is treated with great respect[,] he is being behaved to, and behaves towards others as a transcendental elder” (*ibid.*: 2056). This shows that “he belongs to two networks and, although the two are different, the transcendental network is taken into account in the transactional network while the transactional network affects the transcendental network only indirectly; for example, when another person is ultimately able to replace an elder in his transcendental role through revolutionary manipulation [...]. The transcendental elder implies the existence of transcendental juniors, of transcendental affines, transcendental grandchildren, etc. The transcendental network involves gender roles, thereby creating transcendental women and men. It is a system of interrelated roles and it is this complexity of interrelations at the transcendental level that most critically distinguishes the human social from the sociality of other species.” (*ibid.*: 2057).

These transcendental networks also include “essentialized groups” or “transcendental groups” (equal to what structural functionalists earlier called “corporate groups”), such as clans whose members are also of a dual nature.

“At the transactional level, they differ from each other just as much or as little as they do from people of the next clan. But, in the transcendental social mode, all members of such a group are identical as transcendental members. They are, as is often said, ‘one body’. As one body, they differ absolutely, and all in the same way, from those others in the other clan. The transcendental character of such groups is made all the more evident when we realize that the composition of such groups, whether they are clans or nations, may equally include the living and the dead. [...] The transcendental network can with no problem include the dead, ancestors and gods as well as living role holders and members of essentialized groups. Ancestors and gods are compatible with living elders or members of nations because all are equally mysterious invisible, in other words transcendental.” (Bloch 2008: 2057).

The transcendental character of such groups means that they

- Are imagined
- Often appear as “one body”
- Are part of something that appears as a system
- Can include the dead, ancestors, gods, living role holders, and members of essentialised groups
- Can as much ignore the present physical state of a person as it can ignore death and individuality
- Defy time

3. The transcendental social and the religious in Maurice Bloch's concept

Bloch takes up the argument in Igor Kopytoff's article on 'Ancestors as elders in Africa' (Kopytoff 1971), where it is stated that in many African languages (as in Tibetan languages), the same word is used for living elders and for dead ancestors. As ancestors and elders have much the same powers of blessing and cursing, this leads him to suggest that "to talk of 'ancestor worship' [...] is an ethnocentric representation that imposes *our* categorical opposition" between material and spiritual beings, "between the natural and the supernatural, or between the 'real' and the religious, onto people for whom the contrast does not exist" (Bloch 2008: 2057). Bloch concludes that in a so-called "ancestor-worshipping society" dead ancestors are the same ontological phenomena as elders, and elders have the same ontological status as ancestors. He further concludes that what is termed by him transcendental social and the phenomena referred to as ancestor worship or ethnocentrically religion are part of a single unity (in other words inseparable).

"The inseparability of the transcendental social and the religious is not only manifested in cases of so-called ancestor worship"

but can also be found, for example, in Hinduism:

"here also the transcendental social husband and wife role is part of one single overarching transcendental hierarchical social system that includes the gods" (*ibid.*: 2058).

As a consequence, he states, what needs to be explained is the greater whole in its totality, i.e. the transcendental and not just the kind of phenomena we call 'religious'. He holds that societies with religion in the sense of an apparently separate religion are to be seen as a product of an inessential and superficial modification of those societies where this is not the case. Nevertheless, he admits that the creation of an apparently separate religion is of great importance for the majority of mankind. He sees this phenomenon closely tied to the history of the state. In the case of early states, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, the early Andean states and many other places the religious and the political were inseparable in his view. This can also be stated with regard to the 10th-11th century West Tibetan kingdom that is discussed below.

The fundamental properties of such cases are that the organisation of the state was part of the divine order, an explicit ordering of space and time. Divine kingship and empire of the centre are further attributes of what he calls the "transcendental construction of such states" (*ibid.*: 2058). On the other hand, he also stresses that, like the example of an elder in Madagascar, also the Egyptian pharaoh was of a dual nature, with transcendental and transactional elements. "There were [...] transactional representations of the state, pharaoh, time and space." (*ibid.*: 2058). In addition, he holds that the "royal centralized transcendental construction" of such symbolic states is accompanied by and depends on the partial destruction and reformulation of the symbolism of the subjects.

"In Madagascar, the focus of the symbolism of the subjects migrated [...] from the house to the tomb, as the palace became the symbolical *house* of the kingdom with the ruler as its central 'post' (in Malagasy, *Andry* the root of the word for ruler *Andriana*: lord; Bloch 1995).

Similarly, [...] the descent group ritual of circumcision subsequently became orchestrated by the state and how certain aspects were taken away from the elders to become constitutive elements of grand-state occasions. The descent groups *lost* key elements to the representative of the state and were punished if they attempted to perform the full ritual independently (Bloch 1986).

Since in such systems, the transcendental social and the religious are identical, it is not just the religious that is being reorganised in a centralised state and sucked up to a point into a centralised, organised, organic-seeming system, it is the whole transcendental social. The creation of this transcendental holistic image of the complete kingdom, including gods and men, thus requires the creation of the incompleteness and disorganisation of the subjects' transcendental social, which can only be made complete in the kingdom." (Bloch 2008: 2058).

An additional aspect raised by Bloch concerns the impermanence of states and political systems. As "states are unstable and political systems continually collapse" some time a change that is different to the symbolic centralisation of the state will happen.

"[...] when the state, having confiscated a large part of the transcendental social so as to create its own ordered pseudo totality of cosmic order, then collapsed, a totalizing transcendental representation without its political foundation remained, floating in mid air, so to speak. This begins to look like what we call religion." (*ibid.*: 2058).

4. Hypotheses and questions

From what was stated above, four major hypotheses can be formulated whose validity will be questioned and investigated on the basis of the evidence provided by the example of 10th-11th century Western Tibet. They are numbered in view of their applicability to the historical development of the West Tibetan kingdom.

Hypothesis I concerns the transcendental, specifically the royal centralised transcendental construction of states in societies with an apparently separate religion.

Hypothesis II concerns the transcendental social, its composition of second-order phenomena which are created and maintained by rituals. In view of the transcendental character of different transcendental groups this hypothesis can be differentiated into several categories, the royal lineage, aristocratic lineages and clans (which are discussed in this paper), in addition also Buddhist communities (of monks and nuns), and certain socio-economic groups.

Hypothesis III concerns the assertion that the creation of a transcendental holistic image of the complete kingdom, including gods and men, requires the creation of the incompleteness and disorganisation of the subjects' transcendental social, which can only be made complete in the kingdom.

Hypothesis IV concerns the statement that free-floating religion is the remains of a totalising transcendental representation without its political foundation, thus a consequence of the instability of states and the collapse of political systems.

5. The example of 10th-11th century Western Tibet and its antecedents

Tibet was characterised since at least the 7th century by a system of rulership with divine emperors (*lha btsan po*, initially without any Buddhist connotation) at the top of the state who ruled their empire not from a single political centre but “travelled with a large mobile court”: “the ritual and political centre of the empire was the emperor himself.” (Dotson 2009: 43). Through matrimonial alliances, the dynasty in power was related to aristocratic families from which ministers were recruited who, in turn, were granted administrative power (including tax and military affairs) over their home areas. In addition, through strategically concluded marriages, political alliances were also formed with neighbouring states and empires to the south, west, north and east (*ibid.*: 17-18). The first historical traces of Buddhism appeared in Tibet in the 7th century. The earliest Buddhist temples in Tibet, the Lhasa Jo khang and the Khra ’brug (“Thundering Falcon”) temples, most probably date from the late 630s (Sørensen and Hazod, in cooperation with Tsering Gyalbo 2005: 15). Initiated in 779 by the inauguration of the first Buddhist monastery in Bsam yas (founded with royal support), from the late 8th century onward Buddhism increasingly gained influence, even allowing to speak of a state religion (see, for example, Hazod 2020), although until the end of the Tibetan Empire (ca. 866) it did not represent an exclusive ideology (Hazod 2014).²

With the collapse of the kingdom, a consequence of “the rebellion on the part of the clan aristocracy that led to the expulsion of the Buddhists followed by the disintegration of the imperial court in the mid-ninth century” (*ibid.*: 12), the beginning totalising transcendental Buddhist representation of the state without its political foundation remained, “floating in mid air,” to use Bloch’s words, and “began to look like what we call religion.” It could be regarded as something separable and detachable from the political situation in Central Tibet but remained de facto linked to the royal lineage.

Hypothesis I:

The royal centralised transcendental construction of the West Tibetan kingdom

According to Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan’s chapter on the history of Mnga’ ris in his *Nyi ma’i rigs kyi rgyal rabs skye dgu’i cod paṇ nyi zla’i phreng mdzes* [Royal Genealogy of the Solar Lineage], an important source for the early history of Western Tibet (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011a, Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2021), Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon, a descendant of the Central Tibetan Spu rgyal lineage, who became the founder of the West Tibetan kingdom, was invited by local aristocratic clans to take over kingship in Western Tibet in a Tiger year (most probably 906).

² With the foundation of Bsam yas, “religious councils or gatherings” (*chos kyi ’dun sa*) of the Buddhist clergy, which developed into a religious elite, were newly established and held in the presence of the emperor. On the other hand, the conventional comitatus meetings turned into a “small council” (*’dun sa chung ngu*) (see Hazod 2014: 12).

Seemingly, he took the place of a king from the royal dynasty referred to in this source as Gnya'/Snya shur ruling over the kingdom of Zhang zhung.³

According to the historical outline given in this source (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011: 426-38; Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2021: 90-102), the first prominent ruler of Zhang zhung was one Snya shur Mu pu Ring nge ged who, thanks to his great intelligence and bravery, was consigned as lord by agreement of all subjects of the countries belonging to Zhang zhung.⁴ Eleven generations later the ruler was one Snya shur La khwa Ged rtse whose daughter got married to Srong btsan Sgam po (who is named as the great king of Dbus). Further six generations later, the king of Snya shur is said to have been one Li byin Mu pad khya and that the royal Snya shur lineage was linked to five related patrilineal descent groups (*rus lnga*) known as “five siblings (five sibling lineages)” (Zhang zhung *mched lnga*) from Gu ge through a wedding alliance. The five *rus*⁵ nominated from their ranks turn by turn one who acted as chief minister (*blon chen*), a system which lasted for four generations of Gnya' shur kings. During the office of these chief ministers, the king of 'Gru sha (most probably 'Bru sha, that is, Gilgit) was subdued in an effort to demarcate the northern border of the kingdom, the king of Spu hrangs was defeated, and the ruler of Nyi ti was overthrown. This shows the extension and expansion of the kingdom which seems to have controlled several of smaller kingdoms and principalities. When one A rgyal Gsum gzher from the Rum wer lineage acted as chief minister, it is reported that he did not trust Glangs G.yu rge 'Bar ma from the royal Rnya (Snya) shur lineage, indicating perhaps that he refused to marry her or that he was suspicious of her loyalty so that the established relationship between the royal lineage and the five *rus* stopped and got lost. As a consequence, eventually the five *rus* entered into a wedding alliance with one Stong Lhu bzher. Five daughters of Stong Lhu bzher, who is also referred to as *bla chen po* (“Great Superior”, obviously someone of very high prestige),⁶ were accepted in marriage by the five *rus* resulting in a relationship referred to as the “five *rus* and the maternal uncle Stong, six (altogether)” (*rus lnga zhang po stong dang drug*).⁷

³ The name Snya shur already appears in the *Old Tibetan Annals* and designates the royal lineage of the kingdom which is usually referred to as Zhang zhung (see Dotson 2009: 89). Snya shur is also mentioned as part of the names of Zhang zhung rulers in Dunhuang documents and in Bon po sources (see Namgyal Nyima Dagkar 2002: 429f.).

⁴ Zhang zhung is described to consist of an upper and lower part (*stod smad*) and of several countries (*yul*) (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011a: 428; Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2021: 90; Jahoda 2021a: 75).

⁵ Named as Mang wer ba, Mol wer ba, Skyin wer ba, Rum wer ba, and Hrugs wer ba (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011: 436 / f. 128b; Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2021: 100).

⁶ This title is reported for a number of rulers of the West Tibetan kingdom from the late 10th century onward who, after handing over kingship, entered the Buddhist order. It seems to have had a religious connotation indicating an elevated status by way of a particular religious legitimation (Jahoda 2021b: 290-91).

⁷ The identity of this *bla chen po* Stong Lhu bzher is unclear. If one sets his lifetime around that of King Li byin Mu pad khya (said to have ruled six generations after Srong btsan Sgam po) he may have lived some time in the second half of the 8th and first quarter of the 9th century. His family or lineage name Stong may be taken as an indication for his affiliation with the Stong people (or Sum pa Stong). Members of this lineage (considered as one of the *rus chen* lineages of Tibet) were sent as leaders of regiments to frontier

It is unclear whether the events described subsequently in the source (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011: 431f.; Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2021: 93f.) – the rule of three Snya shur brothers who sacrificed annually one person from the Khyung po family, conflicts with or among the ministers from the Khyung family and blame for all of this ascribed to the five Zhang zhung *rus* – took place in the generation following Stong Lhu bzher or later. However, the date and chronology of events and persons involved are specifically rendered. In the middle of the Tiger year (most probably 906), the five Stong grandsons (*tsha spun*), that is, the leading figures of the five Zhang zhung *rus*, and a minister from the Khyung family sent two envoys to invite Dpal Lha btsan po Khri Bkra shis Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon, then residing at Sku mkhar Lha rtse Brag mkhar urging him to come to Stod Mnga' ris. It is stated in the source that up there the divine Buddhist religion (*lha chos*) was not prospering while Bon was widespread. This may be taken as highlighting the difference between the two political entities located in Central and Western Tibet in terms of religion and adding a religious motivation and background to the invitation, perhaps a retrospective interpretation from a later Buddhist-minded perspective to what was clearly a plot against the Snya shur king planned by one of his ministers together with the leaders of the Zhang zhung *rus*.

Among the retinue of Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon, altogether fifty people consisting of ministers and other high-ranking officials, were two “monks” (*ban dhe*) with excellent qualifications (both descending from aristocratic families) who are referred to as having been capable of binding into servitude malicious gods and demons and malevolent spirits of Bon practitioners (*bon po*), who may have threatened in particular the royal leader. In the year of the Rabbit (907), they were met by fifty horsemen from Zhang zhung under the command of Khyung dpung Stong ring mo, who requested the Snya shur King Li byin kya to come to Ra la mkhar dmar to meet Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon, the prince of Dbus (*dbus kyi lha sras*), who was “becoming an obstacle to the political authority”. Soldiers from a ten-thousand district (*khri sde*) revolted and the Snya shur King, deprived of military support, was killed, most probably by command of the dissident Khyung

garrisons at the time of the empire (see Hazod 2018: 18). His title *bla chen po* can be taken as an indication that he may have given up secular power and followed Buddhist vows or entered the Buddhist order. The only person of this name (Lhu / Klu bzher) related to Upper (possibly Western) Tibet (Stod) in a high position who appears in written sources in a Buddhist context is one Klu bzher (listed among the governors and generals of the upper and lower regions) who, according to the edict accompanying the Bsam yas *rdo ring* inscription, was among those ministers of Khri Srong lde btsan “who swore to the edict proclaiming Buddhism the religion of Tibet” (Dotson 2009: 154). This event can be dated to the years after the foundation of Bsam yas (779). Without further information it is difficult to ascertain whether Stong Lhu bzher is identical with this minister Klu bzher, perhaps a governor or general ruling over an area in Upper Tibet close to or part of the kingdom of Zhang zhung at the end of the 8th century. However, based on the chronology of events in *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs*, it is more likely that Stong Lhu bzher lived some time later, perhaps in the second or third quarter of the 9th century, which sets the events reported closer to Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon's invitation. This would fit with the reported government position taken over by a son of Lhu gsum zher (presumably another reference to Stong Lhu bzher).

minister and the five Zhang zhung *rus*.⁸ After this they offered kingship (*rgyal srid*), i.e., the rule over the whole kingdom (including its minor dominions)⁹ to Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon and pledged their loyalty to the new ruler. The brief subsequent section in verses represents a form of ritual speech, most probably part of a loyalty oath of allegiance “offered” by these *rus*.¹⁰

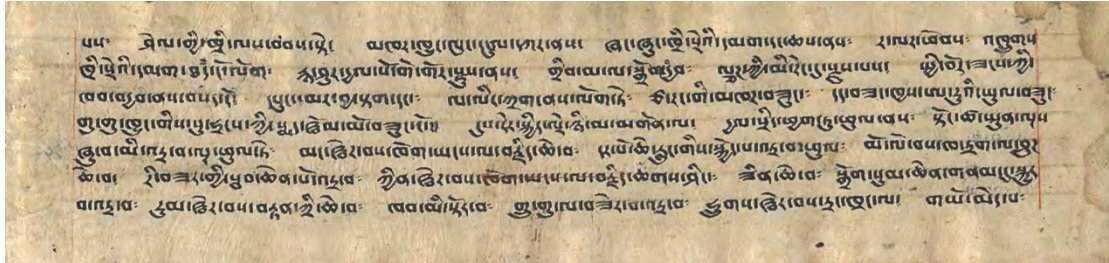


Fig. 1: *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs*, folio 128b. (Photo: Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po, ca. 2010)

The Mang wer ba: their posture will be broad and noble, like a majestic banner swinging in the wind; the Mo lo ba: their speech will be powerful, like a rock rolling down from a steep mountain; the Kyin wer ba: their posture will be broad, dignified and firm, like three straps bound tightly, opened and flung to the sky (*gnam*); the Rum wer ba: they will be as solid as a needle sticking in a ball of yarn; the Hrugs wer ba, they will be as honest and innocent like a strong waterfall.

This was the moment for the royal centralised transcendental construction of the newly founded West Tibetan kingdom which is described thus in the historical source:¹¹

⁸ The actual circumstances of his death are not clear from the account, in particular where this happened, who carried it out and whether it happened in the forefront of or during a meeting with Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon.

⁹ Such as the area around the castle of Rtsa rang (identical with Tsaparang?), the land of A ru (unclear), and Wem mo (described as the lower part of Spu hrang) which are named to have remained or come under the control of ministers of the former Snya shur king.

¹⁰ *mang wer bas khog yangs la brjid che ba / dar po che lung gis skyod pa 'dra ba phul / mo lo bas kha drag la shugs che ba / ri bzar (read: gzar) gyi sbab (read: rbab) chen po 'dra ba / kyin wer bas khog yangs la brjid chags shing / zin che ba / sgrog sum chen gnam du skyur ba 'dra ba / rum wer bas brtan kri che ba / khab mi stor ba / gru gu la bzer (read: gzer) ba 'dra ba / hrugs wer bas drang khrang la / g.yo med pa / shugs brag gi drag gis chu 'bab pa 'dra ba phul* (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan 2011: 436-437 / f. 128b5-129a1; Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po 2021: 100-101).

¹¹ *mar yul la sogs pa nas kyang rgyal phran dang / mi mang po yongs te / phyag dang / zhe sar btud / de rjes skos chen po mdzad te (read: de) / 'dod kham s kyi lha drug / bar snang gi lha phran brgyad / sgo bsrungs kyi khro bo bzhi yi tshul la / shar kyi sgo bsrungs / jo sras nyang tsa li ba / lho'i sgo bsrungs / lhe phyug gi jo sras cog ro mda' pa / nub kyi sgo bsrungs / tshong sa pa la be sa nag po / byang gi sgo bsrungs / star pa nag po / dang po stong tsha spun lnga / lha gsum bzher gyi bu dang drug ni / 'dod kham s kyi lha drug gi tshul du mdzad nas / 'bka' rtags kyi rgya re re / che stags (read: rtags) so so dang bcas pa gnam ngo / khyung lung gi dge shin pa / sge thang gi cog ro / dun mkhar gyi krung shin pa / pag wang gi seng dkar / thang gi rnya (read: snya) shur / lhag (pag gi) lha 'brong / sang nang gi tog sgyung / tang gi khyung po dang brgyad ni / bar snang gi lha brgyad kyi tshul lo / thugs ches kyi nang mi / be gar ba / sgyung dgu la pa / dun mkhar gyi dang stod pa rnams yin no / cang legs skyes dpon*

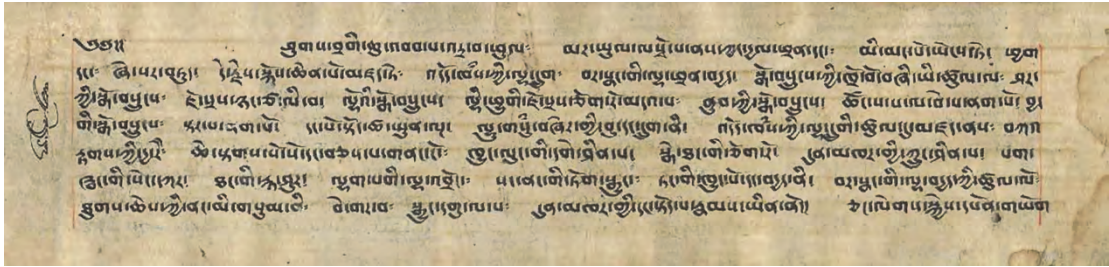


Fig. 2: *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs*, folio 129a. (Photo: Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po, ca. 2010)

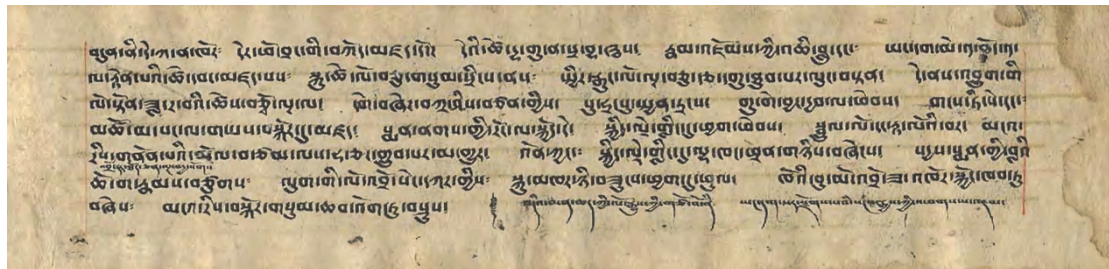


Fig. 3: *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs*, folio 129b. (Photo: Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po, ca. 2010)

Many people came from Mar yul¹² and other principalities, paid reverence and bowed down. After that, a great appointment (*skos chen po*) (ritual) was made: according to the Six Gods of the Desire Realm (*'dod kham*s kyi *lha drug*), the Eight Small Gods of the Intermediate Sphere (*bar snang gi lha phran brgyad*), and the Four Wrathful Guardians of the Gate (*sgo bsrungs kyi khro bo bzhi*), Jo sras Nyang tsa Li ba as Guardian of the East, Lhe phyug gi Jo sras Cog ro mda' pa as Guardian of the South, the black Tshong sa Ba la be sa as Guardian of the West, the black Star pa as Guardian of the North. First of all, the five Stong grandsons (*tsha spun*) and the son of Lhu gsum zher were appointed according to the Six Gods of the Desire Realm and given one by one decrees with a stamp along with distinct emblems of rank. Dge shin pa of Khyung lung, Cog ro of Sge thang, Krung shin pa of Dun mkhar, Seng dkar of Bag wang, Snya shur of Thang, Lha 'brong of Lhag bag, Tog sgyung of Sang nang, and Khyung po of Tang, these eight, were appointed according to the Eight Gods of the Intermediate Sphere (*bar snang*). The three Families of Faith were Be gar ba, Sgyung du la pa and Dang stod pa from Dun mkhar. Cang legs skyes, the master and the servants, altogether seven, none other than these were appointed to serve at the palace.¹³

g.yog bdun ni de ka na khor / der pho brang gi bkod mdzad dol (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan 2011: 437-438 / f. 129a1-129b1; see Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po 2021: 101-102).

¹² Mar yul refers to the area which can be identified to a large degree, at least with its core region, with that of the later kingdom of Ladakh (see also Vitali 1996: 156).

¹³ In a later historical context, at the end of the 10th century, Ye shes 'od (before entering the Buddhist order in 989 known as King Khri Lde strong Gtsug btsan or King Srong nge) is said to have made a great assignment of duties (*bskos chen*) regarding responsibility for the laws (*bka' khrims*) to three types of

While not all of those explicitly mentioned to have accompanied Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon to Zhang zhung in 906 were named on this occasion and/or do not seem to have been nominated for government positions, those, who invited him, and others of local descent are named as having been awarded important ranked positions. It can be assumed that Cang legs skyes (the son of the imperial Chief Minister Cang A pho) may have held a position similar to that of a chief minister or at least belonged to an inner circle of ministerial counsels in a leading position. It is doubtful whether the earlier biennial Central Tibetan council system in the form of comitatus meetings in areas controlled by the king's ministerial comitatus was continued.¹⁴ There is no written evidence for this and, given the conceptual changes in terms of kingship and government already manifest in the late 8th and early 9th century in Central Tibet one should not expect that they were continued.¹⁵

The most important aspect of this great appointment ritual is its foundation and structure according to the concept of *maṇḍala* (*dkyil 'khor*). *Maṇḍala* is a multilayered concept deriving from the Indic world. Ideal-typically it can be defined as a self-contained world geometrically arranged around a centre. The *maṇḍala* model works on various levels: cosmological, political, economic, social, and also on the level of the physical body.

“The [...] mandala model stands for an arrangement of a center and its surrounding satellites and can be employed in multiple contexts to describe, for example: the structure of a pantheon of gods; the deployment spatially of a capital region and its provinces; the

leading officials of the kingdom, who are named in this order as Buddhist masters (*dge ba'i shes gnyen*, Skt. *kalyāṇamitra*), great monks (*btsun chen*) and chief ministers (*bla zhang blon*), and the most notable subjects (*'bangs dra ma rnam*) from Gu ge, Spu hrangs, Mar yul, etc. (that is, the main administrative units of the kingdom at that time). This description makes evident that in agreement with the introduction of Buddhism as state religion in the West Tibetan kingdom in 986 a predominantly religious order with governmental administrative positions in the hands of religious functionaries had been established (see Vitali 1996: 54, 109).

¹⁴ As stated by Hazod (2014: 5), essential features of formative aspects of Tibetan kingship of the early imperial history, which included the mode of establishing trade connections, military organisation, royal hunt, funeral tradition and council meetings, were all related to the comitatus. Some of these features, such as military organisation, were at least nominally continued (although with adaptations) and still present in the late 8th century while others such as council meetings and the royal hunt were either reduced in importance or given up. It is noteworthy that, following Khri Srong lde btsan's passing away, a severe conflict is reported in *Dbas' bzhed* whether the divine burial (*lha 'dur*) was to be carried out according to Bon or Buddhist rituals and who should perform the *btsan po*'s funeral rites (see Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 92f.; Gonkatsang and Willis 2021: 149f.).

¹⁵ In contrast to the time of the Tibetan Empire, regular assemblies of the West Tibetan rulers and their ministers are not reported in relevant historiographical sources such as *Mnga' ris rgyal rabs* (Vitali 1996), *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs* (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011a; Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po 2021) and *Yig rmying* [Old Manuscript]. In fact, whenever important political meetings are mentioned, they are described as gatherings of members of the royal family. Ministers do not surface in these accounts. In these sources as well as in inscriptions only a few ministers are named. In *Mnga' ris rgyal rabs*, for example, only the names of six ministers occur over a period of several hundred years. When one of them, Gu ge *blon po* Zhang rung, at the end of the 10th century is named it is not in relation to secular matters but as having assembled the leaders (*gtso bo*), the elders (*rgan pa*) and the most notable subjects (*'bangs grags pa*) to give order to diffuse the Buddhist teaching all over the kingdom (Vitali 1996: 52-53, 108-109).

arrangement socially of a ruler, princes, nobles, and their respective retinues; and the devolution of graduated power on a scale of decreasing autonomies.” (Tambiah 1977: 73).

With regard to the transcendental construction of the West Tibetan kingdom, several of these levels or spheres were joined together,¹⁶ in agreement with another characteristic aspect of the *maṇḍala*: ‘totalisation’.¹⁷ At this initial stage of (re-)constructing the state, after a new king from outside had been invited and installed who was supported by a small group of aristocratic allies and had brought along an elite Buddhist ideology, not only meant to apply a form of kingship and state government that had developed in Central Tibet at the time of King Khri Srong lde btsan (742-ca. 800) with the royal foundation of Bsam yas (ca. 779) and the subsequent increasing inclusion of the Buddhist clergy in state affairs.¹⁸ An additional question concerns the reasons on the side of those who invited Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon to come to Western Tibet, beside the obvious one mentioned to get rid of the king of Zhang zhung. Among the reasons may have been the prestige and supraregional status of the imperial Spu rgyal lineage, possibly also its advancement in terms of technological matters (military and economic, for example, gold mining) and profitable diplomatic and economic relationships (not least thanks to the Buddhist orientation). The great appointment ritual according to a Buddhist mandalic principle carried out immediately after the enthronement of Skyid lde Nyi

¹⁶ See Jahoda (2021c) for more information on the concept of *maṇḍala* in the 10th-11th century West Tibetan context.

¹⁷ What can be separated analytically and identified as religion, economy, politics, etc. constitutes in fact “a single interpenetrating totality” (Tambiah 1977: 73).

¹⁸ The increasing influence of the Buddhist clergy in institutionalised governmental practice in 8th-9th century Tibet was manifest in “the newly established ‘religious gathering’ [*chos ‘dun sa/ma*], which was held in the presence of the emperor. Later sources refer to this meeting as the ‘great council’, whereas the conventional comitatus meeting is only ranked as ‘small council’. The situation culminated in the institution of the ‘monk minister’ [*chos blon*], who by the early ninth century practically headed the governmental power.” (Hazod 2014: 12). In Beckwith’s view, the comitatus principle was “at least to a certain extent [...] transmuted into a monastic form” after the adoption of Buddhism: “When the Tibetan emperor was proclaimed to be a Buddhist ruler – a *dharmaraja* ‘religious king’ or *cakravartin* ‘one who turns the wheel (of the Buddhist law)’ – the monks were ultimately in his service” (Beckwith 2009: 151). Based on the information in the *Dbas bzhed* and on the political development in the first half of the 9th century leading eventually to the collapse of the Tibetan Empire in 866 (Dotson 2016: 2), no transmutation of the comitatus principle into a monastic form took place. The privileges granted to the monasteries (civil and military tax exemptions) and the allocation of households in support of the religious institutions led to the development of an economically independent monastic sector to the disadvantage of a part of the clan aristocracy. Thus, the comitatus principle and loyalty vis-à-vis the king based on a Buddhist ideology proved in fact to be incompatible. The increasing influence of Buddhism led to a new privileged relationship of lineages in favour of Buddhism to the king and to disunity between these lineages and the king with the aristocratic clans adhering to Bon and opposed to Buddhism. In fact, through the establishment of a “religious council” deemed higher than the “inner (or small) council” (*‘dun sa chung ngu*) a new hierarchical division was created which upset the previously balanced relationships and over time caused the collapse of the political system (see Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 74; Gonkatsang and Willis 2021: 134-135).

ma mgon strongly indicates a unified vision or imagination of a Buddhist empire for which the new ruler must have been the ideal candidate.¹⁹

Despite the reported dominance of Bon and the minor popularity of Buddhism in the kingdom of Zhang zhung, at this time the conditions for establishing kingship and government according to Buddhist principles had become obviously more favourable in Western Tibet than in Central Tibet. The reasons were that with the end of the royal Snya shur lineage the political support for Bon stopped and that the new king and the influential local West Tibetan lineages who had invited him were soon in a such a strong position in military and political terms that within a short period of four years (907-911) the whole area of Western Tibet (Mnga' ris Skor gsum) was brought under control and power.²⁰

Between 911 and 986, when King Khri Lde srong Gtsug btsan / Srong nge (later known as *lha bla ma* Ye shes 'od) issued a 'great edict' (*bka' shog chen mo*) in which the population was called upon to follow the Buddhist doctrine,²¹ seventy-five years passed before the envisioned Buddhist transformation of society was begun to be put into reality on a grand scale with the publication of a 'religious edict' (*chos rtsigs [gtsigs]*) in 988, the proclamation of a sort of religion-based constitution of the West Tibetan kingdom and the initiation of a wave of eight major foundations of Buddhist monasteries in 996. The reasons for this relatively long time or slow progress are not entirely clear. It can be assumed that the introduction and spread of Buddhism from top to bottom (without any monastic system available, including learned monks, texts, monasteries, etc.) was difficult to achieve in the local societies of Western Tibet (consisting mainly of followers of Bon and speakers of Zhang zhung language/s) within one or two generations. In addition, in the first generation after Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon of the three sons among whom the kingdom was divided only Bkra shis mgon is reported explicitly as having been dedicated to the "triple jewel" (*dkon mchog gsum*, the Buddha, the Buddhist doctrine and the Buddhist community). He is said to have built the temple of G.yu sbra²² in keeping with the heritage of the great ancestors. While between the two others unfavourable conflict broke out, the dominion of the Buddhist-minded ruler is said

¹⁹ According to Beckwith (2011: 230), "Buddhism was the dominant 'high culture' paradigm on all sides of the early Tibetan Empire, including all major states directly bordering on Tibet. [...] It remained essentially unchallenged as the de facto dominant 'high culture' paradigm in the four directions immediately around Tibet" until the time of Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon's invitation to Western Tibet.

²⁰ In the year of the Dragon (908), on the fifteenth day of the autumn month, after having been invited by Dge bzher Bkra shis btsan to Spu hrangs, Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon went to the north of Gu ge and made a circumambulation of Mount Kailas (Gangs Ti se) and Lake Manasarovar. As from the year of the Snake (909) until the year of the Horse (910) it was not managed to suppress Mnga' ris by way of a speech, he built two temples at Skyid lde gling and established the rituals for the Medicine Buddha (like the pilgrimage strong indications for his adherence to Buddhism). In the year of the Sheep (911), 'Bro Seng dkar offered the Nyi bzungs palace to him and Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon got married to his daughter, 'Bro za 'Khor skyong, upon which Mnga' ris Skor gsum was brought under his power (see Jahoda 2021a: 77, 79).

²¹ See Vitali 1996: 54, 68, 120, 233.

²² This monument was located most probably in the Khā tse (Mkhar rtse) area of Gu ge, the home of *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po's paternal ancestors (see Khyi thang Dpal ye shes, n.d.: f. 2a).

to have flourished (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011: 441; Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2021: 104).

Hypothesis II:

The transcendental social, its composition of second-order phenomena which are created and maintained by rituals

As summarized above, Bloch's transcendental social is defined as "conscious, explicit representations of the social" and being composed of a number of second-order phenomena, such as social roles (queens, uncles, etc.) and transcendental groups, such as nations, clans, or castes. More specifically, these second-order phenomena are imagined and long-lasting and in the case of groups often appear as one body, can include the dead, ancestors, gods, can ignore the present physical state of a person and defy time. They are created and maintained by rituals.

These phenomena can be identified in the case of 10th-11th century Western Tibet in several imaginary long-lasting entities, first of all the royal West Tibetan lineage (*gdung brgyud*), a number of more or less influential lineages (*rus*) and clans (*pha spun*), and, after the introduction of monastic Buddhism at the end of the 10th century, in communities of Buddhist monks and nuns (*dge 'dun*) closely associated with newly founded Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. As has been shown above, from its foundation government functions were of a transcendental character, the nominated persons incorporated positions according to a transcendental three-dimensional *maṇḍala* system of specifically ranked and positioned Buddhist deities.

When Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon, a descendant of the Central Tibetan royal lineage,²³ became the ruler of the West Tibetan kingdom this royal lineage was continued in the West Tibetan kingdom (referred to as Stod Mnga' ris and Mnga' ris Skor gsum). Royal genealogies are of great relevance for the imagination and long-lasting adherence to royal lineages. Some of the most important written sources upon which the historical analysis is based are in fact, not surprisingly, genealogies of this lineage and the activities of its members, encompassing the time of the Tibetan Empire (7th-9th centuries) and the West Tibetan kingdom (9th-11th centuries), partly also its successor kingdoms. The most important texts are *Mnga' ris rgyal rabs* [Royal Genealogies of Western Tibet] by Gu ge mkhan chen Ngag dbang grags pa (Vitali 1996)²⁴ and *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs* [Royal Genealogy

²³ According to various early historical sources the name of the imperial lineage of Tibet was Spu rgyal (e.g. see Pelliot Tibétain 1038, URL: https://otdo.aa-ken.jp/archives.cgi?p=Pt_1038 (accessed: 20.01.2022); Hazod, in this volume). This is also confirmed by later sources, such as *Yig rmying*, which explicitly mentions the Spu rgyal *btsan po* (Spu rgyal emperors) (see Fig. 4: line 5). The name of this lineage after it moved to Western Tibet with Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon seems to have been referred to at least in inscriptions (such as at Tabo) and texts that can be related to the royal family, as "bodhisattva lineage" (*byang chub sems dpa'i gdung [b]rgyud*) (see Steinkellner and Luczanits 1999: 16; *Yig rmying*: page 34, line 6).

²⁴ This work was compiled by its author in the late 15th century (most probably in 1497), a native of Western Tibet and leading monk of the Dge lugs pa school in Western Tibet who, as abbot of Tholing monastery, had access to and could make use of archival materials available to him in this place.

of the Solar Lineage] by Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan (2011a).²⁵ In November 2011 an untitled fragmentary chronicle, designated simply as *Yig rmying* [Old Manuscript] by the late Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po, was discovered by a monk in a ransacked *mchod rten* in the area of Tholing (Mtho gling).²⁶

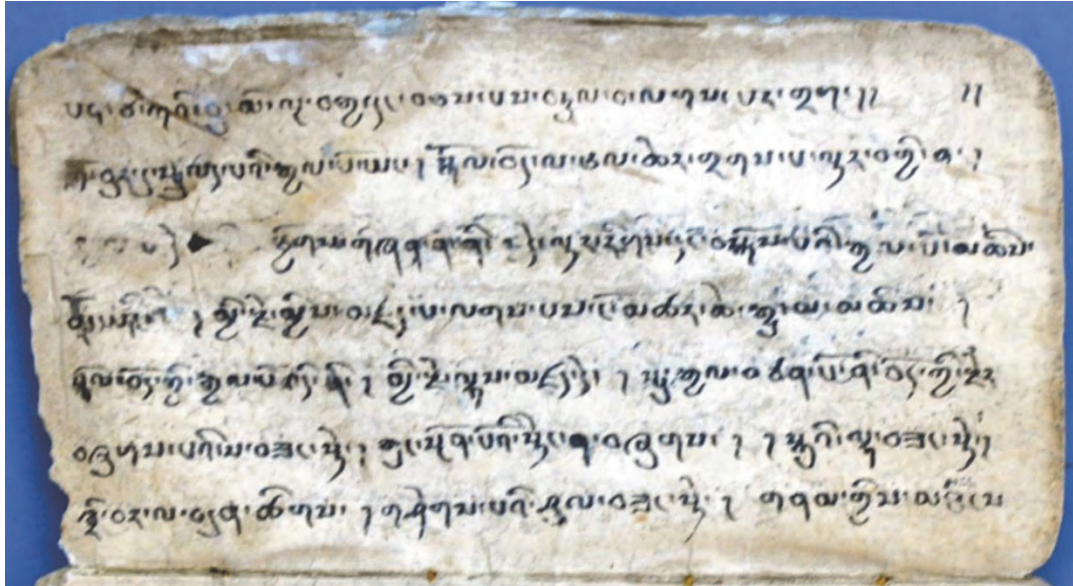


Fig. 4: *Yig rmying*, page 4. (Photo: Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2012)

²⁵ Likewise written in the late 15th century, its author, a member of the Ngor tradition of the Sa skya school, too, was a native of Western Tibet who traced his family from the five Zhang zhung *rus* according to his biography ('Jam dbyangs Nam mkha' brtan pa 2013).

²⁶ This fragmentary document may date from the 12th century and thus seems to be a predecessor of later (post-13th century) Tibetan chronicles. It tells the history of the early Central Tibetan rulers until the collapse of the empire in the 9th century and continues with the rulers of the West Tibetan kingdom up to King Rtse lde (d. 1088). It thus includes the rule and activities of King Srong nge (in full: Khri Lde srong Gtsug btsan) who introduced in 988 Buddhism as state religion before leaving the position as ruler and entering the Buddhist order in the following year. His successors were likewise strong supporters of Buddhism. Due to its close chronological proximity to the West Tibetan rulers of the 10th and 11th centuries and due to the probability that it was written by someone close to the West Tibetan royal family, the historical importance of this document for the 10th/11th century history of Western Tibet cannot be overvalued. The present author bases his analysis of this work on the photographic documentation of this manuscript by the late Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po in 2012 in situ at Tholing.

Of great relevance in relation to oral and literary traditions of royal genealogies and their histories were authoritative ritual speeches (*mol ba*) in the framework of assemblies where the teachings of the Buddha, the history and the kings of Tibet and the diffusion of the *dharma* were praised and prayers offered to the lineage of past Buddhas, kings, lamas, deities and bodhisattvas, etc. (see Jackson 1984). The Tholing MS clearly contains and reflects elements of a bardic ritual performance of such royal genealogies and its contemporary rhetoric (see also Pritzker 2017).

Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs mentions a few meetings by members of the royal family and authoritative speeches held on such occasions (see Jahoda 2016). Unfortunately, as yet hardly any information is available on the ritual performances and procedures of these meetings and assemblies at the time of the 10th-11th century West Tibetan kingdom.

In this source, the phrases for referring to the ruler of the royal lineage are: *skol bod gyi rgyal po 'di ni / myi rje lhas mdzad de /* (Yig rnying: page 4, line 5), “the king of our Tibet, lord of men [*myi rje*] made by the gods [*lhas mdzad*]” (that is, made by the *lha* to be a lord of men).²⁷ This is to be read as a statement of legitimacy founded in divine descent. Legitimate kingship is rooted in the claim or imagination that the king was made a ruler over men by divine beings (and not by men which is also listed in line 4: *myi rje myis mdzad pa*).²⁸ Together with the claim that the ruler was born from a divine family (*lha 'i rigs*), one can also propose that he was made a ruler over men by divine or spiritual/transcendental beings of a royal ancestral lineage whose main exponents had held power successively.

In a somewhat earlier source, in the Renovation Inscription at Tabo from ca. 1042, for example, the characterisation of Ye shes 'od's descent and lineage is thus: *lha 'i rig[s] 'khrungs byang chub sems dpa'i gdung myi rje lhas mdzad mgo' nag yongs kyi mgon* (Steinkellner and Luczanits 1999: 16-17), “born from a divine family (*lha 'i rig[s] 'khrungs*), of a lineage of bodhisattvas (*byang chub sems dpa'i gdung*), lord of men (*myi rje*) made by the gods (*lhas mdzad*), protector of all black-headed [people] (*mgo nag yongs kyi mgon*)”.

The rulers of the royal West Tibetan lineage, at least in the retrospective understanding of 15th century authors, even traced back their line of descent to the royal North Indian Śākya family, that is, to the family of the historical Buddha. King Srong nge, alias Khri Lde srong Gtsug btsan alias Royal Lama (*lha bla ma*) Ye shes 'od, is mentioned in *Lha bla ma ye shes 'od kyi rnam thar rgyas pa* [Extended Biography of the Royal Lama Ye shes 'od] as stemming, literally “being born”, from the Śākya family (*shākya yi ni rigs las 'khrungs*). Also, his father Bkra shis mgon is characterised thus (*shākya 'i rigs bkra shis mgon*) as well as his son Nāgarāja (Na ga ra dza) (*shāk[y]a rigs mi 'i rje nā ga rā dza*) (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011b: 245, 276-78, 345).

How to understand these developments, continuities and changes in the conception of the royal and related aristocratic lineages (which can also be found in more recent sources)? Does Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan's *Nyi ma 'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs* specifically refer to Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon's family and the lineages deriving from him to which he himself is said to have been related (*nyi ma 'i gnyen gyi gdung rgyud*) (Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2021: 118)? A remark in Yo seb Dge rgan's *Bla dwags rgyal rabs 'chi med gter* [Eternal Treasure of Royal Genealogies of Ladakh] (1976: 325) may be taken as confirmation of this hypothesis: *lha nyi ma 'i gdung brgyud las / bla dwags rgyal po dang zangs dkar rgyal po dang gar zha 'i jo dang spyi ti 'i no no rnams yin no zer /*; “It is said that from the family lineage of Lha Nyi ma are the kings of Bla dwags (Ladakh), the kings of Zangs dkar (Zanskar), the lords of Lahaul (Gar zha), and the Nonos of Spiti (Spyi ti)” (translation by Yannick Laurent who made me aware of this; see Laurent, forthcoming). In a list of names of *pha spad* (also *pha tshun*, *pha spun*) collected by Yo seb Dge rgan (Joseph Gergan) in Spiti in the 1920s the first and most important one is *lha nyi ma 'i gdung brgyud* (see Jahoda 2017:

²⁷ On the meaning of the phrase *lhas mdzad pa* see also Bialek in this volume.

²⁸ The text says also that this holds true regardless whether the king appeared suddenly (*glo bur spruld pa 'i rgyal po*, line 2) or was king of a certain lineage or a nominated king (*rigs dang skos pa 'i rgyal po*, line 3).

154). It may well be that at this time and earlier Lha Nyi ma was a popular reference (not used in chronicles and stately inscriptions) to his majesty (*lha*) [Skyid lde] Nyi ma [mgon] and lineages deriving from him.

The deeper meaning (in historical terms) behind the name and concept of the solar lineage in relation to the West Tibetan royal lineage as used by Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan can be found in his assertion that it belonged to the lineage of the Buddha (*shā kya'i rigs*) which itself belonged to the solar lineage mentioned in *Purāṇa* texts. Thus, for example in van der Kuijp's view, Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan's work appears as "the very first treatise in which a full-blown actual *argument* is made for integrating the Tibetan royal families into the South Asian 'solar dynasty' and linking them therewith to an Indic idea of divine kingship" (van der Kuijp 2013: 326). In addition to this, a section in *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs* (not quoted by van der Kuijp) summarises the Indic genealogical origins of the Sun lineage, including Gautama Buddha's lineage, and the two male offspring from whom the "solar lineage" (*nyi ma'i rigs*, Skt. **sūryavamśa*) and "lunar lineage" (*zla ba'i rigs*, Skt. **candravamśa*) derived: *nyi ma'i 'od zer gyis smin pa na / nyi ma'i rigs zhes bya ba dang / go'u ta ma'i bu yin pas go'u ta ma zhes dang / [...] gcig nyi ma'i 'od dang / gcig zla ba'i 'od las btsos te / rim gyis smin par byas las / khye'u gnyis byung ba la / nyi ma'i rigs dang / zla ba'i rigs zhes gnyis byung ngo /* (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011a: 276 / f. 48b1-4). Fittingly, in other sections *Shā kya'i rgyal rabs kye dgu'i cod pan nyi zla'i phreng ba* and *Rgya bod kyi rgyal rabs nyi zla'i phreng ba* appear as variant titles of the text (*ibid.*: 217 / f. 19a6, 319 / f. 69b1). Interestingly, the fragmentary Tholing MS begins on the first preserved page with a reference to the "lunar lineage" (*zla ba'i rigs*, **candravamśa*) based on the *Ba ra ta'i bstan bcos* ([*Mahā*]bhārata śāstra) (*Yig rnying*: page 1, lines 1-5), however, without (yet) claiming a genealogical link as done later by Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan.

As manifest from various Tibetan historical sources from different periods, a change in the narrative of the Tibetan royal lineage, its origin, and the concepts of kingship and state took place. In Old Tibetan texts the origin of the imperial dynasty is essentially related in a mythic formula with reference to a divine ancestor who came from (the gods of) heaven to earth as the lord of men (*gnam gyi lha las myi'i rjer gshegs pa*), the lord of "the polity of black-headed Tibetans" (*bod mgo nag po'i srid*) (see Hill 2016). These phrases were continued, even after the introduction of Buddhism as state religion, in early 9th century sources, for example, in the 'Prayers of the foundation of the De ga G.yu tshal monastery' (PT 0016), although "laden with Buddhist imagery and vocabulary" (*ibid.*: 210).²⁹ Similar phrases are still found from the late 10th century in early monastic Buddhist contexts in Western Tibet, such as in the Renovation Inscription at Tabo from

²⁹ With the exception of Dpal 'khor btsan, the rulers at the end of the Central Tibetan dynasty, Khri 'Od srung btsan aka Gnam lde 'Od srung (see Dotson 2016: 27), and at the beginning of the West Tibetan dynasty, Dpal Lha btsan po Khri Bkra shis Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon, his sons Dpal gyi mgon, Bkra shis mgon, and Lde gtsug mgon (collectively known as Stod kyi mgon gsum, "the Three Protectors of Stod"), carried *srung* (protector) or *mgon* (protector, lord) in their personal names – in my view an indication of a strong Buddhist inclination or influence (of those in charge of giving these names to them). 'Od srung renders the Sanskrit Kāśyapa, the name of a former Buddha and of a major disciple of Gautama Buddha. The Tibetan *mgon* (Skt. *nātha*) often appears in the framework of Buddhist contexts, designating a lord in a Buddhist sense.

ca. 1042, with the main difference that the earlier ruler Srong nge / Ye shes 'od is characterized *in addition* as belonging to a lineage of bodhisattvas (*byang chub sems dpa'i gdung*). Around a century later, in *Yig rnying* (page 34, lines 5-6), Bkra shis mgon, the middle son of Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon, is the first one to be mentioned among the rulers of the Tibetan royal lineage as the one who belonged to a lineage of bodhisattvas and protected Buddhism like his paternal ancestors (*yab mes chos skyong ba'i rgyal po byang chub sems dpa'i sprul pa'i gdung rgyud*). Later, in the 15th century source *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs* the concept of the royal (now West) Tibetan lineage and its outstanding representatives is further elevated with reference to its claimed deriving from the Indic Solar lineage, including the family lineage of the historical Gautama Buddha. In *Mnga' ris rgyal rabs*, a source dating from approximately the same time, authored by a leading monk scholar from the Dge lugs pa school, the general outline is similar but the focus is clearly on the incarnated king (*sprul pa'i rgyal po*) Srong nge / bla ma bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'*) Ye shes 'od (Vitali 1996: 52, 108). The only reference to the Solar lineage (*nyi ma'i rigs*) in its genealogical account of the West Tibetan kings, which is predominantly based on their Buddhist activities, is to a mid-15th century ruler, who is characterised as successor of the Solar lineage descending from the ancestor *lha bla ma* Ye shes 'od.

In my view these changes in the narrative of the Tibetan royal lineage (for reasons of space and time based only on a few selected aspects and indications) can be explained as a reflection of major historical changes as analysed by Romila Thapar with regard to the variation of epic stories, such as the story of Rāma (*Rāma-kathā*) in earlier contexts of historical India. The reformulation of these stories, in my view like that of royal genealogies in the Tibetan context,

“may happen on *occasions of major historical change*, such as with the *emergence of the state in the form of a kingdom*, or of *new states with fresh incentives*, or *when states required ideologies that marked out the king as having divine elements*. Such changes require *validation from the past* and the story is recast to provide this. New territory may be incorporated into the geographical circumference of epic events, where such territory has to be described as having been rightfully settled or conquered. The legitimacy of the new rulers has to be ensured through *origin myths, genealogical links* and events held to be significant to the tradition. Mythology is used to draw the territory and the personalities into a circle of known and familiar forms, *kingship is used to establish links between the new rulers and the territory which is to be incorporated*.” (Thapar 2011: 350; my emphases).

An important feature were also

“the genealogical links claimed by many new dynasties at this time [the early centuries AD]. There was a spurt in claims to *kṣatriya* ancestry. [...] The genealogical sections of the early *Purāṇas* carry a carefully constructed descent list going back to the earliest origins. Two lineages dominate the pattern: the Sūryavaṃśa / Solar lineage, and the Candravaṃśa / Lunar lineage. [...] Thus all those dynasties which claimed descent from the Solar lineage could also claim Rāma as their ancestor. [...] The story of Rāma could therefore become an ancestral epic.” (*ibid.*: 388).

The importance of genealogies and genealogical links, in particular with reference to the explicit mention of the Sūryavaṃśa / Solar lineage, appears to constitute at least a pattern or model relevant for the explanation of similar historical processes in the contexts of Central and in particular Western Tibet. Another important element related to the reformulation of epic stories or royal genealogies in the Tibetan context is Thapar's insight: "The major innovation is the *notion of historicity*." (*ibid.*: 391; my emphasis). This is particularly evident in Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan's *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs* in the effort of "integrating the Tibetan royal families into the South Asian 'solar dynasty'" and in detailing the chronology of the life of the historical Buddha (van der Kuijp 2013: 326), and – particularly helpful for a reconstruction of historical processes in Western Tibet – a lot of chronological information on the rulers of the West Tibetan kingdom (see Jahoda 2021b).

These genealogies, in their written and bardic oral forms, also in the form of inscriptions (in particular in monastic contexts often forming short or partial genealogies visualized by painted images of rulers, in toto visualisations of a Buddhist notion of kingship and society; see Jahoda and Kalantari 2016), rendered perceptions of the past that helped to provide a legitimization of the political project of the ruler, the royal lineage (and their aristocratic allies) at the time of the foundation of the West Tibetan kingdom and a legitimization of the socio-religious project, in particular with the thorough Buddhist transformation of this kingdom initiated in 986. Through the legitimization of these institutions – royal lineage, its aristocratic allies, the foundation of a large number of Buddhist monasteries – these genealogies contributed significantly to the royal centralised transcendental construction of this state and the making of the societies (on the latter see below).³⁰

On the other hand, as demonstrated by Thapar (2011: 387), the legitimization of institutions also determines attitudes to groups and political entities which do not conform to the norms and ideals that are presented in these genealogies. In the case of historical Western Tibet, at the time of the

³⁰ In addition to and beyond the legitimization of institutions the retrospective genealogical claims were of great significance in their forward-looking dimension. This implied and prepared the ground, in my view, for the decision to look and search for Buddhist teachers, teachings and texts in areas associated with the historical Buddha or where his teachings and texts were transmitted in an authentic form. This is evident from many examples, such as in the career of *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po, who was sent to Kashmir (Kha che) and India (Rgya gar) in 975 together with twenty other young boys for the purpose of Buddhist education and studies, or in the invitation of great Indian monk-scholars, such as of Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna, commonly known under his honorific title of A ti sha (Atiśa) or Jo bo rje in Tibetan sources, who arrived in Western Tibet in 1042 (preceded already by a large number of *paṇḍitas*; see Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011a: 446; Vitali 1996: 53, 109; Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2021: 109).

This stands in contrast to the situation during Khri Srong lde btsan's rule in the forefront of the foundation of Bsam yas in the third quarter of the 8th century in the reported debates between adherents to the Bon and Buddhist *dharma*, on the one hand, and between representatives of Buddhist traditions (and political entities), on the other, in which leading monk-scholars from India, Nepal, Za hor / Oḍḍiyāna, and China were involved (see Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000; Gonkatsang and Willis 2021). Among other things, at that time obviously the necessity (presumably also the capability) for legitimating the political project of the ruler, based on a genealogical link to the lineage of the Buddha and the Solar lineage, was not yet ripe.

foundation of the kingdom this seems to have pertained to principalities (earlier belonging to the kingdom of Zhang zhung) forming an alternative in polity to the kingdom, also (until the Buddhist transformation) to the followers of the Bon religion (who were related to the earlier Snya shur lineage),³¹ then (from the beginning of the Buddhist transformation in 986) the followers of non-orthodox Buddhist traditions³² not under the control of the royal-aristocratic Buddhist elite, and from the early 11th century specific enemies threatening the Buddhist kingdom – in particular the Gar log (Qarluq, also Karluk, etc.)³³ characterised as followers of a non-Buddhist religion (*mu stegs pa*).

Thanks to Gu ge Paṇ chen Grags pa Rgyal mtshan's account we have some information about the five related patrilineal descent groups (*rus lnga*) existing in Guge from the time of the collapse of the Snya shur dynasty of the Zhang zhung kingdom and at the beginning of the foundation of the West Tibetan kingdom relating approximately to the first two decades of the 10th century. Further information on these and other groups, mainly on individual members, is available from the end of the 10th century through inscriptions in newly founded monasteries and other Buddhist monuments, colophons of Buddhist scriptures and biographical texts (*rnam thar*) of important monks stemming from these groups.

The above-mentioned five patrilineal descent groups (referred to as *rus* in the source), which are said to have formed a wedding alliance with the Snya shur dynasty, are described as having descended from a family lineage (*rigs*) called the “Five Zhang zhung Siblings” (Zhang zhung *mched lnga*). They were named Mang wer Od tshang Swa ged tsha, Mol wer, Skyin wer Sdong gyed tsha, Hrugs wer Sprud gzher Sto ged tsha and Rum wer Sha zher rtse, who can be understood as perhaps mythical forefathers from whom these groups descended or claimed descent. Mang wer, Mol wer, Skyin wer, Rum wer and Hrugs wer are the names of these groups, obviously non-Tibetan words of a Zhang zhung language, as also the further name parts whose meaning is far from clear. *Ge tsha / ged tsha / gyed tsha* may be identical with *ge tsa* which is listed by Dan Martin (2010: 60) as a Zhang zhung word (synonymous with the Tibetan *bdud btsan*) meaning “a group of gods or demons”.

³¹ As for the burning of “all Bon po” (practitioners) reported in *Mnga' ris rgyal rabs* (“Since the Bon teachings were widespread in Zhang.zhung, all Bon.po-s were gathered, thrown inside a house, which was set on fire. As all Bon texts were collected, they were thrown into rivers”, Vitali 1996: 110), this may be considered as an “improbable account”, doubtful to have taken place, in particular at the end of the 10th century, and a “15th century vision applied to earlier times” (*ibid.*: 140). Given that this account is not found elsewhere, is difficult to reconcile with other information, for example, *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po's descent from a Zhang zhung clan, and is not based on additional written or material (archaeological) evidence, speaks for Vitali's critical assessment. In the light of Thapar's analysis, however, the essential point of this “account” can be seen in the legitimization of the *attitude* towards the followers of the Bon religion at some time (most probably rather in the early than late 10th century) or in retrospective imagination.

³² See *lha bla ma* Ye shes 'od's *bka' shog* sent to the “Tantrists, living in the villages” (Karmay 1980: 153f.).

³³ They can be identified as belonging to the Qarakhanid dynasty (which converted to Islam in 960), ruling over a political confederation to the west of present-day Xinjiang from the 9th through the 13th centuries.

These groups are said to have worshipped 360 gods named as *gye god*, again a word of seemingly non-Tibetan origin corresponding to the Tibetan *lha* (deity, god). A historical linguistic relationship can be assumed to exist between *gye god* and *ge khod* (a class of ancient Tibetan gods), which according to Kvaerne (1996: 40) “may be taken to be a loan from the language of Zhangzhung. The *gekhö* [*gye god* / *ge khod*] are said to number 360 and to reside on Mount Tise (i.e. Mount Kailash), the sacred mountain of Zhangzhung.” The most important and powerful of these gods (obviously expressed in a Tibetanised form) were Bdud rje btsan po ho of the Mang wer ba, Rol btsan Stag ral gtsug – altogether eight siblings (*spun brgyad*) – of the Mol wer ba, Srid pa yongs kyi Ma mo mu tsa med of the Skyin wer ba (a female deity, perhaps identical with Mu la tsa med, explained as a goddess of Zhang zhung by Martin 2010: 169), Sgyugs khyung Sheng rtse of the Hrugs wer ba, and Srin po gnam ro po of the Rum rtse wer ba.

Of four groups, the related territories (*yul*) in the sense of residence areas are mentioned: Phyi wang (perhaps identical with present Phyi dbang), Rme los sgyung and Sad mkhar of the Mang wer ba, Sribs kyi lha rtse (most probably present Shipki area) of the Skyin wer ba, Mkhar Bdu lang Kyung rtse (perhaps identifiable with the present Mkhar rtse area?) of the Hrugs wer ba, and Mkhar she la khyung (present Shel mkhar area in Upper Kinnaur?) of the Rum rtse wer ba. Based on a tentative identification, these groups resided in a coherent area stretching from Phyi dbang in Guge in the north along the Upper Sutlej valley down to Upper Kinnaur.

On account of a conjunction of three aspects – joint residence, joint political function (wedding alliance of all five groups with the Snya shur dynasty), and joint cult of (possibly ancestral) gods – these groups which are referred to in the source as *rus* (patrilineal descent groups) may be conceived according to ethno-sociological concepts (see, e.g., Murdock 1949) as clans composed of lineages (*rus* or *brgyud*, local lineage, a subcategory of *rus*, also *rigs rus* and *pha rus*), who traced their descent patrilineally from a common (male) ancestor (*pha lha*). Therefore, they correspond to the Tibetan *pha spun* (also *pha spad*) described by several authors (Gergan 1940; Yo seb Dge rgan 1976; Brauen 1980; Dargyay 1988; Gutschow 2004) for various regions of Mnga’ ris Skor gsum as “based historically on exogamous, patrilineal lineages (*brgyud*) tracing their descent from a common ancestor, and which were additionally linked by common residence, a common ancestral deity (*pha lha*) and a cult of the dead” (Jahoda 2017: 136).

The importance of these (and further) clans (*pha spun* / *spad*) as transcendental groups, acting as “one body” in terms of their social functions in areas of historical Western Tibet was still observed in 1909 by August Hermann Francke during his research in Spiti: “every *pha-spun*-ship has to look after the cremation of their dead, and monuments in commemoration of the dead, *mchod-rten* or *maṇi* walls, are generally erected by the whole *pha-spun*-ship of a certain village, and the name of the particular *pha-spun*-ship is found on the votive tablets of such monuments” (Francke 1914: 48). Also in the 1920s, the Rum wer ba were still present in Spiti when Yo seb Dge rgan collected there the names of 79 *pha spad*. In his list, the Rum bo’a pa appear as number three (obviously of high status) after the Lha nyi ma’i *gdung brgyud* and Blon chen pa. A *pha spad* with the name Rum pa is listed as number 49 (Jahoda 2017: 154-55).

From this brief sketch it is quite clear that these clans fit quite well with Bloch's characteristics of transcendental groups (which often appear as one body, can include the dead, ancestors, gods, long-lasting, etc.). With the exception of the account in *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs* given above not much can be said about the origins and realities of the five Zhang zhung clans,³⁴ except that they played a key role in the foundation of the West Tibetan kingdom. The maintenance of these (transcendental) groups by rituals, such as funerary rites, wedding ceremonies, and ancestral deity worship can be assumed to have been an important element in early 10th century Western Tibet as well as later. The main difference in the self-understanding of these groups by the end of the 10th century was their adoption of Buddhism (obviously not yet present among them at the foundation of the West Tibetan kingdom) which took place in the course of time between 911 and 986 and is manifest in various forms (see below).

Hypothesis III:

The creation of a transcendental holistic image of the complete kingdom, including gods and men, requires the creation of the incompleteness and disorganisation of the subjects' transcendental social, which can only be made complete in the kingdom

As mentioned above, the creation of the transcendental holistic image of the West Tibetan kingdom according to Buddhist principles must be seen as a process which began with the enthronement of Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon as the representative of a royal lineage of divine descent and the appointment of members of aristocratic clans in government functions according to the Buddhist concept of *maṇḍala*. The unified vision of a Buddhist kingdom seems to have fully developed only with the proclamation of a religion-based (Buddhist) constitution or code of law, which was made public by the ruler of Western Tibet in the form of two royal edicts in 986 and 988, and the subsequent foundation of eight key Buddhist monasteries (simultaneously in all cases in 996) in major areas of the West Tibetan kingdom.

The content of these proclamations was very clear in terms of their overall goal, the establishment of a Buddhist kingdom in the sense of "a single interpenetrating totality" (Tambiah 1977: 73). Covering the whole sphere of law – divided into religious and royal law (*chos khrims*, *rgyal khrims*) – they were built upon the royal divine lineage as its central element from which the ruler and those members of the royal family originated who controlled in a leading position from the royal palace all doctrinal and organisational affairs in the Buddhist sector of society. In addition, clear-cut ideals and rules and regulations were formulated that applied to monks and lay people, that is, all social groups, and in toto encompassed the whole administrative, social and economic sphere of society. The key guiding principle was the declared uncompromising commitment to the

³⁴ Although these five Zhang zhung clans, of which Gu ge seems to have been composed at this time, were of main concern to the author of this source because of their role in the early history of the West Tibetan kingdom and for personal reasons, in other areas of the earlier kingdom of Zhang zhung and subsequently in areas under the control of the West Tibetan kingdom (such as Gar zha, Zangs dkar, Bla / La dwags, etc.) existed many more clans of which we know from inscriptions in various places and sites from the late 10th century onward (see Luczanits 1999, Takeuchi 2013, Martin 2019).

Buddhist concept of liberation (from being reborn or leaving the repeating cycle of birth, life and death [*myang 'das*, Skt. *nirvāṇa*]) for which the kingdom provided the conceptual and worldly framework, to which the whole society was encouraged to adhere, and for which the royal lineage and their aristocratic allies were the dominant religio-political masterminds (see Vitali 1996: 55-56; 110-111).³⁵

It is clear that these ambitious goals meant “a partial destruction and reformulation of the symbolism of the subjects”, in particular of all those lineages and clans whose members not (yet) adhered to Buddhism. This included, for example, giving up the custom of burying the dead in cemeteries with riches (*gshin po'i don du nor dur la sbed pa'i lugs yod pa bkag*; Vitali 1996: 55) and (not only in the case of the royal family) a change in the conception of clan ancestry and ancestral deity worship, in particular by the claim to derive from the Indic Solar lineage, including the family lineage of the historical Gautama Buddha. In one version of the biography of *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po, his *rus* is described as being the Lha Nyi ma hrugs lineage (*rus ni lha nyi ma hrugs kyi gdung brgyud*) of the Hrugs wer (clan) (Khyi thang Dpal ye shes, n.d.: f. 2a).

Through the introduction of Buddhism as state religion all lineages and clans became in a new way subordinated to the state, its highest representatives, the king and the royal family. Buddhism as state religion was under the control of “those (male) members of the royal family who, after their ordination, had the duty to protect this realm as members of the palace or from the palace (*pho brang*). The phrase used for this is “to protect the Vinaya realm” (*'dul zhing srung ba*) or “to protect the teachings” (*bstan pa skyong ba*).” (Jahoda and Kalantari 2016: 87). One aspect concerned the transfer of control over local descent groups from the clan elders to the royal family and its lineage. A good example for this is the recruitment, termed donation or giving of two hundred youths to

³⁵ Furthermore, according to *Mnga' ris rgyal rabs*, “while earlier [relating to the period of the Central Tibetan dynasty or at least pre-Ye shes 'od times] a law existed (according to which) as long as the father, the king, had not passed away the son of the king was not enthroned, (in the present) a custom was introduced according to which after his father was revealed (and addressed) as *bla chen* (Great Superior One) the son was enthroned as *mnga' bdag* (ruler).” (*ngar yab rgyal po ma drongs par rgyal sras rgyal sar mi 'don pa'i khrims yod pa la khong gi yab bla chen du ston nas/ sras mnga' bdag tu bkur ba'i srol stod/*) (Vitali 1996: 55).

Furthermore, “in general, [Ye shes 'od] greatly diffused the Buddhist teachings and in particular he prepared many [copies of] the text of *chos khrims* and *rgyal khrims* [as follows]: “How is the law to appoint the king? If there are many [king's] sons, [all] have to become monks except the heir apparent (*rgyal tshab*). If the *btsan po* is ordained, he has to protect the sangha. If the line (*gdung*) of lay rulers (*btsan po skya bo*) is interrupted, it is to be restored from the monks' side [of the royal family]. All lay people and monks (*skya ser*) have to safeguard the stability of the Buddhist teachings (*chos skor*). From now onwards, the latest developments in terms of teachings and written sources, which are recommended by the monks of high knowledge and the full-time keepers of religious vows (*sdom brtson*), all of them, as well as medical (*sman*) and technical science (*go cha*), if they do not exist, should be brought from elsewhere. All monks and laymen have to stand as guards against the hazards [created by] people at the borders of the kingdom. The population (*skye bo*) [has to learn] to shoot arrows, to run and to jump and to wrestle [in various] techniques, to swim and to perform exercises of dexterity on horses, to read and write and make calculations, [i.e.] the nine kinds of male training. Moreover, all kinds of exercises of bravery have to be learned.” (Vitali 1996: 110-111).

become monks in newly founded monasteries. In *Mnga' ris rgyal rabs* we find the following account:

“In antiquity, King Zas gtsang gave [rendering the Tibetan *phul*, that is, offered] five hundred Śākya youths gZhon nu don grub [that is, Siddhārtha, the young Buddha Śākyamuni]. Similarly, from mNga' ris Skor gsum, as two hundred youths were gathered, who had considerable wisdom, bright intelligence, diligent mind, good heart, faith in Buddhism and fondness for the Triple Jewel [dkon mchog gsum], altogether two hundred, they were delivered on the path of liberation in the footsteps of Ye shes 'od's two sons (Devarāja and Nāgarāja). Consequently, one hundred from Gu ge, forty from sPu hrang, thirty from Mar yul, thirty from Pi ti (Spiti), altogether two hundred, were gathered.”³⁶

The associated reformulation of the symbolism of the subjects is evident in the avoidance of using any reference to their clans. On the other hand, they are counted by numbers in relation to countries or areas (*yul*) where around this time new monasteries were founded (such as Mtho gling in Gu ge, 'Khor chags in Spu hrang, Nyar ma in Mar yul, and Tabo in Spiti), a clear indication in favour of their new monastic identity. This becomes even more visible in the system of names. From the late 10th century, the use of distinct Buddhist designations in addition to the names of clans and in the case of ordained persons, the replacement of lay personal names by Buddhist names. We find thus in Tabo monastery in late 10th and early 11th century wall inscriptions a revised system of names, partly a combination of old and new reference systems, partly also the replacement of the old by the new system.³⁷

Monks were identified by a combination of three names or designations: first clan name, second religious function or title and third personal religious name (for example, Snyel 'or *dge slong* Grags pa Bshes gnyen). Laymen were identified by clan name or royal descent and personal name (for example, *lha sras* 'Jig rten mgon) (cf. Jahoda and Kalantari 2016: Figs. 8 and 9).

Thus, an important aspect of clans as essentialised transcendental groups is, of course, the use of clan names. Like religious titles they are attached to people, often by way of rituals, and imply roles that represent the people involved as permanent. As stated by Bloch, however, with regard to a completely different ethnographic context, “These names and associated transcendental roles are part of a large, explicitly evoked and more or less systematized transcendental.” (Bloch 2013: ix). Such names are a way to create an image of an ordered encompassing whole, “the transcendental social”. Bloch says that “images of this kind are accorded particular authority by important people”, such as was the case in Tabo monastery, seemingly not free from the motive of self-fashioning by

³⁶ *sngon gzhon nu don grub rgyal po zas gtsang shākya'i gzhon nu lnga brgya phul ba ltar sras gnyis kyi phyag phyir / mnga' ris bskor gsum nas gzhon nu shes rab che shings blo gsal ba yid 'grus shing snying stobs che ba / chos la dad cing / dkon mchog la bsri zhu che ba / nyi brgya bsdu nas thar par btang ngo / de yang gu ge nas brgya / spu hrang bzhi bcu / mar yul sum cu / pi ti nas sum cu dang / nyi brgya bsdu pa yin no /* (Vitali 1996: 59).

³⁷ There are more than ten names which refer to clans: for example, Snel wer/'or, Rhugs wer/'or, Mo lo / Mol wer, Mang wer/'er/'or, Rum (wer), and Mag pi tsa (see Luczanits 1999).

the religio-political elite (consequently implying a danger of false realism). Another aspect is that such names mark the creation of the individual as social person and the imagination of the state and the society. Related rituals, written or painted accounts thereof (as in the case of Tabo monastery, presumably the original consecration) are key moments not only in the creation of the transcendental social but also for the lasting imagination of the Buddhist kingdom and its transcendental groups of which it is conceived to be composed, royal and aristocratic lineages and clans, Buddhist communities, lay male and female Buddhist practitioners, etc.³⁸

Hypothesis IV:

Free-floating religion is the remains of a totalising transcendental representation without its political foundation, thus a consequence of the instability of states and the collapse of political systems

Reversing Bloch's hypothesis, it may be reformulated accordingly: states as a form of political system are unstable and collapse from time to time. Similar to nations (a form of transcendental group, "the imagination of which can last for very long periods of time"), they are characterized by a "totalizing transcendental representation". Whenever such a state and its political system collapse, the remains of this "totalizing transcendental representation", now without its political foundation, may turn into a free-floating religion.

While originally the "totalizing transcendental representation" is strongly related to a specific political system of a state and can be seen as a transcendental, divine and enduring representation of the state in its totality, after the collapse of the state its unspecific, detachable elements or parts remain and may be transferred elsewhere. This transfer cannot take place without carriers (those bringing and embodying 'religious' knowledge) or "human agents" (Meinert 2016: 12) and require, as such "totalizing transcendental representations" are usually complex systematised ideas, physical media with written and visual information (objects embodying 'religious' knowledge), also termed "transfer agents" (*ibid.*: 15).

According to *Dbā' bzhed* (f. 1b1-3), "the royal narrative how the Buddha's doctrine arose in Tibet", Buddhism appeared in Tibet in steps which are related to the reign of four rulers (*btsan po*):

During the reign of *btsan po* Lha tho do re Snyan btsan [ca. 5th century CE?], the noble *dharma* [*dam pa 'i chos*] first appeared (*dbu brnyes*), during the reign of *btsan po* Khri Srong btsan [ca. 605-649], the custom of practicing the holy *dharma* was introduced [*lha chos mdzad pa 'i srol btod*], during the reign of *btsan po* Khri Srong lde btsan [742-ca. 800], it was spread far and wide [*dar zhing rgyas par mdzad*], during the reign of *btsan po* Khri Gtsug lde btsan [815-841], it was fully established [*shin du gtan la phab*].³⁹

³⁸ Another visual example are paintings in a *mchod rten* at Mtho gling associated with the demise of Ye shes 'od, datable in my view to around 1019, showing a figure of royal descent (possibly King 'Od lde ruling at this time) and rows of male and also female donors of the Rugs (Hrugs) wer and Mang wer clans (see Heller 2010).

³⁹ See Gonkatsang and Willis 2021: 102 for the Tibetan text and *ibid.*: 103 for a slightly different translation; dates after Dotson 2016: 27.

The first appearance of the “noble religion” (in the retrospective view of this text) was marked by the “discovery” of objects named “secret powerful” (*gnyan po gsang ba*), which according to the source were at a later time identified as Sanskrit texts written in letters of gold and a golden *stūpa*.⁴⁰ At this time obviously the concept of “noble religion” (*dam pa'i chos*, translating the Sanskrit *dharma*) was not yet present or understood. The terms for ‘religious’ practice found in contemporary documents of pre-Buddhist Tibet are *lugs bzang* (“good tradition”), *yab mes lugs* (“tradition of the ancestors”), *gnam sa lugs* (“tradition of heaven and earth”), also *chos* (“customary practice”) and *gtsug lag* (sciences, teachings, principles). The latter two came to be used for the religion of the Buddha (cf. Hazod 2014: 9).

Thus, a clear terminological differentiation is recognisable, on the one hand, between the “good, ancestral, cosmological tradition” and “customary practice”, and words specifically adapted and used to translate the Sanskrit *dharma*, referring to the Buddhist religion, on the other. A further difference between an unnamed tradition or customary practice and the veneration of secretly (unintelligibly) powerful objects distinguished as belonging to the noble *dharma* or the introduction of the custom of practising the holy or divine *dharma* is: the first implies something that is usual, common and ordinary, in addition something that is intellectually, conceptionally and linguistically immediately understandable, while the second implies something that is not usual, common and ordinary but exceptional, secret, powerful, particularly valuable and valued, associated with prestige (in itself and socially), and not immediately understandable intellectually, conceptionally and linguistically. Also, the reference to the *dharma* as “noble and divine” (*dam pa'i lha chos*) is a clear expression of this difference and connotation.

The general development in terms of objects and persons embodying religious knowledge and the (state) political relevance of Buddhism which took place in Tibet until the mid-9th century can be briefly summarised thus:

a) If one trusts the account in *Dbā' bzhed*, initially only a few Buddhist objects appeared (without any carriers being mentioned) that were venerated (among other things) by the ruler for their power. Their political importance seems to have been negligible.

b) The foundation of the first Buddhist temples in the late 630s during Srong btsan Sgam po's reign date from the time when the King of Nepal “Narendradeva lived in exile in Tibet from approximately 624-641” (Dotson 2009: 82, fn. 129) and can be seen as a result of this royal interaction (Sørensen and Hazod, in cooperation with Tsering Gyalbo 2005: 15-16) which involved also the marriage of a daughter of the Nepalese ruler (known accordingly as *bal rje'i bu mo* at the earliest level of the *Dbā' lRba' bzhed* MSS).⁴¹ In the course of this interaction a considerable transfer of objects and persons embodying Buddhist knowledge took place as far as can be concluded from historical accounts and archaeological evidence.⁴² Together with the conceptualisation of the

⁴⁰ On the story of Buddhist objects falling from the sky, including the “holy secret” (*gnyan po gsang ba*) as referred by the king, see van Schaik in this volume.

⁴¹ Willis and Gonkatsang 2021: 44.

⁴² See Sørensen 1994: 25; Romain 2021.

kingdom having the shape of a demoness (*srin mo*) resting on her back – this myth is ascribed by the sources to a Chinese princess, another one of Srong btsan Sgam po's wives – which provided the basis for the foundation of twelve Buddhist temples suppressing the demoness (Sørensen 1994: 261f.), a “totalizing transcendental representation” of the kingdom according to Buddhist principles⁴³ can be assumed to have been present already at this time but, as it did not extend to and pervade all spheres of society, the overall impact on the kingdom, governance and local communities still remained quite limited.

c) After the passing away of Srong btsan Sgam po (d. 649), when Tibet owed its territorial expansion until the late 7th century to the powerful Mgar clan, from 700 to 712, at a time of infant rulers, de facto ruled by their mother and grandmother 'Bro Khri ma lod, then by Khri Lde gtsug rtsan (Mes 'ag tshom), this period was characterised by military activities in various areas of Central Asia – mainly confrontations with Arabs, Turks and Chinese – as well as a civil war in the 690s, an outbreak of an epidemic in Lhasa in the late 730s (ascribed to immigrant Indian and Central Asian Buddhist monks expelled from China), and a revolt which may have begun in 748 and turned into a temporary overthrow of the monarchy from 753 to 754 with the assassination of Khri Lde gtsug rtsan (cf. Beckwith 1987, van Schaik 2011, Dotson 2009 and 2017, Hazod 2019). Buddhism (and a small number of Buddhist monks, mostly of foreign origin) faced a severe push-back, which culminated in a law issued by Minister Zhang Ma zhang in the late 750s banning the practice of Buddhism (see Dotson 2017; Hazod 2020).

A fundamental change took place with the convening of a “council” (*bka' 'gros*, literally consultation) in 761 by the new *btsan po* Khri Srong lde btsan (enthroned in 756 aged fifteen by Tibetan reckoning) where he managed to secure support for the religion of the Buddha and created a new unequivocal basis for his reign by turning Buddhism into a “marker of royal allegiance” on the occasion of the inauguration of Bsam yas Monastery in 779 when he made all of his “vassals and councilors swearing never to persecute Buddhism, but to increasingly uphold and support it” (Dotson 2017: 4).

The emperor's view regarding his support of Buddhism (termed *sangs rgyas kyi chos*, the *dharma* “religion” of the Buddha) is made clear in a paper document accompanying a short edict inscribed on a *rdo ring* marking the consecration of the first monastery of Tibet. There he also deals with the views of his/Buddhism's opponents:

“After the Tsenpo [my] father passed into heaven, some of the uncle-ministers had thoughts of rebellion. They destroyed the Buddha's Dharma that had been practiced since the time of [my] father and ancestors. They contend that it was not right to practice [according to] the god and religion of the southern barbarians in the land of Tibet, and, moreover, they wrote a law forbidding it later on. [...]

⁴³ Among the geomantic principles to be observed also counted the establishment of various proper sites: a palace for the king, a *gtsug lag khang*, a monastery, a site for the common people, a site of ultimate happiness (perhaps a funerary site or tomb) (see Sørensen 1994: 558).

That [Buddhism] was not the old religion. Because it did not accord with the propitiations and rites of the tutelary deities, all suspected it to be no good. They suspected it would harm [me, His Majesty]. They suspected it would threaten governance. They suspected [that it brought about] epidemics and cattle plagues. They suspected it, when famine suddenly fell upon them.”⁴⁴ (Kapstein 2013: 63).

Obviously, the reported opposition to Buddhism had its basis in views (which seem to have been present at least since the 730s) that this religion and its gods were of foreign origin (*lho bal gyi lha dang chos*),⁴⁵ not suitable to be practiced in Tibet (*bod yul*), not in accordance with the old rituals for worshipping the tutelary deities (*sku lha*) (of the ruler), threatening governance (*chab srid*) of the kingdom, a possible cause for the appearance of human and cattle diseases (*mi nad phyugs nad*), and famine (*mu ge*).

The *btsan po*’s decision, whether it was “correct to abandon or to practice this Dharma in association with those sūtras” (*ibid.*: 64) is answered with reference to the outcome of a discussion and counsel with his immediate subjects (*’bangs*), named in order of their rank and status – lesser kings, such as the *’A zha* (Tuyuhun), and outer and inner ministers (*phyi nang gi blon po rnams*):

“[I have concluded that] in the first instance one is to rely upon the scriptural pronouncements of the Buddha, the Transcendent Lord; in the second instance, one must look to the exemplary precedents of my royal ancestors; and, third, one must also connect this with what has been set forth through the power of spiritual benefactors.”⁴⁶ (Kapstein 2013: 64).

His statement makes clear that it is based on the unequivocal consent and commitment from among his royal vassals and allied clans (represented by the ministers), thus comprising effectively all subjects within his kingdom. In addition, the priority given to the authoritative words (*bka’ lung*) of the Buddha (as contained in writing), keeping the (good) example of the royal ancestors (*yab mes kyi dpe lugs*), together with the authoritative interpretation of the words of the Buddha in the hands of Buddhist masters (*dge ba’i bshes gnyen*, Skt. *kalyāṇamitra*), presumably also regarding

⁴⁴ *l btsan po yab dgung du gshegs kyi ’og du zhang blon kha cig gis hur ’dums kyi blo zhig phyung ste l yab mes kyi ring tshund chad l sangs rgyas kyi chos mdzad mdzad pa yang bshig go l de nas yang snyed ni lho bal gyi lha dang chos bod yul du bgyi ba’i myi rigs shes l gzhan yang phyind chad bgyid tu mi gnang bar bka’ khrims bris so l l [...]*

de na bod kyi chos mying pa ma lags la l sku lha gsol ba dang cho ga myi mthun pas l kun kyang ma legs su dogs te l la la ni sku la dmar yang dogs l la la ni chab srid gong gis kyang dogs l la la ni mi nad phyugs nad byung gis kyang dogs l la la ni mu ge langs bab kyis kyang dogs so l l (Richardson 1998a: 96-97, rendering the Tibetan version of this text as contained in the *Mkhas pa’i dga’ ston* [Feast for Scholars] of Dpa’ bo Gtsug lag ’phreng ba, mid-16th century).

⁴⁵ As discussed by Richardson (1998b: 103-105), the expression *lho bal*, which reads like a reference to Nepal, may be understood, based on its occurrence in contemporary Dunhuang texts, in a general sense as denoting ‘foreigner(s)’, in specifically derogatory contexts also ‘barbarian(s)’.

⁴⁶ *mdo de rnams dang sbyar na l chos ’di gtang ngam mdzad dam ci rigs shes l ’bangs su mnga’ ba rgyal phran ’a zha rje la bstgogs [sic!] pa dang phyi nang gi blon po rnams la bka’ s rmas l bka’ gros su mdzad nas l gcig tu na sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das kyi bka’ lung la bsten l gnyis su na yab mes kyi dpe lugs la ’tshal l gsum du na dge ba’i bshes gnyen gyi mthus bstangs pa* (Richardson 1998a: 98).

the Buddhist activities of the royal ancestors, not only expressed royal approval of the practice of Buddhism but official support of Buddhism by the ruler as overall representative of the kingdom and those ruling and administering the country. Furthermore, it prepared the ground for the transformation of the political and economic relations of power in favour of Buddhism. This concerned the establishment of a “religious council [*chos kyi 'dun sa*], which was deemed higher than the inner council [*'dun sa chung ngu*]” (Gonkatsang and Willis 2021: 133-135), the appointment of a Buddhist master (*dge ba'i bshes gnyen*) as Bhagavat (*bcom ldan 'das*) as representing the Buddha (*sangs rgyas kyi zhal dang 'dra ba*, literally “corresponding to the presence of the Buddha”) and as principal authority in all Buddhist matters, who was ranked higher than the chief ministers in the seating order (*dral yang zhang blon chen po'i gong du 'dug*) and was entitled to send authoritative messages (*spring pa*) to them (*ibid.*: 134).

In the economic sphere it was suggested by the newly appointed religious Principal to set aside an endowment (*rkyen ris*) for the eternal continuity of the monk communities to be established. Upon his decision “to each (monastery for) the triple gem (*dkon mchog gsum*), two hundred servants (*'bangs*) should be assigned (and) to each monk (*ban*) three households (*khyim*)”, that is, for all tasks necessary for monastic daily life and rituals two hundred servants and for each monk the yield of the produce of three (subject family) households ([*'bangs mi*] *khyim*) were assigned and control over them (servants and households) conferred to the monk communities (*dge 'dun*). This “practice of assigning serfs” and the “granting of [...] serf households” is characterised as continuing an established (governmental) custom from which formerly benefitted only a privileged few or the estate of one person that was now adapted to Buddhist purposes and beneficial for the emperor and the whole kingdom (*sku dang chab srid*) (*ibid.*: 134-135).

These measures which were continued by the successors of Khri Srong lde btsan led to a growing number of monks who were taught the “language of India” (*rgya gar gyi skad*, Sanskrit), and after becoming proficient in it, began to translate the Sūtra texts and Abhidharma treatises of the Mahāyāna tradition (*mdo sde dang theg pa chen po'i mngon pa'i bstan bcos*) in a newly established translation school (*sgra bsgyur grwa*) (*ibid.*: 146-147).

In general, a twofold development took place: through the above-mentioned measures a political and economic foundation for Buddhism was created, which had come and been present until that time as more or less a “free-floating religion” representing in a limited form the remains of a totalising transcendental representation without its political (and accordingly also economic) foundation. In addition, through the foundation of the first Buddhist monastery, the increasing translation of texts (along with a process of codification) and acquaintance with the teachings of the Buddha, the totalising transcendental representation of the kingdom (and the emperor) in Buddhist terms grew in depth and breadth.

Despite the fact that the “totalizing transcendental Buddhist representation” of the kingdom had proceeded much further in the first quarter of the 9th century than at any time before it did not encompass the Tibetan society as a whole and did not convince the entire clan aristocracy. Some of the clan leaders must have felt a degradation vis-à-vis the power of the newly appointed Principal (also named Great Principal of the monks, *ban de chen po*) or an imbalanced representation within

the government of the kingdom at their costs (in terms of political power and also in economic terms). In addition, also in the conception of the *btsan po* the “totalizing transcendental Buddhist representation” of the kingdom was not yet fully settled and institutionalised. This is evident, for example, from the controversial discussions reported at length in *Dbas bzhed* regarding how to hold the funeral feast after the passing away of Khri Srong lde btsan, in accord with Bon or Buddhism (*ibid*: 148-157).

The loss of power felt by a part of the clan aristocracy and their opposition to the “empire’s wealth [...] being absorbed by Buddhism” led to a conspiracy during the reign of Khri Gtsug lde brtsan (better known as Ral pa can) (815-841), which first culminated in the assassination of the monk prime minister Dpal gyi yon tan and later also of the emperor. He was followed by his brother Khri ’U’i dum brtan (Glang dar ma), supported by the anti-Buddhist conspirators, which brought about an end to state patronage of Buddhism, the suppression and expulsion of Buddhists. Ultimately, after Glang dar ma was killed by a Buddhist monk in 842 and a conflict over the succession between two factions of the royal family supported by different clans broke out, the result was the political collapse and fragmentation of the kingdom (van Schaik 2011: 44-47).⁴⁷

On account of this development, the totalising transcendental Buddhist representation of the state was separated from its political and economic foundation but remained linked to the royal lineage and a small group of allies, so that with the invitation of Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon it could be transferred to Western Tibet and provide an already developed specific vision for the new establishment of a Buddhist kingdom.

As before when Buddhism came to Tibet this transfer to Western Tibet did not take place without carriers, in the first place Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon as descendant of the royal lineage, accompanied by members of a few allied aristocratic clans and Buddhist masters (“great monks”, *ban dhe*), also from aristocratic families, all standing for the vision of a Buddhist kingdom as it had existed a few generations ago from the reigns of Khri Srong lde btsan to Ral pa can.

An important precondition for the successful transfer and gradual implementation of this vision was the adaptability of Buddhism to different political contexts, in particular to societies where a state order emerged or was or had already been present.⁴⁸ This was the case on the occasion of the

⁴⁷ The killing of Khri Gtsug Ral pa can (Khri Gtsug lde btsan) and Buddhist masters, the suppression of the aristocracy, following factional interests and violence of the sacred laws, and finally a great revolt are given as specific reasons for the collapse in *Yig rnying* (page 27) while the underlying cause is rendered according to a Buddhist view in the vanished merit of Tibet in general (conceived as being held under the grasp of a great demon), finally also in the exhausted merit of the ruler.

According to Beckwith, the support for monastic state-sponsored Buddhism was stopped mainly for economic reasons. Like the economies of the Tang, Uighur, Arab, and Frankish empires which began to face a severe economic crisis because of military expenses by around 820, that of the Tibetan Empire must have been heavily affected by this development which led to a “great world-wide collapse around 840” (Beckwith 2011: 233).

⁴⁸ Although this characteristic is evident from its transfer across wide areas of the Indian Subcontinent, Central and Eastern Asia, the political contexts, that is, the specific nature, structure, and development of the polities, in particular state societies, where Buddhism spread and became incorporated, has so far been

historically proven first (successful) transfer of Buddhism to Tibet in the 7th century, and even more so in the third quarter of the 8th century when the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet was founded and Buddhism was adopted as a state religion by the emperor of Tibet (see also van Schaik 2016: 59).

A state order was also existent in historical Western Tibet with the kingdom of Zhang zhung and subsequently with the foundation of the West Tibetan kingdom. In the case of the latter, in contrast to the time before the downfall of the Tibetan Empire, the newly formed alliance between local aristocratic clans and the Central Tibetan royal lineage provided for a strong establishment of political power so that politically non-conforming clans or principalities were irrelevant for the internal stability of the state. As shown, the most important government positions were awarded by the ruler in accordance with the Buddhist concept of *maṇḍala* so that from the point of foundation of the kingdom governance and administration were based on Buddhist criteria.⁴⁹

The small popularity of Buddhism reported for historical Western Tibet before the advent of Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon (supported by the complete lack of any archaeological trace) indicates that hardly any Buddhist monks, scholars, texts (with the exception of those brought along from Central Tibet), not to speak of institutions and monuments, did exist there at the time of the foundation of the kingdom. Therefore, an important condition for the establishment of a Buddhist kingdom were, beside the immediate goal of political, military and economic consolidation, including the connection to regional and transregional trade routes, the recruitment of monks from the local population, whose education – as in the case of *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po (958-1055) – initially took place in distant centres of Buddhist learning (in Kashmir and India), and the invitation of Indian monk-scholars, both in view of the planned erection of altogether eight major monasteries which were founded simultaneously in the Fire Male Monkey year (996).

not studied in detail (with the exception of a few cases, such as Dunnell 1996), and not from a comparative political perspective.

From a wider comparative historical perspective, the appearance of the state order was held by Eric Wolf as the main criterion for the transition from “food cultivators in general” to peasants (Wolf 1966: 11). To exercise control over land in the form of a patrimonial domain “where control of occupants of land is placed in the hands of lords who inherit the right to the domain as members of kinship groups or lineages, and where this control implies the right to receive tribute from the inhabitants in return for their occupance” (*ibid.*: 50), constitutes another, socio-political-economic criterion that is also relevant for areas of historical Western Tibet (see also Jahoda 2015: 139f.).

⁴⁹ That the perception of the imperial persona of the ruler (by himself, his court, allies, subjects, and others, even later historians) is a critical aspect in the process of state formation was already analysed by Ruth Dunnell with regard to the 11th century Xia (Tangut) state. Particularly noteworthy is her statement that “carrying out rituals of legitimation [such as the appointment of government positions by the ruler according to Buddhist principles] gives expression to or ‘enacts’ the state, which is identified with the imperial institution [of the ruler]. So does raising troops and engaging in war.” (Dunnell 1996: 22). What applied to the Xia state in the 11th century, which controlled Buddhist ordinations and monasteries, came to apply not only at the same time to the West Tibetan kingdom after the foundation of the first wave of Buddhist monasteries in 996 but immediately with the foundation of the kingdom, based on an “understanding of ideology and politics, in which religion and ritual are not set apart from them but viewed as their very substance” (*ibid.*: 25).

The main difference between the transfer and establishment of Buddhism to Tibet during the time of the Tibetan Empire and the West Tibetan kingdom was that in the earlier instance Buddhism was brought to Tibet by a carrier or human agent without (apparent) invitation from outside in the person of the King of Nepal, and that the introduction of state-sponsored monastic Buddhism in 779 went along with or necessitated a major change in the perception of the emperor, in the balance of power relations to his allies (or immediate subjects), vassal kings, ministers, and clan leaders, and in the flow of economic resources and human labor towards Buddhist institutions and monks. In the West Tibetan kingdom of the early 10th century, Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon was perceived by the local Zhang zhung clans who invited him to come to Stod Mnga' ris as descendant of the prestigious imperial Spu rgyal lineage, certainly also known for his personal adherence to Buddhism, and, whether or not they had sympathies or were acquainted in detail with the sort of Buddhist governance that was installed following the accession rite ('enthronement', 'coronation') of the new ruler⁵⁰ (obviously in accord with his vision of kingdom), the imperial persona of the ruler and the form of government according to Buddhist principles, presumably also the imagination of a stable unified Buddhist empire (as far as it existed and as long as it helped to reinstate the prestige and positions of power of local aristocratic clans) were perceived as legitimate, state of the art, stable, and promising.

The totalising transcendental Buddhist representation of the state (within the totality of a cosmic order), with the *btsan po* as the paramount figure,⁵¹ which had developed in the Spu rgyal dynasty

⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the details regarding the accession rite in the case of the early West Tibetan rulers are not known. Based on the reported claim to preserve and continue royal ancestral customs it can be assumed that the importance of these accession rites with the (re-)naming of the king as it was analysed by Dotson for the imperial Tibetan context continued to exist also in the early post-imperial West Tibetan context: "To name the king is to perform and ratify a ritual and political cosmology in which the king is, if not paramount, at least a central figure. [...] The use of name bestowal in accession rites – "coronation" in other cultural contexts – also casts light on the act of naming as a performance of the social contract between the king and his subjects, or between the namer and the named, through which both parties accept and establish their rights and responsibilities. In fact, naming as accession rite in Tibet would seem to exemplify Roy Rappaport's [1974: 38] remark that ritual 'contains within itself not simply a symbolic representation of social contract, but a consummation of social contract [replaced in Rappaport 1999 by: "a tacit social contract itself"]'." (Dotson 2016: 24).

Accordingly, the names of the rulers in the first and second generation of the West Tibetan kingdom – Khri Bkra shis Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon, his sons Dpal gyi mgon, Bkra shis mgon, and Lde gtsug mgon (the Stod kyi mgon gsum, "the Three Protectors of Stod") – should be seen also as accession names and beyond this as an expression of the political cosmology.

That Bkra shis mgon, father of Khri Lde srong Gtsug btsan / Srong nge / Ye shes 'od, is mentioned in *Yig rnying* (page 34, lines 5-6) as the first one among the rulers of the Tibetan royal lineage to belong to a lineage of bodhisattvas who protected Buddhism like his paternal ancestors, speaks for the progress in the political cosmology which then culminated under his son.

⁵¹ This is in accordance with a suggestion made by Matthew Kapstein "that the Tibetan imperial state itself came to be constituted, through a principle of homology, as the body and maṇḍala of the Buddha Vairocana", and that "the emperor himself was in some sense homologous with the cosmic Buddha, and that the ordering of the empire was therefore effectively equivalent to the generation of the maṇḍala." (Kapstein 2000: 60).

in the period from 779 to 841 and had then lost its political foundation, was ‘embodied’ in the imperial persona of Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon and his royal successors, later also in the design of Mtho gling Monastery.⁵² Further ‘human agents’ involved in the transfer process among his retinue, which consisted mainly of members of aristocratic clans, were beside ministers and other high-ranking officials two “great Buddhist monks” in leading positions. With the invitation to come to Mnga’ ris and the foundation of the West Tibetan kingdom, the totalising transcendental Buddhist representation of the state and Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon as its paramount figure/embodiment/human agent found a new political foundation. The development and making of a Buddhist culture (monks, monasteries, texts, etc.), lacking at this time, and the provision of the necessary economic resources (presumably not least through an increase in the mining of gold) was achieved after two generations of rulers by Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon’s grandson.

Hypothesis IV appears to be applicable in this general formulation to the historical processes which took in the late phase of the Tibetan Empire (779-841) with the foundation of Bsam yas Monastery and the introduction of Buddhism as state religion – the conceptual transformation of the Tibetan imperial state itself into a *maṇḍala* of the Buddha Vairocana, and in a cosmological sense the emperor into an equivalent of Buddha Vairocana, rendering “the ordering of the empire [...] therefore effectively equivalent to the generation of the *maṇḍala*” (Kapstein 2000: 60) – so that “when the state, having confiscated a large part of the transcendental social so as to create its own ordered pseudo totality of cosmic order, then collapsed, a totalising transcendental representation without its political foundation remained floating in mid air, so to speak.” (Bloch 2008: 2058). This “totalizing transcendental representation without its political foundation” was preserved after the downfall of the empire by leading members of the royal lineage, their aristocratic allies and religious masters, and was transferred (‘floated’) in this way by Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon and his courtly followers to Western Tibet where it found a new political foundation with the establishment of the West Tibetan kingdom.

Bloch’s concept of the social and the religious, defining ‘religion’ as an aspect of human sociability and the historical “product of an inessential and superficial modification” of the transcendental social, opens up a wide field for research. Through more systematic, comprehensive and detailed investigations than was possible here, for reasons of space and time limited to the

⁵² According to some historical Tibetan sources, Mtho gling Monastery, the most important Buddhist monument of historical Western Tibet, is reported to have been built by Ye shes ’od similar to or in imitation of Bsam yas (see Vitali 1996: 203). While on conceptional and architectural grounds certain structural differences between these two monuments can be identified (see Vitali 1999: 120) they share a fundamental feature in their religio-cosmological symbolism, representing a built *maṇḍala* cosmology with Rnam par Snang mdzad (Vairocana Buddha) as central deity. What was summarised by Lewis Doney with regard to Bsam yas – “the circular *maṇḍala* symbolism inherent in the design of Bsam yas Monastery reflects the ideal empire, with the emperor identified with the powerful cosmic buddha (Vairocana) at its centre” (Doney 2019: 19) – is in a more developed form (given over two hundred years are between the foundation of the two monuments) also true for Mtho gling, including a development in the perception of the associated (former) ruler Ye shes ’od as the most elevated figure of the kingdom who seems to have been referred to as bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa’*) immediately after his passing away in 1019 (see Jahoda 2021b: 290).

analysis of only a small selection of relevant sources and summary of main characteristic elements, better insight into the relevant historical processes in imperial and post-imperial Tibet and in other parts of the world can be gained.⁵³

⁵³ Bloch enumerates various different examples where the collapse of the political base of the transcendental social may lead to, such as the occurrence of ritual, sacred, pseudo-royal systems of Africa, or “shadow ‘states’ that only exist in mystical form as spirits that possess mediums”, “the bizarre institutions of contemporary European monarchies” (Bloch 2008: 2059), and others, thus extending his anthropological perspective to the global history of Europe and Asia, recently confirmed, for example, by Michael Borgolte’s work on medieval endowments, the global history of the Middle Ages and their Mesopotamian and Egyptian foundations (see Borgolte 2014).

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Abbreviations

Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs = [Royal Genealogy of the Solar Lineage] by Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan (Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa Rgyal mtshan 2011a and Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2021).

Mnga' ris rgyal rabs = [Royal Genealogies of Western Tibet] by Gu ge mkhan chen Ngag dbang grags pa (Vitali 1996).

Yig rnying = [Old Manuscript] of anonymous authorship; discovered 2011 at Tholing, photographically documented by the late Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po in 2012.

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